EXPLORING GENDER IDENTITIES OF FEMALES FROM TOWNSHIPS IN DURBAN AS REPRESENTED AND NEGOTIATED THROUGH STEREOTYPES BY SOUTH AFRICAN SOAP OPERAS: GENERATIONS: THE LEGACY AND ISIDINGO: THE NEED

By: Maud Blose

(216072891)

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School of Arts
College of Humanities

Supervisor: Prof Jean-Phillipe Wade

Co-supervisor: Prof Deirdre Pratt

ABSTRACT

This study explores gender identities and media culture of black African women through digital storytelling using two of South Africa's popular soap operas, Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need, as its case studies. The interpretive paradigm was employed to ascertain a deeper understanding of soap operas and the historical, social and cultural context of individual viewers and perspectives of those involved in the production. Data in this qualitative research were gathered not only from the perspectives of viewers from townships around Durban where the study was carried out, but also incorporated the views on gender stereotypes of the soap opera production team. Reception analysis theory was used as the main theory for the study with social identity theory and the social representation theory subsumed under it. The data analysis suggested that viewers' awareness of gender stereotypes contained in South African soap operas did not only take place in their immediate encounter with soap opera text but was heightened when they discussed such text with other viewers. In other words, soap operas have a mixture of both active and passive viewers. Active viewers question and address gender inequality and stereotypes in television soap operas, whereas passive viewers' unawareness of gender inequality and stereotypes makes them susceptible to media influence. Stereotypes in soap opera storylines were seen to determine viewers' social practices and what was seen as acceptable behaviour within their social group(s). The results suggested that stereotypes portrayed in soap operas contribute to the suppression of black women, especially those who reside in townships. The results also suggest that soap operas are not a true reflection of society but are tainted with the subjective lived histories of the production team. In conclusion, it is essential that soap operas are not only entertaining but should also be informative and educational. If used correctly, this genre has the potential to educate societies about socio-economic, socio-political and other developmental issues. It is hoped that this research will add to the body of knowledge in the field of media representation of gender stereotypes and contribute to the empowerment of women in South Africa in realising that the roles they adopt in real life are not limited to the options presented in soapies.

DECLARATION

I, Maud Blose, declare that:

(i) The research reported in this dissertation/thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

(ii) This dissertation/thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all those who triumph beyond their imagination, those who do not let their circumstances and backgrounds limit their potential, and those who believe in themselves and hold on to hope in hopeless situations. When you look in the mirror, you will see one of them.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The year 2020 has been a significant year in highlighting race and racism. The hashtag #blacklivesmatter originated in the United States and has erupted in race-related issues across the world, demanding the recognition and importance of the lives of black people. Although the hashtag's main focus is black men, this study highlights the significance and importance of black women. Although trends show a growth in women representation across different sectors including research in South Africa, numbers provide a false representation of gender, racial and class stereotypes of black women, what Phakeng and Zungu (2020) refer to as "triple oppression". Transformation policies that promote gender and racial transformation do not necessarily translate into practice in the real world. The hypothesis raised by this study is that other races' perception and treatment of black people is influenced by media images. This study focuses on the role played by the media, specifically television soap operas, their representation of black women using stereotypes, and how these stereotypes affect black women and impact on how they construct their gender identities. Since the media influence and shape society's perception of one race over the other, television soap operas play a significant role in the discourse surrounding race, class, ethnicity, gender and identity. According to Ross (2017: 2-3):

> …there are messages and images which, through their repetitive display and unproblematic usage, promote a particular understanding of minority ethnic communities which impact negatively on viewers and influence their thinking about minority ethnic communities in their own social world.

Ross's study explores white media and black audience[1] focusing on the diversity and dissonance on British television. She looks at ways in which race and ethnicity of minority communities, that is black and Asian people, are represented. Her findings (Ross 2017: 6) highlight the dissatisfaction of some of the focus group participants at the "characterizations and marginalization" of black and Asian people through characters that are "peripheral to the main action" in a multicultural society such as that in Britain. Although her study was conducted in Britain, Ross's findings on representation are relevant to a global context, including South Africa. This study explores the gender

[1] The words audience and viewer are used interchangeably throughout the study.

identities of black women from townships in Durban, South Africa, as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by soap operas Generations and Isidingo.

This research uses the definition of black women provided by Madlela (2019: 34) in his study on media messages, where he refers to black women as "a diverse population of black African women, in terms of economic status, age, ethnic group, sexual orientation and social class, who have a shared historical reality of structural oppression". As the research examines Generations and Isidingo from both a textual and reception sphere, this chapter makes reference to literature which provides a background to the study looking at debates surrounding gender identity and representation of black women on television soap operas, the township as a social and viewing space, black culture, and media influence through the use of stereotypes and its effects embedded in soap opera storylines. These constructs are explored in terms of how they relate to the audience's perception of their social and cultural contexts through the consumed soap opera texts and meanings interpreted from the texts.

Although roles assigned to women characters have changed over the years, Byerly and Ross (2008:7) argue that "while women's representation today is certainly 'better', in many ways, than ever before, women still experience actual prejudice and discrimination in terms of unequal treatment, unequal pay, and unequal value in real life". Black women, the focus of this study, are no exception. Cox and Ward (2019: 541) add that the history of the portrayal of black women in television "has been one of under- and misrepresentation". They add that soap operas as part of scripted television, are "a prominent source of gender socialization" and that gender non-conforming women in scripted television are ridiculed and stigmatized and "face discrimination, victimization and harassment" if they fail to be "passive, partner pleasers, faithful, sexually attractive, yet sexually modest" (Cox and Ward 2019: 541). Such representations of black women can be found in South African soap operas. They are not only restricted to screen portrayals, but also translate to the treatment of black women off screen, impacting on how women perceive themselves and their social context, and how they are treated in society. I will discuss in the later chapters how these representations are paralleled by lack of media ownership by women. The television industry is a challenging one for female writers, since it pigeonholes them into writing mostly jobs involving children's content and other 'soft' genres (Johnson and Peirse 2020).

Jean (2019) argues that, although there have been improvements of the presence of black women in television, they continue to be represented through images of stereotypes that lack diversity and dimension. Popular stereotypes of black women include (but are not limited to) "the mammy described as a highly maternal, family oriented and self-sacrificing" (woman who is usually obese, fully-figured with a big flat nose and dark complexion); the "jezebel described as seductive, sexually irresponsible and promiscuous", and the aggressive "sapphire also referred to as the angry black woman" (Jean 2019: 8-9; West 2018). According to Jean, these stereotypes emanated from white slave owners as they exerted control over the reproduction of black women.

1.2 Media representation of black women

Media consumption practices perpetuate social inequalities (Moisander, Penaloza and Valtonen 2009). According to Winston (1982:173), stereotypical depictions of black women were used as "ways of coding and rationalizing interracial behavior" providing a justification for the ill-treatment of black women in society, thereby prioritizing a particular race as superior to other races. Suggs (2019: 15) further extends the idea as to how "stereotypes found in television can have some effect on the ways minorities view themselves and the majority groups". The representations of black women using stereotypes do not only influence other people's perspectives of them, but also influence black women's perception of other racial groups and social classes, and this impacts on how they construct their own identity (West 2018; Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yarchi 2017). Black women are faced with the challenges of navigating through racial and gender prejudice in life due to their dark pigmentation skin colour, which is "associated with dirt, poverty, low social status, low intelligence, animal sexuality, primitiveness, violence and a general inferiority" (Braham 2005: 265), and this is exacerbated by how they are represented in soap operas. This hypothesis is supported by hooks[2] (1992: 5) and Brooks and Herbert (2006: 297), who argue that black female representation in the media "determines how blackness and the people are seen and how other groups will respond to us based on their relation to these constructed images" as a result of "dominant racial, gender, and class ideologies" perpetuated by "the image of the black woman as oversexed fantasy object, dominating matriarch, and nonthreatening, desexualized

[2] American scholar bell hooks uses lower case for her name, which convention is used by authors citing her work (except when the first letter is capitalised at the start of a sentence or reference list).

mammy figure [which] remains the most persistent in the media". Patel (1995: 1) shares a similar hypothesis in that "mass media in contemporary society are increasingly responsible for the construction and consumption of social knowledge and meanings which people draw on to make sense of their world and act upon their social reality". Brooks and Herbert (2006: 297) add that media "are central to what ultimately come to represent our social realities". With this in mind, media are influential towards individual and societal behaviour and actions. Media influence how women and men engage with each other through their portrayal of gender stereotypes and promotion of patriarchy.

Since the media selectively interpret social reality for their viewers by highlighting some aspects of reality while censoring others, Gallagher (1983) contends that women, especially from developing countries like South Africa, are underrepresented or misrepresented by the media through derogatory images. Those who appear on screen are used as commodities, are passive, silent, marginal and at times dependent on men.

1.3 History of soap operas

Television programmes are "the leading resource for construction of identity" (Barker 1999: 3) and play a crucial role in regulating gender by shaping and changing women's behaviour (Kwanjai 2018). This study focuses on a specific type of television programming, that is, soap operas, which have a large loyal audience acquired over the years (Pitout 2018). Soap operas contain what Livingstone (2007: 53) refers to as the "cliff hanger technique" which translates to narratives of suspense and drama that parallel the viewer's own reality, thereby hooking their attention for the next episode. Some scholars define the soap opera genre as based on the "presence or absence of narrative[3] closure" (Pitout 2018; Khaghaninejad, Dehbozorgi and Mokhtari 2019). This study employs Mumford's (1995: 8) definition of soap opera, which states that it is "a continuing fictional dramatic television program, presented in multiple serial instalments each week, through a narrative composed of interlocking storylines that focus on the relationships within a specific community of characters".

Soap operas were initially broadcast on the radio medium in the 1930s to keep housewives entertained as they conducted their chores. Manufacturers realized their potential and

[3] Narratives convey messages and have a beginning and an end. But they may also "incorporate changes that occur according to a pattern of cause and effect" (Mthethwa 2014: 10).

used them as a tool to advertise products, mainly soap. Due to its popularity with female listeners and housewives, the genre[4] migrated to the television medium in the 1940s and marketed mainly soap products that could enhance women's beauty, thus the name "soap opera" (Marx 2007). Television as a medium has historically afforded women a platform for expression. This platform has allowed women to break societal rules by presenting female viewers with an alternative life to their own. Through television soap operas, women in their variety see the possibilities of working in a corporate environment, exercising their rights first as humans and then as women, and still be able to carry out their responsibilities towards their families. Although this might not be the lived experience of some women, the fantasised world provided by television soap operas opens possibilities for women and opportunities they would not normally access in society. History indicates that women in the past lived conservative lives. They wore loose clothes that covered their whole bodies; they were not allowed to have a voice and fully express their likes and dislikes; and they were disempowered not only as inferior members of society, but also by being damaged psychologically. However, through the television medium women are realising that they can be more, say more and do more. For example, Marilyn Monroe is one women who used television to break negative stereotypes of women and show how a woman could embrace her sexuality. She thus embodied sexuality and challenged other women to explore their own sexuality. Eventually socially constructed rules and traditional gender roles against women eased up both on and off screen.

Decades late, soap operas in various parts of the world vary in how they construct and present their content and the images they use to represent women. The United States, Great Britain and Australia contain mainly open-ended storytelling, while those in Latin America, India, Japan, China and South Africa are mainly closed-ended (Allen 1995: 112). Storylines can last anything between a month to a year, a period during which soap opera content has the ability to influence viewers. Those which last longer are marginal and are usually determined by the viewers' response through viewership ratings and feedback on social media platforms. Soap operas primarily engage with the viewer's emotions (O'Donell: 1999) and also incorporate political and social issues. However, their main objective is to provide entertainment to viewers while transporting them to a

[4] Neale (1980: 2) defines the term 'genre' in television as "systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that circulate between industry, text and the subject".

fantasy world. Such characteristics have contributed to the global success of the soap opera genre over the years.

According to Doherty (2008) and Mueni (2014), soap operas were intended for both male and female audiences, but over the years their popularity has remained with mostly female audiences. According to Curti (1998: 55) and Livingstone (2007), the genre's element of "fantasy rather than facts" is what makes them appeal more to female viewers. Themes such as love-relations, and family and communal interactions, are also of interest to women (Bowles: 2000). Syed (2011: 22) argues that these themes appeal to femininity as a "gender norm acquired through cultural conditioning". Modleski (1979) suggests that they construct a maternal position for their viewers, positioning narratives from a "female-centric perspective" which boxes women in its representation (Mueni: 2014:28). Soap opera storylines contain blurred lines between representing women as subjects or objects (Friedan: 1963; Tuchman: 1978; Gallagher: 1980). Although women are present in the production of soap operas as viewers, characters, writers and producers, women are still seen through men's eyes by both men and women (Curti: 1998). According to Kaul and Sahni (2010: 19), the media hardly challenge societal stereotypes, and this is seen in how the media negatively represent women in three roles: "biological, domestic and decorative". According to Geraghty (1991: 30), another element that soap operas associate with the female audience is the on-screen presentation of characters making the use of "close-ups of faces, of important objects, the deliberate movement of a character across the room, (and) the lingering of the camera on a face at the end of a scene". The popularity of television soap operas can also be attributed to the dramatic elements of storytelling techniques and effects, including sound, moving pictures, colour, semiotics, and on-camera action that is relatable off camera. The combination of these techniques and effects results in narratives which enable the female audience to live their lives through television media characters portrayed on their screens.

Stewart and Kowaltzke (2007) developed the timeline, as shown in Figure 1.1, illustrating the progression in the representation of women, namely in television. Women were first represented in the comedic sense. This representation lent itself to the portrayal of women as housewives. First wave feminism saw the representation of the deadly and sexually alluring woman. Second wave feminism focused on gender representation, whereas third wave feminism saw the representation of women as professionals working alongside men.

Although there is more inclusion of women in television in the 21st century, their (mis)representation remains questionable, particularly that of black women in soap operas in South Africa. The power of this genre has shifted and represents images of black women as objects and subjects of explicit sexuality, broken families, disrespectful children, immoral behaviour, hostile and toxic disempowered women. Soap opera narratives portray stereotyped images and representations of black women.

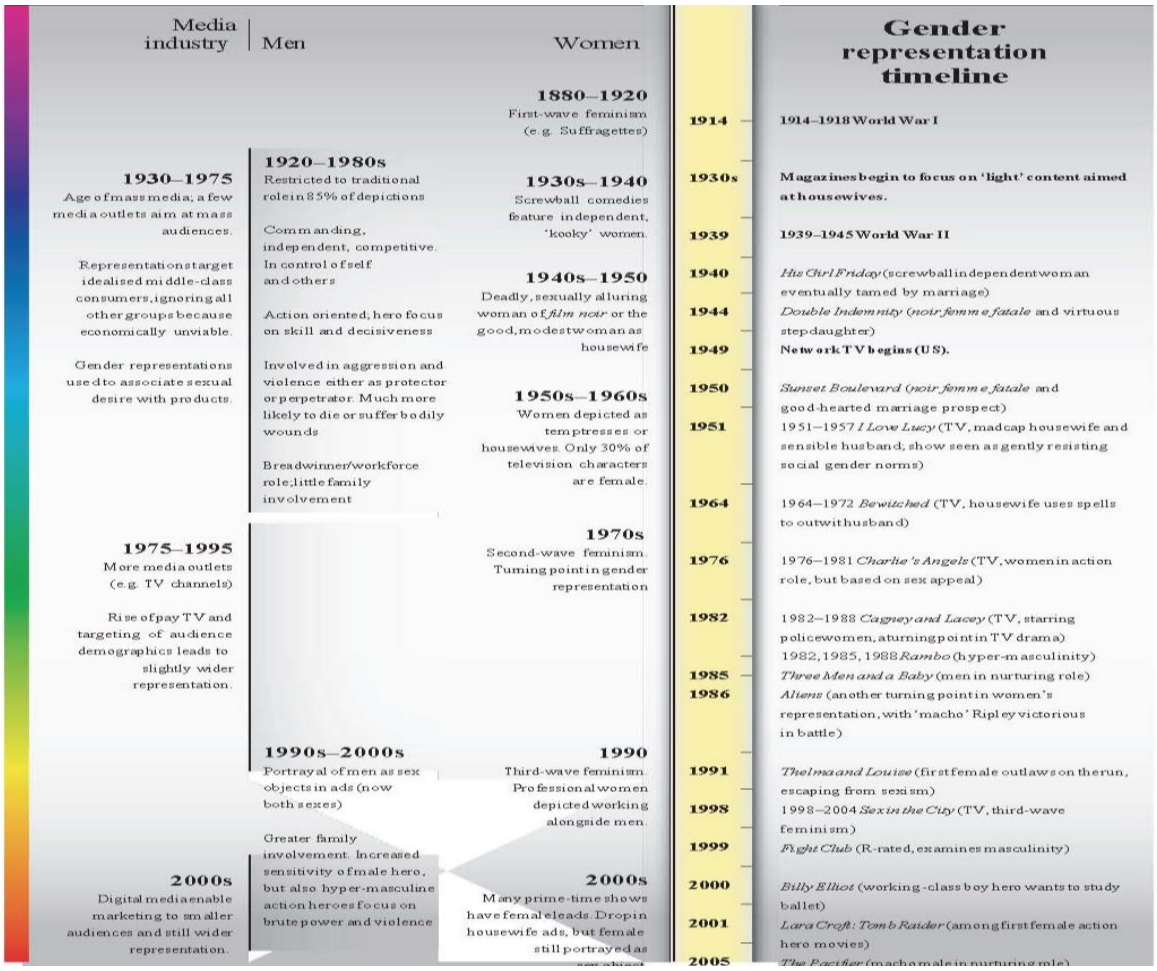


Figure 1.1 Timeline illustrating the representation of gender by the media (Stewart and Kowaltzke 2007).

Figure 1.1 shows that since the 1920s, men were restricted to traditional gender roles who had control of the self and others. The representation of men in years leading up to the 1980s saw them as action heroes and breadwinners. In the 2000s, men are seen as sex objects, family-oriented, hyper-masculine and sensitive. The earlier years of the 1900s represented women in comedies as this was a conservative era where women were mostly seen as domestic beings. As society's became used to seeing women on television screen,

women were later portrayed as sexually alluring beings, and housewives. The 1970s introduced a second wave of feminism and witnessed a turning point in the representation of women who explored their sexuality on television screens. However, third world feminism aimed for the representation of women as professionals working alongside men in the corporate industry and has shifted from the domestic representation of women in their traditional roles. The timeline attests to the shift of gender representations over the years. Opportunities in the television and film industries requires an interrogation not only in the representation of gender, but also race and class. This study takes a closer look into the representation of black women in two of South Africa's soap operas and explores how they construct and negotiate their gender identities.

Madlela (2019:35) contends that "the constructionist approach acknowledges that there is a mediated relationship between the material world, conceptual images, and language" as representations are a close likeness of a constructed image creating meaning in the viewer's mind (Hall 1997a; Stewart and Kowaltzke 2007) in this case black African women. Representations therefore are presentations of images, programs, words spoken and written. If these are misrepresented in the storylines, they can have impact on how viewers construct the self and interpret their social world.

1.3.1 Soap operas in South Africa

Historical developments of broadcasting in South Africa parallel the history of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (Wigston 2018). Broadcasting in South Africa started with amateur broadcasts by John Samuel Streeter, Reginald Hopkins and Arthur Sydney Innes, who broadcast English and Afrikaans messages from their homes. The popularity of the experimental amateur broadcasts caught the attention of the then government, which, as a result, requested licences for regular broadcasts. Growth in listenership of the radio medium meant a growth in its content. When the "Nationalist Government with a pro-Afrikaner and stronger racial segregation agenda" (Wigston 2018: 11) came into power in 1948, it realized the radio medium's potential of communicating its propaganda. The growth of and demand in radio programming, coupled with financial constraints and government's interference, saw the birth of the African Broadcasting Corporation, later to be called the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The Nationalist Government during the 1950s and 1960s, however, opposed the introduction of television in South Africa on "moral and ethical grounds" (Wigston 2018: 14). The Meyer Commission,

appointed to investigate the introduction of television in South Africa, recommended that television should be used "to advance the self-development of all its peoples and to foster their pride in their own identity and culture" (Mersham 1993: 175). However, this was not to be so, as initial television programmes offered content which favoured the advancement of the identity and culture of those in power. The SABC aired its first broadcast on 5 May 1975 and regular services commenced on 5 January 1976 (Wigston 2018).

The growth in broadcasting meant a demand of more content that accommodated the other languages of the country. By this time, storytelling programming had already begun being broadcast in the 1950s on the radio medium, namely Springbok Radio. Storytelling on radio did not only provide entertainment but embedded messages with political and social nuances intended to be decoded by a particular listener. These stories proved to be a safer and less obvious mode to transport ideological messages from the ruling apartheid government. The popularity of radio storytelling encouraged the introduction of American soap operas Dallas and Santa Barbara being broadcast on Bop Television, a television station in the Bophuthatswana Homeland (now part of the Northwest Province). Radio stories were more relatable and popular among South African audiences than these television soap operas, which offered foreign content. The post-apartheid transformation period of South Africa necessitated television programmes that would turn away from racial and gender stereotypes and would portray the much-needed change, unity and opportunities relevant to the local populations. The SABC channel was instructed by the Independent Broadcasting Authority to prioritise local programming in the bid to have programming that would "advance the self-development" of all South Africans and to "foster their pride in their own identity and culture" (Meyer 1971:17), the latter referring to the apartheid government's policy of Separate Development, where ethnic separateness and pride were encouraged. By the 1990s, South Africa had suffered decades of racism and political turmoil. The SABC called for proposals for local programming. This was around the time that filmmaker Mfundi Vundla had returned from exile in America. His proposal was successful, and Generations, of which he is the executive producer, was the first locally produced soap opera of the SABC. Almost three decades later, soap operas appealing to various community groups have mushroomed on South African television.

The growth opportunities and accessibility in the media industry in South Africa paralleled the growth of different social, economic and political challenges in the country. One of the main challenges is gender-based violence, which some researchers link to gender inequality (Khachaturyan and Peterson 2014; Helman and Ratele 2016; Graaff and Heinecken 2017; Meyiwa *et al.* 2017; Smit 2018). Storylines of soap operas like Generations and Isidingo have portrayed gender-based violence. The disconnect, however, is seen through stereotypes rife in gendered roles[5] showing a juncture in gender inequality through some of the characters and preferential order of importance given to some storylines which give importance to male leading roles and the dominance of patriarchy.

South African soap operas are flagships for the various channels that show them and are broadcast on weekdays in the evenings during prime time. Around this time families are presumed to sit together in their living rooms and view soap operas. The first challenge to this presumption is that, judging by the LSM of Generations and Isidingo viewers, viewers are the working class and below. It is erroneous to assume that they all have living rooms, as not all viewers respondents have houses that *have* living rooms. Others live in households that barely have enough bedrooms for all family members, let alone a living or leisure room for entertainment. Secondly, South African statistics reveal that viewership in this category comes from what is loosely termed as 'broken families', where parents are not together and/or children are being raised by their grandparent(s) or relatives. Thirdly, in the article *Social media usage and statistics in South Africa* (Lama, 2020), demographics indicate that 47.9% of active social media users are aged between 25-34, followed by 40.4% aged between 18-24, and the least number of social media users are aged 35 years upwards. These figures are indicative of the loss of social media views and engagement from the older generation who also make up soap opera audience members. Both Generations and Isidingo are active on their social media pages and interact with their viewers providing teasers for upcoming episodes and also using data from social media to gauge how audience receive certain themes and storylines. If the older generation is not as active on social media as the younger generation, their views

[5] Richmond-Abott (1992:7) defines gender roles as "beliefs that men possess certain traits and should do certain things and that women possess other traits and should do other things". In other words, there are distinct male-jobs and female-jobs. This assumption is based on the misconceptions that one gender has about the other where one is more masculine and strong and the other feminine and soft. These roles are present in society and manifested by images in the media.

on how they receive content either delayed or lost. Although feedback on social media from viewers is helpful, focus of storylines can be lost if those in production aim to accommodate feedback from all viewers that fall within the four categories of their viewership; namely viewers aged between 25-34 in the lead, following by 35-49, with 18-24 in third place, and the last category being viewers from 50+ years.

South African soap operas are said to be 'universal'. This means they do not necessarily have to tell South African stories but that they portray stories that viewers across the globe are said to relate to. This research, through the analysis of storylines, explored if Generations and Isidingo are 'South African soap operas' or if they are 'soap operas in South Africa'. Both types of soap operas provide an alternative life to viewers. Tainted social representations through stereotypes on soap opera storylines potentially result in black women constructing their identities through stereotypes which disempower them.

1.3.2 Generations and Isidingo

At the beginning of this study, Generations and Isidingo were two of South Africa's most watched soap operas, thus the researcher chose the soaps as its specific cases. South African soap operas consist of a combination of prototypical forms (Liebes and Livingstone 1998a:153) in that they are dynastic (focusing on a powerful family), communal (community-based) and dyadic (relating to interactions between two people). Dynastic form is exemplified by the Moroka family in Generations and the Sibeko family in Isidingo. Communal form is involved, as both Isidingo and Generations have other families and characters which form communities around the dynastic families. Dyadic form focuses on the romantic entanglements, disentanglements, and re-entanglements of the characters in Isidingo and Generations as they form, develop and abandon affiliations such as family and love relationships. Although soap operas in South Africa are ongoing, their storylines have a shorter life span compared to countries like Great Britain, Australia and America. This is witnessed in the storylines of both Isidingo and Generations. These soaps are divided thematically and structurally around family, business, friendships and relationships. According to an excerpt by Mfundi Vundla, executive producer of Generations, in an interview published in 2005 (Esipisu 2005: accessed 2019), "Generations made its debut on public broadcaster SABC after apartheid ended in 1994, aiming to show blacks in a positive light after years of television drama cast Africans as unsophisticated, superstitious idiots who visited witch doctors to solve their problems".

Soap operas are broadcast weekdays on the SABC channels between 18:30 to 21:30, and contain predominantly black but diverse (in terms of earnings) characters, including CEOs, account executives, housewives, domestic workers, and other supporting characters from different races. The major themes around the transformation period of 1994 saw themes that centred around the corporate world, home and family life, and different forms of relationships. As the country's democracy grew, so did the focus of the soap opera and other television programmes. This growth saw the rise in South Africa's television content. Democracy marked a significant shift in South African media, both culturally and politically. S'gudi S'naysi used situational comedy for black audiences to provide an alternative lifestyle to black lives. Although the show portrayed a progressive representation of black women, it centred around the male character of S'dumo played by the late comedian Joe Mafela. The success of S'gudi S'naysi led to the development of other television shows that centred around black lives, with a predominantly black cast, like Generations.

There is a growing belief that to attract more black female viewers, scripted programmes ought to translate into the inclusion of black female leads (Umstead 2015). Suggs (2019: 64) contends that "studying genre and representation together gives a sense of not only what can happen to black women characters, but also why it happens". The genre used helps to decide how stories are told, and examining how stories are told provides insight into explaining representations within the narrative. Citing Hall (1997a: 258), Suggs states that "the use of stereotypes helps to uphold systems of power while othering those deemed outside of the norm". According to Suggs (2019: 18), "controlling images contribute to systemic class, gender, race, sexual oppression, injustice and subjugation of black women".

Although the use of black casts has increased significantly over the years, local programmes like Generations and Isidingo contain an over-portrayal of men and of middle to high class occupations. In July 1998, the first episode of Isidingo premiered on SABC3 and played weekdays at 7pm. Isidingo was created by Gray Hofmeyer and its executive producer is Pumla Hopa. The soap is closely linked to The Villagers, a soap opera created by Hofmeyer which was popular in South Africa during the apartheid era. Isidingo's storylines centre around the corporate world, mining, the community of

Horizon Deep (a make-believe mining location), family life and relationships. Character Barker-Haines and his family are the wealthiest in Horizon Deep, owning The Duncan Hotel and a television channel, ON-TV. The rest of the cast play supporting roles to this family, portraying the lives of staff members and their extended relationships. The focus of narratives around the Haines shifts over time, making way for the Sibeko family, who are owners of Sibeko Gold.

Generations and Isidingo are multi-racial and multicultural with an emphasis on multiculturalism, an element that has enabled their success and have reached a wider audience. These soaps, however, reserve leading roles, such as chief executive officers, for males, whereas females play supporting roles like secretaries of companies and personal assistants to the main male boss. Themes embedded in the storylines encompass prostitution, teenage pregnancy, gambling, gender-based violence, politics, issues surrounding femininity and masculinity, transgender, crime like drugs smuggling, corporate espionage, relationships and general workplace dynamics. However, they do not confront issues straightforwardly and with an informed outcome. According to Byerly and Ross (2008: 23), "characters who work out these storylines are forced to solve their 'problems' themselves, provoking a community response that is pathologized within the private sphere". Such storylines carry with them a subtle nuance which fosters individualism among viewers and restricts communal-based efforts in tackling solutions to problems. Soap operas portray storylines where characters create a bigger problem in trying to solve the initial problem.

Although Generations and Isidingo storylines have evolved over the years, gendered stereotypes remain in favour of men as heroes and rescuers of women, who are portrayed as emotionally and physically weak, continually needing to be rescued by men (Gunter 1986). Both soap operas portray women as incapable of running businesses without eliciting help from men. Initially, the Morokas owned a thriving advertising company called New Horizons under Archie Moroka. Their rival company at the time was called Isis, run by Shaan Naidoo, a female character. Isis failed under the leadership of Shaan while New Horizons thrived profitably under Archie. New Horizons later failed when Archie's sister Karabo Moroka took over the company. She was portrayed as incapable of running the company, and had to get help from her boyfriend, Tau Mogale, whereupon the company regained its position of power in the advertising industry under his

leadership. Again, the company suffers when Tau leaves following a failed love relationship with Karabo. She joins forces with the mighty Sibusiso Dlomo and the company recovers under his leadership. Decades later, Generations storylines still portray men at the helm of successful businesses, shadowed by women as their supporters. In board meetings, there are more males than females and ultimately men have the deciding votes. Ogunleye (2005: 132) cautions against the effects of such images of women in the media, and states that "if a female, a girl child in particular, sees herself portrayed in such negative stereotypes on a consistent basis, she begins to believe that the filmic image is the appropriate portrayal" and accepts gender discriminatory treatment in her real life. Gender stereotyping and misrepresentation thus transcend television images and become the lived experience of the viewers. Motsaathebe (2009: 433) concurs that societal stereotypes are fostered by stereotypes portrayed in the media "because people tend to imitate what they see in the media without questioning it and this reinforces certain stereotypes, including gender stereotyping" in society.

Generations *has* portrayed powerful women, like the devious Ntsiki Lukhele and villain Anne de Villiers. However, Anne is a ruthless woman who acquires shares through theft, and Ntsiki is shown as a greedy, manipulative and emotional woman capable of evil tactics to get what she wants. Most of the original cast members left the soap at various times citing different reasons of dissatisfaction with storylines and management. The only character that remains from the past is that of Tau Mogale. He, too, left Generations for quite some time but was brought back. The soap now has a fairly new and younger cast portraying storylines around drug addiction and smuggling, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, gambling, politics, religion, and dynamics within different relationships and the corporate environment. Current leading roles are played by Tau Mogale (male), Gadaffi (male), Jack Mabaso (male), Mazwi Moroka (male), Smanga Moroka (male) and Cosmo Diale (male). Supporting roles revolve around Tau's girlfriend, the weak Ayanda (a female board member where Tau works as one of the main executives at the Hashtag Ezweni company); Gadaffi's girlfriend (a female divorcee whose husband left her for a younger woman and she is now insecure and desperate when she learns that Tau has sexual relations with a young prostitute who wears the same perfume as his runaway ex-wife Tshidi); Mazwi's wife Sphesihle (a female doctor who had to sleep with Smanga, the infertile Mazwi's brother, and drugged their child to get Mazwi's love and attention), Lucy Diale (a female drug dealer); and the sexual and sensual Tshidi (Gadaffi's ex-wife

and Tau's sister). It can be seen from these examples that female characters are portrayed as weak, devious, needy and dependent on men.

In reality, women in society have progressed in ways contrary to their regressed representations on soap operas like Generations and Isidingo. Women occupy various leadership roles including being directors, chief executive officers, engineers, ground-breaking researchers, and politicians. Stereotypes widen the disconnect of misrepresenting what is happening in society by perpetuating gendered roles and discrimination as seen on television soap operas. The production team of soap operas must bridge the gender divide gap and include roles of male secretaries, house husbands, male nurses and male personal assistants: roles where men play the supporting role for a change. Women predominantly make up the majority viewership and ought to be given leading roles where they successfully run companies, not because they are women but due to them qualifying to do so. Such role-reversal will curb subtle nuances of gendered roles which foster inequality and have a lasting effect on viewers. Motsaathebe (2009: 445) concludes that: "although the number of females in positions that were traditionally regarded as male-only has increased over the years, mainly due to government legislation on gender and other developments such as symposia and debates surrounding the issue, stereotyped gender images in Generations still linger in muted values manifested in gender roles".

Generations' representation of black women is questionable as it portrays them as being deceitful, emotional, devious, selfish, chronically dependent on men for emotional stability, from broken homes, unstable mothers and wives. Compared to women, male characters are portrayed as strong, emotionally stable, determined, powerful, hardworking and more family-oriented. Males are portrayed using positive stereotypes compared with the negative stereotypes associated with females. Extensive examples attest to soap operas being male-dominated with women shadowing in their supportive roles. Isidingo's representation of women is similar to that of Generations. Although the soap has had female leading characters in the past with the likes of villainess Cherel de Villiers-Haines, Nina Zamdela and police officer Priya Kumar, current leading roles are dominated by males. Prominent leading characters include billionaire business tycoon Barker Haines, mining mogul Lincoln Sibeko, drug-world leader Georgie Zamdela, and murderer-turned-business person Benjamin Le Roux. Media are influential, and such

misrepresentations of gender, identity and race continues to re-position black women in the social and cultural contexts, setting off the ripple effect of an unequal society.

1.4 Media influence

Television is "a site for the production and circulation of public feelings" about race, gender, class, religion, and identity (Gray 2015: 1115). According to Strong (2014: 348), "what appears on the surface as an improvement to gender image, may actually be further traditional stereotyping". Reality is distorted through preferred gender representations selected by the scriptwriter, camera operator, editor and producer before the final soap opera product is shown on television screens, because "their primary goal is to entertain, not to represent reality accurately" (Nueman 2014: 23). This distortion therefore provides false impressions of characterization. For example, more often than not, it is always the man who is in the driver's seat when the man and woman travel together in a car. This type of representation drives a subtle yet obvious stereotype that men are in control of their lives and the lives of those around them (in this case women); that a position of power and leadership is suitable for a man. Such representations widen the gender gap and allow for unrealistic public expectations. The reality - where both men and women challenge traditional gender roles - is seldom represented in television images, giving preference and precedence to traditional gender roles and racial stereotypes in storylines. Stewart and Kowaltzke (2007: 35) warn of the impact of selected manufactured ideas which are said not to be presentations but representations "based on the values of producers and, in turn, the values of the larger society and culture (through influence)". The more often society consumes the repeated manufactured versions of presentations, the more likely they are to be influenced by them.

Representations are repetitive, and their repetitiveness enables them to appear more natural and appealing to viewers. The more viewers watch media content, the more likely they are to start internalizing and believing it. The repetition of representations makes viewers either identify with or recognize them. Representations can be direct or indirect, with the hope of addressing the individual viewer or viewers as a collective. Viewers identify with media characters, and even formulate a parasocial relationship[6] with them. Viewers see themselves through the life of the character, or at times, the character could

[6] Parasocial relationships are "attachments, defined as viewer relationships with fictional characters interpreted as real people" (Stern *et al.* 2005: 223).

be a representation of an ideal life the viewer wants to live. As characters transport viewers from their viewing location to that of the character on the screen, the viewers experience their own life through the life of a character. If representations are used positively, they have a positive impact in society, as the character provides the viewer with an aspirational life. The opposite is also true, where negative representations can add to already existing societal woes, as representations put across a particular point of view. The viewer can choose either to identify with this point of view, as it assumes who the viewer is, or they can choose not to identify with it. While those who identify with representations in soap operas tend to become religious viewers of the soap, those who do not identify with the representations seldom watch other episodes of the genre again. Representations also enable the media to categorise ideas, people and events by putting across a particular agenda (Ross 2017). According to Ross, "if the media do not tell us what to think, they set the agenda on what we should think about" (2017: 14). The agenda can be that of the production team where those in production relate to the representations before the viewer does. Alternatively, the production team can produce representations which are foreign to their own lived experiences but with the hopes that the representations' mode of address speaks to the viewer. Moreover, representations portrayed in soap operas might contain the agenda of those who produce content, making them foreign to the viewer. A content producer can be a different race, gender and class to that of the viewer. It is these differences that make storylines seem like fiction in relations to the viewer's reality.

Studies show that viewers' perceptions are contaminated by influential media images that structure their social ideas about other groups (Hall 1980, 1996; Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers and De Leeuw, 2010). Soap opera texts contains media images represented through stereotypes or selected exaggerated images of individuals, groups or ideas. Viewers consume these stereotypes, formulating their opinions and judgment based on stereotypes represented against other individuals, social groups and ideas. Viewers not only structure their behaviour on stereotypes but literature shows they construct their own identities through stereotyped images on soap operas (Allen 2004; Elliot 2011; Ahmed & Khalid 2012; Blose 2020). If stereotypes are meant to be mind-maps, as argued by Lipmann (1922), the destination is a convoluted one in an already intricate world. I will show in the following sections how stereotypes can be exaggerated negative images. Kidd (2016) suggests that viewers are more likely to identify positively with positive

media images and relate better with characters. Negative stereotypes highlight negative differences about the out-group, and this widens the gap between the in-group and the out-group. In other words, "the more similar an in-group or out-group target is to the relevant characteristic of the perceiver's in-group, the more favourable the evaluation" (Mastro and Kopacz 2006: 309). According to Browne, Mickiewicz and Firestone (1994: 8), stereotypes extend throughout society and "frequently serve as trend-setters, taste-makers, labelers, and the raw material for daily conversation". Such biased representation of a group can affect the behaviour and treatment of one group towards the other (Murray, Schwartz and Lichter 2001). Although stereotypes and racial prejudice do exist in society, they are reproduced, represented and re-emphasized through misrepresented media images. Collectively, mass media have historically perpetuated racialisation, ethnicity, cultural dominance, classism, and gender stereotypes through their preferential representations of some groups and differential treatment and exclusion of other groups deemed to be negatively 'different' (Khaghaninejad, Dehbozorgi and Mokhtari 2019: 134).

It can be concluded that one of the ways media influence society and manipulate its perceptions and behaviour is through media characters represented using stereotypes. Media influence lends itself to the relationships that viewers develop with media characters, making it easy for such characters to define and create attitudes that inform viewers' attitudes and behaviour. The media, especially television soap operas, portray black women as the minority group and situates them in the periphery of the circle of importance. In turn, black women are maltreated in society as their identities are diluted and misrepresented through media images. They are portrayed as materialistic, sensual and sexual, masters of supportive roles to men, dependent, and stepping stones of those with a patriarchal mindset wanting to advance in a system favourable to them. The portrayal of black women as second-class citizens who do not belong dilutes their identity and suppresses their full potential in a patriarchal system that has long been in existence. The issue is not on the under-representation but on the misrepresentation of black women in television images and storylines submerged in stereotypes, perhaps due to the marginalization of black females involved in the production of soap operas. The imaginative world depicted on soap operas is the lived reality of its millions of black female viewers. Attitudes towards race and gender created in the patriarchal hierarchy of images in the television medium influence the social structure where racial and gender

inequality are rife globally. As "one of the most exported forms of television viewed in a range of cultural context", due to their "narrative mode produced in a variety of countries across the globe" (Barker 1997: 75), the impact of television soap operas and the effects of misrepresentation, stereotyping and the marginalization of black women transcends South African borders, thereby creating a global effect.

Studies attest to the influence of media messages in informing our behaviour and beliefs (Devereux 2013). The media are not only a magic window that frames our perception of the world, but they are also a door that lets ideas into our consciousness (Sanborn and Harris 2013). The power of the media is insurmountable, as social constructs occur as a result of media images. In other words, we come to a belief of reality based on the fictitious reality being constructed through various media images. The media influences our meanings of what constitutes the world around us, as they are focal to the representation of our realities (Brooks and Hebert 2006). Such is the power of the media. This kind of power in the wrong hands can be detrimental to those who consume its content. However, it can have the opposite, and more positive effect if it is used as a tool to promote socio-economic issues that shuns stereotypes that hinder the personal growth of each consumer.

1.5 Background to this study

With an understanding that knowledge and information define power, African feminist and academic Professor Amina Mama in an interview in the Agenda Journal (Salo 2001) encourages the visibility and active participation of women in academic spaces writing their own narratives through literature, being activists and advancing their information technology skills to advance the fight against gender inequality. African feminists' stories are mainly undocumented, because the academic space was previously dominated by men. However, the shift in socio-economic positions now enables women, especially African women, to be the authoresses of their own stories and key role players in their 'herstory'. As a lecturer in Television Production in the Journalism Programme at the Durban University of Technology, I have a professional interest in television as a medium which communicates cultural and gender stereotypes; as a black South African woman, I have a personal stake in identifying and challenging gender stereotypes which might disempower me or limit my human potential. Being a black African woman who grew up in one of the townships in Durban, I have always found it intriguing to see how mass

media, especially television content through its images and representation, impact on how we construct our identities. Television, in particular amongst other media, influences millions of viewers daily (Haferkamp 1999; Ndayi and du Plooy 2019), including the way women see themselves and how they construct their identities (Mehra 2019). According to Mehra (2019: 628), "television has evolved as a powerful mass medium that dominates the organization of viewers' personal spaces, the topic of conversations, and most importantly, the content of viewers thought processes". Gender inequality is a global problem (Khachaturyan and Peterson 2014) as much as it is a South African problem (Morrell and Lindegger 2012; Salahodjaev and Azam 2015; Ndayi and du Plooy 2019).

1.6 Aim of the study

This study, then, aimed to take a look at gender identities and media culture of black African women through digital storytelling using two of South Africa's most popular soap operas, Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need, as its case studies. This research explored the social and cultural origins of the female characters featured in these soap operas, and analysed the possible replication of media culture in society to discern the impact it has on women's identity, empowerment and development. Soap operas are not filled with images that promote women's aspects of being intelligent, independent, socially responsible and conscious (Mehra 2019). Instead, soap operas insinuate, through certain characters, the idea that women should be seen, materialized, consumed and fantasized (Motsaathebe 2009; Jean 2019). Through constructed gender roles and images of some characters in soap operas, women may possibly develop a desire to change the way they look and behave as they aspire to become more like the characters they admire. In this way identities may start to be shared and shaped. As storylines of characters evolve, so do identities of viewers. Local soap operas, the objects of this study, also provide a space where new South African identities are created and old identities are negotiated (Marx 2007). Moreover, these identities can be stereotypically gender-aligned and influenced by media content. In agreement with Friedman and Zebrowitz (1992), Hollingstead and Fraidin (2001) reveal that people use gender to make assumptions about someone's personality, their social roles and how they should look (Biernat 1993). Gender stereotypes can generate expectations and potentially hinder performance (Foddy and Smithson 1999). This influences motivation and effort (Kerr and MacCoun 1984; Vancouver, Rubin and Kerr 1991; Plaks and Higgins 2000). Therefore it can be said that

media norms do influence societal norms (Eddington 2020), which is what this study sought to explore.

Studies have been done, especially in Western countries, on the following:

- **Female representation** (Bartsch et *al.* 2000; Brooks and Herbert 2006; Adcock 2010; Johnson and Peirse 2020; Mehra 2019);
- **Gender roles** (Lindsey 2015; Ter Bogt, Engels, Bogers, and Kloosterman 2010; Gerding, and Signorielli 2014); and
- **Identity** (Breakwell 1993; Livingstone 1998a; Bamberg 2011; Elliot 2011).

It is hoped that this study will add to the body of knowledge on gender issues in South Africa from a different viewpoint – that of African female gender representation and viewers' identity formation in soap operas.

1.7 Research problem and objectives

1.7.1 Research problem

Television soap operas play a major role in influencing the construction of one's identity: what you watch appear to mould the person that you are. This is backed up by previous research, which has found that the more time people spend watching television, the more their views are aligned with televised portrayals (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner *et al*. 1977; Gerbner *et al*. 1980; Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes 1981; Bryant, Carveth and Brown 1991; Signorielli 1991). Television is where diverse viewers share "a wide range of discursive patterns, images, beliefs and lifestyle practices, even as it also motivates them towards social mobility, social action and social change" (Tager 2010: 104). Constant viewing of the television soap opera world could then be said to influence the construction of images and identities of viewers. Boylorn (2008: 415) encourages black women to challenge and criticise false media images that deceive viewers into having negative perceptions of black women. African American females have also been visually portrayed in negative stereotypes. Fritsche (2015) states that when groups are repeatedly stereotyped in negative ways, the stereotyped group can internalise the image in varying levels. Elliot (2011: 10) states that "television images allow viewers to live vicariously through others, and can provide access and imagery about a number of values, issues, opinions, actions, and emotions without viewers leaving their homes". Through these

images, impressions and perceptions of viewers are influenced to varying degrees (Elliot 2011: 10).

Soap operas contain gender identities and stereotypes based on social representations which offer women little scope as individuals with talent and aspirations. Some studies reveal that female characters traditionally portray women as victims: weak, submissive, sex symbols, housewives, dramatic, emotional, men-pleasers, manipulators, and serial cougars (Tan, Fujioka, and Tan 2000; Boylorn 2008; Mueni 2014; Fritsche 2015). The research problem was to establish to what extent viewers were aware of these stereotypes, and how they might negotiate these dominant representations in the construction of their personal and social identities.

1.7.2 Specific research objectives

To establish the following:

(1) to what extent the gender stereotypes contained in South African soap operas contribute to viewers' individual and social identities;

(2) to analyse in what ways viewers negotiate these identity representations; and

(3) how these affect women's empowerment as individuals.

According to research by the Broadcasting Research Council of South Africa (30 May 2017), Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need continued to remain the most watched SABC television programmes at that time (however, note the 'canning' of Isidingo from April 2020 owing to poor audience ratings, with resultant decline in revenue and poor investment return). The study was located in South Africa's largest province, KwaZulu-Natal, where most viewers consume these programmes. This province is rich in traditional African culture, and gender equality remains a sensitive issue to some. Research was conducted in townships within the eThekwini Municipality area in this province where focus groups were conducted over a period of time.

1.7.3 Research questions

Many studies have been conducted looking at gender equality (Adams and Mahomed 2018; Blankenship and Kubicek 2018; Walker 2018, Naidoo and Kongolo 2018; Quisumbing *et al*. 2019; Treves-Kagan *et al*. 2019). Others have looked at gender representation in the media (Cummings and Glesing 2017; Dobson 2016; Krijnen 2020;

Mittal 2020) and objectification of women through music lyrics (Blose 2012). However, a lot of these studies focused on the global aspect of gender in the media (Hozic and True 2017; Bachmann, Harp and Loke 2018; Krijnen 2020;). Eddington's (2020) study looked at the psychological effects of media representations of black women in the United States. She questioned whether media representations, especially during primetime, portrayed progress, regression, or the status quo. Her findings show that black women's intersecting social identities are as a result of stereotyped media representations in terms of race and gender. In Britain it is no different. The representation and publicity of black women in British mass media and public arenas is through backlash (Sobande, Fearfull and Brownlie 2020) as black women are marginalised and situated on the periphery of the borders of Britain. But media access and active audience participation now sees black women across the world penetrating media spaces with the hopes of owning their narratives. There remains a gap at how particularly the representation of black females in soap operas impacts on how this vulnerable group of viewers construct their identities, thus the need for this study. In the South African context, Ndayi and du Plooy (2019) looked at Generations The Legacy by exploring "gendered differences in the representation of men's and women's relationship to marriage and childbearing in business and economic contexts". Marx (2007) looked at the "Narrative and soap opera", where she focused on the identities constructed by this genre in the new South Africa. Mueni (2014: 61) encouraged the study of gender representation because television, as part of the broader media influence, "not only mediates messages, but rather it mediates represented messages". According to Stern, Russell and Russell (2005), women are a vulnerable group in soap operas, and this genre represents them as dependent on men and relationships for them to flourish in life. Creber (2010: 3) agrees, adding that women's "passivity" represents them as victims in storylines, while men take the leading roles. La Guardia (1983) warns of the effects of the repeated images of female-victimisation, stating that such images of vulnerable characters influence vulnerable viewers in society, who are mainly women. According to La Guardia (1983), the element of repetition by producers of soap operas is intended to influence women to display the "realism" displayed on their screens. But the problem is that soap operas repeat the gender stereotypes circulating in society rather than challenging them. Soap operas reflect hegemonic representations of African women.

Hudson (1998) and Collins (2000; 2004) point out that gender and racial stereotyped media images of black women reflect white ideologies about black people. Hooks (1992: 5) argues that such representations of black women determine "how blackness and people are seen and how other groups will respond to us on their relation to these constructed images". In agreement with bell hooks, Hudson (1998: 249) states that "these stereotypes simultaneously reflect and distort both the ways in which black women view themselves (individually and collectively) and the ways in which they are viewed by others". This study aimed to fill the gap in knowledge by exploring gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas: Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need.

Data for this study were collected in three ways; viewing of soap opera texts by the researcher, one-on-one interviews with cast and crew, and focus groups with soap opera viewers. The primary focus of the study is on black females aged between 18-50 but male viewers were also be included in the study so as to get perspectives from male viewers on their reception and interpretation of soap opera texts. Participants were required to reside in townships under the eThekwini Municipality, be between the ages of 18-50, be black African women (and men in some of the groups) varying in education levels and economic class and be avid viewers of the selected soap operas. Focus groups were conducted in several venues and participants were requested to watch randomly selected Generations and Isidingo video episodes downloaded from their YouTube channels. At the end of the viewing process, participants engaged in a discussion where they interpreted the meanings of the texts based on their individual cultural background and life experiences, and discussed the representation of various characters and how they negotiate and construct their identities. Emphasis was placed on data from focus groups as the thesis focus was not on television soaps but black women who watch South African soaps.

The following questions were framed to guide the inquiry:

In response to viewing clips from Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need:

- To what extent are participants aware of the gender stereotypes contained in South African soap operas?

- In what way/s do these stereotypes contribute to their individual and social identities?
- Are these stereotypes viewed as limiting their individual potential in any way?
- What alternative portrayals of women in soap operas might contribute to their empowerment?
- How do women viewers negotiate these dominant gender representations in order to fashion their identities?

Healey (2013: 21) states that "gender roles and relationships vary across time and from society to society, but gender inequality has usually been closely related, and men typically claim more property, prestige, and power". Gender roles are changing, and the gender gap is slowly closing. We now see more men engaging in what society used to deem as jobs for women and vice versa. However, soap operas still cling to old gendered ideologies and stereotypes and continue to perpetuate these through some of their storylines. Therefore, soap operas are an interesting object for analysing their "construction of gender roles and identities and their treatment of gender-related issues" (Grassi 2013: 17). We are yet to see the representation of more female bosses chairing meetings in the boardroom, househusbands doing domestic work and being emotionally present for their kids, female gangsters and heroes, and men financially dependent on their women. Studies have been done on soap operas and gender studies in South Africa in their different magnitude and perceptions (Barnes 2003; Msimang 2008; Gajek 2009; Motsaathebe 2009; Tager 2010; Govender 2016). This study explored gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas: Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need.

1.8 Significance of the study

Motsaathebe (2009) looked at "Gendered roles, images and behavior in the soap opera Generations" where he focused on gender stereotyping and the role that producers have to ensure equal representation through their construction of media images drawing the conclusion that "the research division of Generations should ensure constant viewer feedback; preview sessions should include communications experts, regulation experts and women's lobby groups; Generations should consider having its own in-house guidelines on the portrayal of women, men and children; and the soap opera should consider having more women actively involved as writers, directors and producers".

Ndayi and du Plooy (2019:111) explored Generations The Legacy's gendered differences in their "representation of men's and women's relationship to marriage and childbearing in business and economic contexts".

This study explored gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes in South African soap operas: Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need. In the duration of this research Generations and Isidingo were two of South Africa's most viewed soap operas with an approximated sum of close to 20 million viewers combined. Studies show that females are the main consumers of soap operas (Geraghty and Weissmann 2016; Iqbal and Abdar 2016; Soukup 2016). In a country where gender inequality remains a challenge and gender-based violence is reported to be growing even more than before (Maluleke 2018; Meyiwa *et al*. 2017; Allen 2018; Colpitts 2019), it is imperative that the power of the media is acknowledged and that the media are held accountable for their role in the development of the broader society.

Advances in digital technology have meant that communication is near-instantaneous and can be done through a mobile phone on the palm of the hand, thus making content produced accessible to the masses. However, such accessibility has meant that content quantity supersedes its quality. Those in the profession of soap opera productions are now obliged to use various communication platforms to market their soap opera product in competing for viewers' attention. Quoting Livingstone (in press), audience researchers Ong and Das (2019) state that in the time when technology has given rise to other communication platforms through the Internet like social media, "audiences are now being newly fought over as pawns in the games of powerful ones". Through techno-colonialism (Madianou 2018), audiences are quantified and commodified. The media's interest surpasses the social interests of the public. As much as audiences are culturally-situated subjects, they are influenced by various media platforms, as these provide individualized personal experiences through connection in a public sphere. Ong and Das (2019: 4), however, warn that "audiences are not entities wholly or powerless" but are "fundamentally moral actors in shared mediated public sphere".

Producers of soap operas show some level of bias and obscurity of content through stereotypes, leaving vulnerable viewers like black women susceptible to media influence.

This in turn has a direct impact in how this target group constructs its identities, which are constructed through fictitious soap opera texts which epitomizes the values, social norms and cultures of the West. Beauty in soap operas like Generations and Isidingo is defined by long silky hair, light skin, a slim body, clothes reflective of the Western culture, and disoriented family lives that are unstable and chaotic.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The first limitation of this study is that, although there are many soap operas in South Africa, it uses only two of those soap operas as its case studies. This is to narrow the scope of the study so as to get a more focused overview of soap opera representations and the identities of black women. The study is confined to townships within the eThekwini Municipality for convenience and accessibility of data. The researcher was denied access to the Isidingo production set for fieldwork observation and to conduct one-on-one interviews with both cast and crew. Several emails were sent and I even reached out on the soap operas social media platforms. The overall response was that the soap opera does not accommodate such requests. Another limitation was that during the final year of the study, the Isidingo soap was taken off air on the 12th March 2020, and was not part of the new fiscal year commencing April 2020, owing to poor audience ratings and loss of income on the investment (see media statement and Teer-Tomaselli 2020).

1.10 Overview of chapters

Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing a detailed background and context of gender inequality against women, especially black women, at a global scale, and then narrows the focus to the South African context. It also looks at the history of soap operas and how the soap opera genre and its content has evolved in South Africa. The research objectives and questions make a case for the study by presenting the statement of the problem and the significance of the study. It was thought that it was not enough to look at how soap opera texts positions black women, which is why this chapter set out to examine the body of literature that provides in-depth understanding of the television as a medium. This chapter also briefly highlights how black women are represented in soap opera images and narratives, and links such representations on gender to the social and historical contexts of South Africa.

Chapter 2 provides an illustration of the composition of television soap opera texts, since text is central to how viewers construct their identities. It further distinguishes between ritualized and instrumental audience, and looks at how these viewers make meaning of soap opera texts, and how they identify with characters through parasocial interaction and form a parasocial relationship with soap opera media characters. This chapter comprises the literature review of this research, focusing on debates surrounding soap opera texts packaged as stereotypes embedded in soap opera storylines and the effects stereotypes have on viewers. This study seeks to explore not only the 'what' and 'why' questions surrounding the representation of black women in soap operas; it is also pertinent that the researcher explores the 'how'; hence the exploration of the production of soap opera texts. This refers to how soap opera texts are constructed resulting in stereotypes, and how stereotypes affect how black women construct their identities. In this case, text becomes important.

Chapter 3 further extends the review of the literature, this time focusing on semiotics and the representation of black women and effects of stereotypes emanating from soap opera images and texts relating to black women. This chapter also explores women's viewing and residential space, that is the townships. As Shamase (2014:15) points out, black women in the past two centuries were "dynasties, regents and rulers who took up positions of leadership through periods of nation-building and wars of resistance". However, black women on Generations and Isidingo are seen through misogynistic representations containing female characters who are defined by the male characters in their lives, thus perpetuating negative depictions and oppression of black women which ultimately cascade into how society perceives and treats black women. The peripheral location of the townships on the border symbolizes the location of women by society, a vulnerable group situated on the periphery of the social order. This chapter looks at the representation of black women in the television medium, situating them within a feminist lens and linking such gender representations to their social and historical contexts. It also explores the idea of positioning black women from an African feminism perspective that could potentially lead to their empowerment. Empowerment becomes an important concept as black women's misrepresented identities are negotiated and challenged.

Chapter 4 deals with the theoretical framework and research design. It focuses on the theoretical lens that frames the study, comprising the reception analysis theory, the social

identity theory and the social representation theory. The reception analysis theory serves as the anchoring theory, while the social identity theory and social representation theory are pertinent, as the study looks at how black women construct their identities through texts from Generations and Isidingo. The funnel method is used where the theories are first looked at from a global perspective and then contextualized in the South African setting. The research design includes the methodology and specific methods used to collect and analyse data for this study. Data were collected using focus group interviews, visual texts from episodes of both soap operas and one-on-one interviews with the cast and crew members from Generations. Data were analysed using discourse analysis, interpretive textual analysis and the parasocial relationship scale. The study also employed the use of Atlas.ti, qualitative data analysis software, to assist in the analysis of the data and the development of networks which create visual presentations of the interpretation of the analysed data. This chapter also presents findings of field observations at the production studio, highlights key points presented by respondents during one-on-one interviews, and presents focus group data in the form of networks.

Chapter 5 discusses framing and positioning in the media, and provides a discussion of themes arising from the data analysis. It first provides a broader context around framing and positioning ahead of the narrowed actual analysis. It then shows a visual participation framework where television discourse happens and the engagements which occur during pre-production, production and post-production processes. This chapter also provides an analysis of how Generations and Isidingo fare against the SABC mandate. The chapter also presents perspectives from participants, by demonstrating how soap opera content is constructed through the knowledge and meaning which exist in the world of encoders and decoders. Viewers as message decoders in turn comprehend and interpret such text giving meaning to it according to their own knowledge. Data from focus groups are discussed and visually presented using Atlas.ti networks, which displays perspectives from individual viewers and their interaction with each other as individuals and also gives an understanding of the historical, social and cultural contexts of viewers. This chapter further shows how soap opera texts are the preferred genre for social and cultural messages. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on how soap operas are an influential meaning-making system containing a mixture of language and pictures paralleling real life experiences.

The research project is concluded with Chapter 6 by first providing a discussion of the results. The chapter also provides a reflective summary of the research project, the general conclusions of the research, and discusses how the research questions have been answered. It further touches on the implications of the study, how the study contributes to my understanding and professional grasp of the issues involved, and concludes the thesis by providing possible recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 Introduction

Shomade-Smith (2002: 25,31) contends that "television emits and constructs racialized, gendered, sexualized and generational tropes". She further argues that "whiteness reigns as a controlling, dominating, patriarchal, standard-bearing ideology that regulates visual production, influences viewer consumption, and exists without notice or name." In other words, race is embedded in the television text and representation to provide specific meaning to viewers. Since a text is central to how viewers construct their identities, this chapter provides an illustration of the composition of the television soap opera texts. Chapter 2 further distinguishes between ritualized and instrumental audiences, and looks at how these viewers make meaning of soap opera texts, identify with characters and form a relationship with characters. Literature on how viewers make meaning from texts and the relationship they share with characters is explored to understand the construction of television soap opera texts and the relationship between text and viewers which are fundamental to this study. It explores soap opera narratives, this time through representations containing stereotypes, and shows how soap opera texts are the preferred social and cultural interpreted meanings of those who produce soap operas. This chapter further elaborates how soap operas are an influential meaning-making system because they contain a mixture of language and pictures that parallel real life experiences of both encoders and decoders of soap operas.

2. 2 Television culture and storytelling techniques

Television storytelling and viewing is a culture. It is perhaps worthwhile to first define culture and television as separate entities so as to get a clear understanding of the concept of television culture and the definition employed in this study. Culture is multifaceted (Browne 2006), plays a role in the psychodynamics of gender identity (Diamond 2006: 1104) and is a way of life (Mueni 2014: 37). "It includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of that society" (Tylor 1958: 1). Edward Said in Mueni (2014: 37) states that reservoirs of shared human expressions representative of a community's culture include their practices and communication tools and methods of information, pleasure and entertainment which define who they are. Culture provides the ability to gauge society's strengths and weaknesses, both in an individualistic and collective form. In other words, although

culture influences our values, attitudes and beliefs, it is everyday communicators who give meaning to what culture is. Schein (1984: 3) defines culture as "a set of shared meanings that make it possible for members of a group to interpret and act upon their environment". Culture is flexible and has the ability to change. Psaila (2016: 832) states that "culture therefore, is not simply a record of how one should live within a given society or what behaviour is expected in various circumstances, but is also a form of expression for human thought and imagination". It influences our attitudes towards other members of society. According to Fiske (2002: 1268), culture is:

> …concerned with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies …these meanings are not only meanings of social experience, but also meanings of self, that is, constructions of social identity that enable people living in industrial capitalist societies to make sense of themselves and their social relations.

Fiske and Hartley (1978: 15,16) state that it is television's familiarity of being "ephemeral, episodic, specific, concrete and dramatic in mode" that makes it important and central to one's culture. They further liken television to:

> …the language we speak: taken for granted, but both complex and vital to an understanding of the way human beings have created their world. Indeed, the resemblance of television discourse to spoken language explains our interest in the communicative role played by television in society.

The concept of television culture[7] is complex as it deals with meaning, ideas, knowledge of the world and others. Television culture requires that viewers be active producers of meaning rather than passive consumers of media content. Fiske and Hartley (1978: 17) liken the television medium to a rear-view mirror of society but also acknowledge that it is a human construct that is "the result of human choice, cultural decisions and social pressures". Undoubtedly television viewing is a culture (Fiske 1990). In any culture, there are beliefs and practices. Regarding soap operas, the belief is that television broadcasts media texts that have multiple meanings. Since "text brings into being things that are not immediately apparent or present" (Burnett and Merchant 2020:2), shared codes and signs relay messages to the receiver. Producers have a choice, when constructing the text, to determine which codes and signs to use in order to convey

[7] Caronia and Caron (2008:373) define television culture as "a system of ideas, representations, values and knowledge about the world, derived mostly from exposure to television content".

particular messages. The process of choosing during the construction of texts gives producers control over messages constructed from narrower pockets of meanings conveyed as storylines. Through the various storylines, the viewer has the ability to establish the dominant ideology of a television programme. Since television texts are complex and contradictory, viewers derive multiple meanings from them (Livingstone 2007). Meaning-making is based on each viewer's experiences and extra-textual resources thereby prioritising social and textual determinations in the production and reproduction of meaning. The soap opera genre illustrates, through conveying multiple meanings of storylines portrayed interchangeably, the preferred dominant ideology by producers. The practice is displayed by pockets of communities who watch this genre on a daily basis, in a specific timeslot, and on a particular day. These communities of viewers follow storylines and are fans of certain characters. The advancement of technology has now allowed for the audience not only to follow characters during soap opera screenings but the relationship between viewers and characters is extended into their social media platforms. Viewers follow the lives of their favourite actors, viewing them as celebrities whose lives are held in high regard. This extension of this relationship comes at a price, as fans are of the belief that they know these characters beyond their screens. Therefore, characters are held accountable by viewers expecting actors to behave in a certain manner off screen. Actors endorse such relationships, seeing them beneficial, as the number of followers on their social media pages gives them an advantage in their acting jobs and attracts different brands for advertising. Additionally, actors get paid for advertising brands on their social media page, and viewers (who also serve as followers on social media) are influenced by their lifestyle.

2. 3 Storytelling

Television soap opera texts, in the form of storylines, encompasses dramatic elements of storytelling inclusive of, but not limited to, moving images, sound, and lighting, all of which appeal to viewers' emotions and curiosity. These elements are packaged to illustrate narratives in a fictional world consisting of characters and their stories. Other people's stories, in this case soap opera storylines, appeal to viewers for their ability to provide entertainment and momentarily take them away from their own lives and arouse interest of first-hand insight of events in the characters' lives. Cohen (2006: 183) states that "by allowing us to share in the lives of others, entertainment can excite and educate us, can make us imagine, think and feel in ways we may not otherwise have a chance to

experience". The viewers' emotions and thoughts are invested in the soap operas during their viewing. Such a viewing process feeds into the element of escapism where viewers emotionally escape from their own lives while consuming media content provided by the television medium.

Viewers' emotional investment during the consumption of soap opera texts makes the genre relatable and at times so believable that viewers then construct their identities and make sense of the self, using soap opera texts. It is worthwhile and perhaps to an extent concerning to note that viewer identities are formed from a fictional world of unrealistic characters with whom the audience identifies strongly. Scriptwriters themselves are not immune to the effects and influence of soap opera texts as they too form part of the soap opera audience in one way or another during the production process. Since meaning-making is subjective and based on socio-cultural experiences of the meaning encoder, producers of soap operas draw on their own personal experiences, identities and extra-textual resources when producing soap opera texts. Therefore, soap opera texts consist of elements of the producers' identities and interpretation of their social world. Since both encoders and decoders of soap opera texts are not objective in their construction and interpretation of content, audience therefore construct their identities using storylines packaged in stereotypical narratives and images. Using scripted narratives, characters exhibit stereotypes in the form of escapism and entertainment. Identities of audiences are tainted and built on stereotypes and fiction. It can be said that media texts influence society and producers, who are members of society themselves, influence messages embedded in media texts (see Figure 2.1).

Cohen (2006: 183) states that viewers' comprehension and interpretation of soap opera content which leads to deep feelings towards fictional media characters as viewers engage in stories is perplexing. Viewers develop an intimate relationship with media characters and see the world through the eyes of characters even though the characters are not real. The extent of the relationship that viewers have with fictional soap opera characters is evident, but this intimate relationship between television soap operas and its viewers is complex. To unpack it, one has to first consider the personal viewing space in which the television hardware is found. In other words, media content is consumed mostly in the viewer's home, as this is their environment of relaxation. For the mere fact that the medium transporting soap opera texts is found in the viewer's personal space, the sharing

of this space becomes an intimate one between viewers and fictional characters. Viewers' invitation of characters into their homes therefore leaves them as no strangers, leading to the formation of parasocial relationships between viewers and characters. Thus 'communication' is shared almost on a daily basis, depending on how frequently viewers watch soap operas. Turner (1993) and Cohen (1997, 2004) point out that female viewers develop stronger relationships with media characters compared to men as they partake in the lives of the characters. This then results in what Livingstone and Mele (1997) describe as the paradox of fiction where the audiences are "emotionally and cognitively involved in stories" that they are fully aware are fictional. During the viewing experience, viewers are not concerned whether storylines are real or not, because stories fill a void resulting in viewers' emotional investment in fictional plots and characters. This attests to the underlying principle of the reception analysis theory, discussed in Chapter 3, which deals with how the audience as active members interpret the meaning of the text based on the individual's cultural background and life experiences (Meidasari 2015). Television images contain messages with "preferred" meanings (Fiske and Hartley 1978). When decoding these messages, the viewers' culture, gender, race and social experiences determine their interpretation of the message and the meaning made.

2. 4 Television viewers/audience

Television is magnetic towards its audience. Early scientific audience studies examined the audience as passive readers (being told how and what to think) of media texts who had no resistance against the power of the media (Gilley, Gilbert and Marguth 1988; Wright 1978; Peterson, Bates and Ryan 1986; Hearn 1989). The passive reader concept was then challenged by the uses and gratifications theory (Ruggiero 2000; Dolan, Conduit, Fahy and Goodman 2016; Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1973). This theory places the audience as active media users selective of content to satisfy particular needs (Pitout 2018: 391). For audiences to be able to make a selection, they need to actively engage with media messages. This results in a change in paradigm and ideological shift where viewers move from being a passive to an active audience. The active audience role has "become important in soap opera discourses since television audience has been transformed into consumers who seek information, entertainment, and education from consumption of television soap opera" (Mehra 2019: 629). According to Pitout (2018: 391), this active engagement takes place within the boundaries and parameters set by the media. Boundaries and parameters refer to certain messages being highlighted while

others are excluded. Media messages contain boundaries in how they are presented and this aligns with the media setting a particular agenda. By highlighting certain issues and excluding others the media sets an agenda. Viewers then make interpretations of selected media messages within boundaries of a particular agenda being set. When it comes to soap operas, for example, producers of soap operas package the product in ways that are appealing to the consumer/viewers by selectively including themes relevant to relationships, love, community, health, business, family and others. Multiple unending storylines in soap operas are highlighted through specific themes to serve a particular purpose.

Some scholars over the years have questioned whether audiences are indeed active or passive in their engagement with media messages (Wright 1978; Hearn 1989; Hayward 1997; Livingstone 2007). One such scholar is Sonia Livingstone who questions whether active audiences are alert, attentive and original. In her own research (Livingstone 2007) she accords that audiences, through their experiences and knowledge, are active because they 'do' something with media texts, acknowledging that something does happen when audiences encounter media texts. The interpretation of media texts is dependent on the viewer's ability to 'read' media texts. Reading media texts, that is the actual moment of interpretation, is important to how viewers derive the meanings, as media texts are multilayered, "subject to conventional and generic constraints, open and incomplete in their meanings, providing multiple yet bounded paths for the reader" (Livingstone 2007: 1). Media messages have the ability to satisfy various needs of the viewer. According to Pitout (2018: 392-395), these include:

> …cognitive needs (seeking information about relevant events, looking for advice, learning about important topics and self-improvement, and gaining a sense of security through knowledge in the media), affective needs (refer to the emotions experienced when interacting with the media like relaxing from a hard day's work, escaping from daily and/or personal problems, fill time because of boredom, provide emotional release from anger and/or disappointment, get sexually aroused), social interactive needs (getting insight into circumstances of others and developing social empathy with them, fulfilling a sense of belonging to a group, finding topics for conversation for social interaction, finding substitute for real-life companionship by getting involved in a para-social relationship with media personalities and characters), and personal integrative needs (relate to finding reinforcement for personal values, identifying with valued others, gaining insight into oneself and to improve self-esteem).

Television soap operas cater to this typology of needs, especially the affective and social interactive needs. This therefore allows for soap operas to be universal and versatile in their ability to reach audiences of multiple cultures and with different experiences. The typology of needs demonstrates that audiences cannot be completely passive, but are active with the ability to derive some meaning from the media text. If it was not so, the media text would be a meaningless blur to audience. There is a symbiotic relationship between audiences and media texts; audiences as active readers must have social knowledge to be able to construct meanings of media texts, and producers of media texts in turn must have knowledge of the audience. Quoting Corner (1995), Livingstone (2007) states that in making sense of a media text, viewers need to first comprehend the text in order to decode and interpret it.

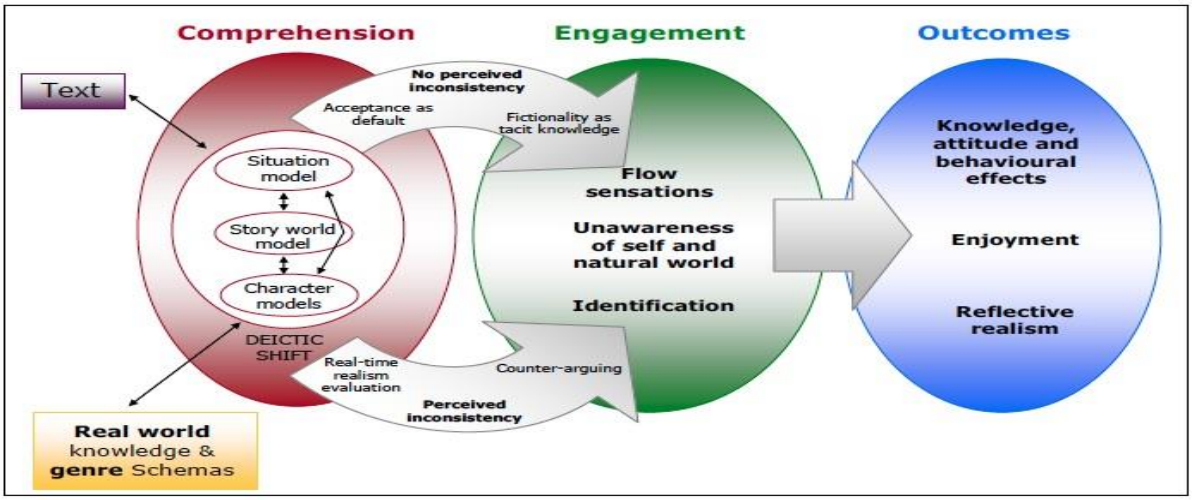


Figure 2.1 Viewers' comprehension and engagement with media texts and possible outcomes (adapted from Busselle and Bilandzic 2008).

Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) contend that comprehension enables viewers to engage with the media texts and this leads to knowledge, attitude and behavioural effects that enable the viewer to enjoy texts while reflecting on their own reality, as shown in Figure 2.1, where media texts are personified through characters and other signs to convey stories and messages. For comprehension to take place, the viewer temporarily locates himself/herself from the real world into the fictional world. This deictic shift enables for transportation to take place where the viewer loses awareness of the real world, oneself or even a sense of time, whilst taking on the life of a character. Once the viewer comprehends texts and the story from the character's perspective, the viewer then engages

with the text through the imaginary process of identification. The process of identification sees the viewer adopting "a character's point of view and develops an empathic understanding of his/her plight and motivations" (Cohen 2006: 194). As the viewer engages with media texts, he/she becomes unaware of self and the actual world whilst they momentarily live in the story world. Through the process of identification (discussed in the following section) viewers comprehend and engage with a text, leading to possible outcomes of knowledge, attitude and behavioural effects, enjoyment and reflective realism. The process is, however, not as linear, as shown in Figure 2.1. A closer analysis reveals that comprehension is followed by interpretation which is in turn followed by implication and association with the text. Moreover, viewers' response to the text is dependent on their own contextual and personal circumstances. Texts cannot be right or wrong because meanings from the text are a result of the viewer's own experience.

Livingstone (2007: 3) further distinguishes between comprehension and interpretation suggesting that "comprehension depends on people's basic knowledge structures … interpretation reveals the cultural and contextual factors which differentiate among viewers". In other words, interpretation of media texts by the viewer is socially located and gives insight into the knowledge and experience of the viewer. Both comprehension and interpretation occur when the viewer encounters media texts, such as television soap operas. It can be assumed that viewers are subjective in their interpretation, and media texts are biased in their packaging/communication of information. This bias presents a power struggle between the viewer and the text insofar as who influences whom the most.

This study aims to explore connotative meaning-making by soap opera viewers and the linkage of these meanings to how viewers construct and negotiate their identities. Denotation is the literal meaning of the text, and results in consensual meaning of the text among viewers, while connotation opens itself up for interpretative divergence due to its associated meanings which are as a result of the viewer's "situational ideologies" that "alter and transform signification" (Hall 1980: 133). Soap opera viewers are diverse but converge at their preferred genre, that is soap operas. However, when decoding soap opera texts, they derive different meanings due to their social and cultural positioning. Soap operas, because they are multi-layered, open and incomplete in their meaning, invite different kinds of knowledge from viewers. Viewers may draw on extra-textual resources

such as their beliefs, values, emotional concerns and social knowledge to make meaning of television texts. This process of meaning-making attests to the incorporation of television into viewers' lives. This can also be seen during real life social interactions when viewers characterize and role play media text into their own identities.

Viewers comprehend and interpret television media texts, resulting in their preferred reading (Hall 1973). The concept of preferred reading simply put is the dominant meaning made from media texts. Livingstone (2007: 7) states that "television texts are complex and contradictory" and that there are "no agreed procedures for determining the majority reading among a group of viewers". Viewers do not have one reading of television texts because they do not have one experience in their lives. However, a viewer has multiple readings drawing from his/her multiple experiences and extra-textual resources in his/her life. Extra-textual resources and reception[8] are prioritised according to each individual viewer. Social and textual determinations play a role in the production and reproduction of meanings by viewers. Livingstone (2007) proposes studies that look into why audiences interpret media texts the way they do. This study explores personal integrative needs of viewers by looking at the construction of gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need.

2. 5 Ritualised and instrumental audience

Perse and Rubin (1987) suggest that there are two different types of media users; ritualized and instrumental. Ritualized or habitual media users are those who consume media content for relaxation or to pass time. Two of the various needs that media messages satisfy in the viewer include personal integrative needs and social integrative needs. Pitout (2018: 392-395) states that personal integrative needs "relate to finding reinforcement for personal values, identifying with valued others, gaining insight into oneself and to improve self-esteem" and social integrative needs allows for viewers in "getting insight into circumstances of others and developing social empathy with them, fulfilling a sense of belonging to a group, finding topics for conversation for social

[8] According to Livingstone (2007: 12): "audience reception is structured by textual factors, however understood, such as textual closure, preferred readings, generic conventions, naturalising discourses, dominant ideologies, or subject positioning … Audience reception is structured by (psycho)social factors, however understood, such as sociodemographic position, cultural capital, interpretative community, contextual discourses, sociocognitive resources, national identity or psychodynamic forces".

interaction, finding substitute for real-life companionship by getting involved in a para-social relationship with media personalities and characters".

Although the viewers' personal integrative needs and social integrative needs are addressed by media texts, however their interest lies more in how media messages/texts address their cognitive and affective needs. Instrumental media users are media literate and select specific media texts/programmes for consumption. Instrumental users comprehend media texts and are more concerned with the text addressing their personal integrative needs and social integrative needs more than their cognitive needs and affective needs being addressed. According to Pitout (2018: 397) "ritualized media users are more inclined to be affected by the media than instrumental media users". The former gravitate towards fiction programmes, such as soap operas, while the latter gravitate towards non-fiction, such as news programmes. Ritualised media users, especially those who gravitate towards fiction programmes, can be found in the townships and have developed parasocial relationships with soap opera media characters.

2. 6 Viewer-character relationship

It can be deduced from Chapter 1 that soap operas provide viewers with the option of escapism, affording them the power and ability to experience life through soap opera characters. Soap operas enable viewers to escape from their own reality and experience a life full of fantasy afforded by the fictional character. Given the history and socio-economic conditions of life in the township as discussed in Chapter 1, the numbers of viewers of soap operas in townships is not a surprise. Residents as viewers develop an imaginary relationship with media personae (Tuchakinsky 2011). A parasocial relationship is a viewer's response to media characters (Schramm and Hartmann 2008: 385) established between viewers and characters while engaging with media content is one-sided (Rubin and McHugh 1987: 279). The viewer is aware of the existence of the relationship but the media character is (obviously) not aware. Viewers dedicate a part of their lives watching media characters in the intimacy of their homes and share in their narratives. This relationship is developed through what Cohen (2006: 184) terms as identification[9] and dates back to the early days of television where interactions went beyond the duration of the viewing experience (Horton and Wohl 1956). In other words,

[9] Cohen (2001: 245) defines identification as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them".

parasocial relationships are an extension of, and not a substitution for, real life relationships, and these include para-romantic love and para-friendships (Tuchakinsky 2011). Before viewers develop a parasocial relationship with a media character, they first engage in parasocial interaction with media texts. Parasocial interaction (PSI) as defined by Schramm and Hartmann (2008) talks to how a viewer responds to media texts during the viewing process. whereas a parasocial relationship (PSR) appears to be an extension of PSI, transcends beyond the viewing experience, and lasts longer than PSI. In other words, PSI establishes PSR but PSR influences future PSI selection processes (Gleich 1997).

2. 7 Identification

For a viewer to develop a parasocial relationship with a character, they have to first undergo the process of identification, which is "an imaginary process in which we adopt a character's point of view and develop an empathic understanding of his/her plight and motivations. It is related to other facets of involvement such as realism and transportation, and "it is coupled with increased emotional involvement with texts" (Cohen 2006: 194). Cohen's earlier definition also includes the notion of the viewers' social and psychological positioning experiencing reception, interpretation and overall events from within, "as if the events were happening to them". Identification is thus a good indicator of media effects.

Through the process of identification, viewers momentarily transport from their own reality into the lives of the characters, 'writing in' a part of themselves in the hope of being carried away by the performance if they were to act it out themselves. While strongly identifying with a character, viewers cease to take on their own social role as a viewer momentarily or sometimes longer, and instead take on the identity and perspective of the character with whom they identify (Cohen 2001). Identification thus enables viewers to develop a better understanding of the character's motivations through their own, and they become invested in the outcome of the events. This is achieved through a sense of intimacy and emotional connection with a character, and developed through the process of identification, showing how identification "is both a function of and an aid to the human capacity to imagine and to mentally process events at various levels simultaneously" (Cohen 2006: 193). Identification is thus a good indicator of how mediated messages affect lives and society, as discussed in detail in the analysis of data.

Before viewers undergo the process of identification, they first have to interpret media messages. In his study, Fiske (1989) shows the correlation between identification and interpretation, explaining that, when viewers identify with characters, the intended message of the text is not lost. During the identification process, viewers forget themselves and take upon the lives of characters, and thus they experience what the characters experience. The meaning encoded in the text is not lost, and is decoded and interpreted as intended. The identification theory and the reception analysis theory, which is the principal theory of this study, are in agreement. The reception analysis theory,[10] devised by Hans Robert Jauss, seeks to explore possible meanings derived when the viewers (in this study, African women aged between 18-50 residing in townships from the eThekwini Municipality) encounter media texts. Through the use of this theory, the researcher tested media culture and the influence of soap operas on the viewers' construction of their identity. The underlying principle of this theory is that audience as active members interpret the meaning of the text based on the individual's cultural background and life experiences (Meidasari 2015). Although viewers do not always identify with characters whom they have shared cultural background and life experiences, the reception analysis theory is in line with the study conducted by Fiske (1989), which states that, through identification, the encoded meaning is not lost as viewers momentarily immerse themselves and take up the lives of the characters in soap operas thus seeing life and situations as characters would.

Both Fiske and Jauss's findings are in agreement in that the importance of the content is not permeated in the content itself, but in the relationship between the content and the reader. However, where they differ is that, according to Jauss's reception analysis theory, senders encode meaning in their texts according to their own views and ideals and viewers decode meanings according to their own views and ideals (Hall 1993: 91) and not according to the viewers of characters as stated in the identification process. Thus, using the reception analysis theory, it is found that the intended meaning may be lost since both senders and receivers may have different views and ideals. Hall (1993) states that there

[10]Reception analysis theory explores the meaning of "text (be it a book, movie, or other creative work) is not simply passively accepted by the audience, but that the reader/viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. In essence, the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader" (Meidasari 2015: 6).

are three positions the receiver can take; the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional view. The dominant-hegemonic position refers to the receiver decoding textual meanings as intended by the sender. The negotiated position is when the sender negotiates the sender's intended meaning according the dominant cultural and societal views. The oppositional position is when the receiver decodes another unintended meaning within the text. Cohen (2006: 190) focuses not so much on the viewer's position and interpretation of the decoded text, but in the provision of "alternative explanation for data" that identification enables which points to active interpretation by the viewer. According to Cohen (2006: 192), "if viewers identify with main characters, they decode and make meaning from the text as they were meant to and are likely to produce the expected responses and enjoy the experiences".

2. 8 Positioning and identification

Perhaps to understand identification and interpretation better, one needs to first understand the notion of positioning. The production team, including writers, directors and camera crew strategically position viewers within a text so as to get them to interpret the text accordingly and derive specific meaning from it. For the viewer to identify with a character, that character's plot needs to evoke certain emotions from the viewer so that the viewer is not only entertained by what they see, but care about whom they see. This is done through codes[11]. Codes are a representation of perceived reality and are packaged in ways that convey meaning of the viewers' social and cultural world and are governed by social and cultural rules. Although some codes may be static, others are dynamic and continually changing to enable viewers to make meaning of what is represented to them. Constant tension may result between static and changing codes as a result of changing practices and traditions of how variables are represented. According to Fiske (1978: 1276), there are three levels of television codes, as follows:

> …reality (appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behaviour, speech, gesture, expression, sound), representation (camera, lighting, editing, music, sound which transmit the conventional representational codes which shape the representations of narrative, conflict, character, dialogue, setting, casting), and ideology (which are organized into coherence and social acceptability by

[11] According to Fiske (1978: 59) "a code is a rule-governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture. Codes are links between producers, texts, and viewers, and are the agents of intertextuality through which texts interrelate in a network of meanings that constitute our cultural world".

> the ideological codes such as those of individualism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism, capitalism).

Given the use of codes, it can be assumed that the 'reality' experienced by viewers of television is not new but is reflective of presentations that are represented for viewers to derive particular meaning drawing from socially and culturally constructed codes. Codes consist of signifiers, which are signs that enable a viewer to decode and interpret a representation (these include technicalities which will not be discussed here so as not to divert from this study's research objectives).

The notion of positioning enables the viewer to interpret and decode the text in the way that it was encoded. Soap opera producers create texts within certain parameters in the hopes of achieving the desired impact. This is achieved through the use of plot lines, character development, camera angles, lighting, sound and other effects. Television effects are not combined haphazardly but are intrinsically designed to yield a specific discourse, one that is shared between consumers and producers of soap operas through the use of characters. Viewers are not mere bystanders and consumers of media texts from the periphery, but they become participants through identification as:

> [T]hey are asked to react emotionally and care about the story, to intimately understand the characters and relate to what they are going through. By identifying with characters, viewers take on the perspective and goals of these characters and position themselves as participants in the evolving plot (Cohen 2006: 192).

This extends viewers' emotional horizons and social perspectives. Through the process of identification, viewers are able to identify through characters what it is like to be a boss, a wife, a domestic worker, a villain, a gangster, a prostitute, an abuser, a victim, a priest, and many more alternative identities. The viewers' imagined experience of this identity is as the characters would allow it to be, as viewers get a chance to experience things they cannot experience or have not yet had a chance to; trying on alternative identities, or otherwise adopting the goals, feelings or thoughts imagined to be those of the target of our identification (Cohen 2001: 249). Identification is thus a psychological variable central to how viewers identify with media characters and Liebes and Katz (1990) argue there are three types of reactions viewers exhibit towards characters, namely, liking the character, being like the character, and wanting to be like the character. In another study, Liebes (1996) listed six additional components of identification

regarding viewer reactions to media characters adding to arguments earlier studies made questioning whether or not there is a clear definition of identification and specified concepts that relate to audience involvement to media characters (Freud 1989).

Conceptual terms linking viewer relation to media characters are often used interchangeably (Mccoby and Wilson 1957; Liebes and Katz 1990; Hoffner and Cantor 1991) but these studies have failed notably to state, for example, that, for identification to take place, the viewer needs to discard the self and take up the identity of the character (Cohen 1997; Livingstone 1998a; Cole and Leets 1999). At the moment of identification, life and all feelings associated with the text are internalised and fiction becomes reality for the viewer. However, for parasocial interaction to take place, viewers need to maintain the distance between themselves and the mediated texts and retain their self-identity so as to still maintain an "objective" view of reality (Horton and Wohl 1956). Measuring identification of viewers to characters remains a challenge, since it is an imaginative process altered by a state of (un)awareness (Cohen 2001: 255) and no standardised measuring scale has been devised. It is important to test identification as a variable that impacts on viewer-response to mediated texts (Maccoby and Wilson 1957); however no measure has been devised (Cohen 2001), thus popular scales which potentially remain suitable for measuring identification include the Parasocial Interaction Scale and the Parasocial Relationship Scale.

Parasocial interaction (PSI) talks to how a viewer responds to media texts during the viewing process (Horton and Wohl 1956; Schramm and Hartmann 2008). But PSI is one-sided as it involves the relationship the viewer forms with a media persona whereas the personae do not form a relationship with the viewer but can only anticipate the viewer's response to their actions. Therefore, a parasocial interaction scale measures the one-sided relationship a viewer develops with a media character. The term 'parasocial relationship' was coined by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in 1956. It refers to an emotional bond the viewer develops with a character as he/she perceived the character to be a friendly companion. The viewer sees the media character as a friend in their own social world (Rubin, Perse and Powell 1985). A parasocial relationship scale measures the intensity of the relationship created by the viewer on a character. PSI occurs during the mediated exposure and offers short responses to personae whereas PSR is long term, appeals to the viewer's affection and is perceived to be cross-sectional. Parasocial relationship (PSR)

appears to be an extension of PSI, transcends beyond the viewing experience, and lasts longer than PSI. In other words, PSI establishes PSR but PSR influences future PSI selection processes (Gleich, 1997).

Scholars (Mccoby and Wilson 1957; Eisenstock 1984; Liebes and Katz 1990) devised their own scales measuring how viewers like a character, want to be like a character, and how they felt similar to the character. However, this strategy overlooks and eliminates other elements that contribute towards the process of identification mentioned in Figure 2.4. Cohen (2001: 256) has since come up with the following improved measure of identification using ten statements from which participants may choose, which were modified and adopted in this study during focus group discussions:

1. While viewing program X, I felt as if I was part of the action.
2. While viewing program X, I forgot myself and was fully absorbed.
3. I was able to understand the events in the program in a manner similar to that in which character X understood them.
4. I think I have a good understanding of character X.
5. I tend to understand the reasons why character X does what he or she does.
6. While viewing the show I could feel the emotions character X portrayed.
7. During viewing, I felt I could really get inside character X's head.
8. At key moments in the show, I felt I knew exactly what character X was going through.
9. While viewing the program, I wanted character X to succeed in achieving his or her goals.
10. When character X succeeded, I felt joy, but when he or she failed, I was sad.

Cohen's (2001) measure of identification using the ten statements suggests a personal reflection from the viewer upon their encounter of a media text. Table 2.1 is derived from Cohen's (2001: 256) initial identification of the ten elements used for a measuring scale, and shows the main themes used during data analysis while measuring identification. Drawing on past research of the identification of a measuring scale (Cohen 2001), Schramm and Hartmann (2008: 389) have since looked at three psychological classifications found in the identification process following post-exposure to mediated

texts, namely, 1) perceptual cognitive response, 2) affective, and 3) behavioural response towards persona or character.

Table 2.1 Themes associated with identification

THEME	Empathy (i.e., sharing feelings of the character)	Cognitive aspect (sharing the perspective of the character)	Motivational	Absorption
ASSOCIATED FEELINGS	Happy, sad, excited, angry, scared (not for the character but with the character)	Understanding the character and motivations for his/her behaviour)	The degree to which the viewer internalises and shares the goals of the character	Self-awareness is lost during exposure to the text

Schramm and Hartmann's (2008) scale shown in Table 2.2 focuses on a type of interpersonal involvement and the extent to which an individual interacts psychologically with media texts (Rubin, Perse and Powell 1985). Such involvement can be determined by the degree to which an audience interacts with the medium and its content individually, between the audience and media character, and with mass media content at large (Wirth 2006: 201). This involvement touches on a fundamental aspect of the reception of media texts and the viewer, necessitating the use of reception analysis theory devised by Hans Robert Jauss, which is used as a primary theory in this study as discussed in Chapter 4. Understanding the process of identification illuminates how audience receive media texts. Cohen's scale is more generic of a viewer's perception of the actual show and character, whereas Schramm and Hartmann's scale depicts the viewer's reimagined self-awareness while engaged in mediated texts. However, both scales are equally useful to gather a funnelled effect of identification, that is, starting from a generic perspective and moving towards a specific intention of identification between the audience and the text. Therefore, both scales were be used during focus group interviews. Participants watched three specific episodes, as depicted by the number of YouTube views, completed responses on paper as guided by the scales and thereafter engaged in a discussion based on their responses. Responses, whether positive or negative, are a good point of departure for discussions, as participants get to realise the "intensity and the dimensionality of PSI"

with media characters (Schramm and Hartmann 2008: 385), how this constructs their identity and how they relate or differentiate to other participants.

Table 2.2 Measuring scale for parasocial process and responses leading to identification (Schramm and Hartmann 2008).

Response	Process	Item example
Cognitive	1. attention allocation	I carefully followed the behaviour of PERSONA.
	2. comprehension of persona's action and situation	I hardly thought about why PERSONA did certain things s/he did. (inverted)
	3. activation of prior media and life experiences	I kept wondering if I knew persons that are similar to… PERSONA.
	4. evaluations of persona and persona's actions	I became aware of aspects of PERSONA that I really liked or disliked.
	5. anticipatory observation	I kept asking myself how things would evolve around PERSONA.
	6. construction of relations between persona and self	Occasionally, I wondered if PERSONA was similar to me or not.
Affective	1. sympathy/antipathy	Sometimes I really loved PERSONA for what s/he did.
	2. empathy/counter empathy	If PERSONA felt bad, I felt bad as well; if PERSONA felt good, I felt good as well.
	3. emotion contagion	PERSONA left me rather sober and unaffected. (inverted)
Behavioural	1. nonverbal behaviour (e.g., mimics, gestures)	Whatever PERSONA said or did – I kept still. (inverted)
	2. (para-)verbal behaviour	Occasionally, I said something to PERSONA on impulse.
	3. behavioural intentions	Sometimes I felt like speaking out on persona

The interaction process is automatic and transpires when viewers encounter media texts. The intensity may vary and the "processes may change dynamically within the course of media exposure" (Schramm and Hartmann 2008: 388).

The scale hypothesises that interaction processes may be affected by a character's physical appearance and direction of their storyline, notwithstanding the viewers "personality traits or situational motivations" (Schramm and Hartmann 2008: 388). Past studies offer a fraction of knowledge into the understanding of parasocial processes between viewer and media character, most offering a one-dimensional positive interaction (Levy 1979; Wenner 1983; Levy and Windahl 1984; Rubin, Perse and Powell 1985; Auter and Palmgreen 2000; Schramm, Hartmann and Klimmt 2002; Hartmann and Schramm 2006; Schramm 2008). There is thus a need to make use of the scales as a point of departure during focus group interviews. The nature of a focus group discussion and qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions is thought to yield rich data from participants. Decades later, with the rise of multi-media platforms, including social media, researchers can to some extent gauge not just the quantity (number of viewer interaction with character) of PSI but the quality of PSI (the nature of the actual engagement between viewer and character), especially on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter (Gunn 2012). "As a result, TV production is increasingly about producing a dialogue with the viewers, and about facilitating 'social TV' experiences via second platform interactivity" (Gunn 2012: 123). Mehra (2019: 630) adds that such media enable soap operas to possess a soft power with which they have transcended geographical boundaries "opening new, participatory avenues for cross-cultural communication".

Film theorists, literary scholars and media scholars have contested over the years whether television offers a true form of identification (Benjamin 1969; Houston 1984; Meyrowitz 1994; Oatley 1994; Lombard 1995). The debate is centred around technology and the viewers, whereas film theorists (Houston 1984; Benjamin 1969) argue that in film, the viewer identifies with the act and not just the character, whereas television narratives offer multiple characters for the viewers to identify with (Meyrowitz 1994). Identification in film is determined by the director through camera angles, therefore the viewer identifies with what the director chooses for them to identify with. Film theorists continue their argument, stating that, through the cinema setting, the viewer is carefully placed

between the screen and projector; the setting is dark to maintain the ambience and mood, and there are no distractions. However, in television, interruptions (through commercial breaks, shorter shots, and domestic duties) offer only a tease as opposed to real psychological satisfaction. Film theorists believe that identification is technologically determined and that the multiple use of cameras in a television production does not provide a unified point of view. Meyrowitz (1994) and Lombard (1995) contest these arguments and state that identification ought to be more about the viewer and not necessarily about technology. They add that television does make up for its interruption through the repetition of episodes and that, through television production, the focus is on the uniqueness of the viewer and not the production itself. Additionally, identification in film is generally through one character, and this excludes various audience members who cannot identify with that particular character, whereas television production offers more variety of multiple characters thereby reaching more viewer identities. Moreover, Cohen (2001: 258) adds that "there has been little empirical evidence to substantiate the rich theoretical claims of technological effects. At the same time, substantial evidence has been gathered for active reception and variance in viewer reactions to various media and texts and the importance of reception contexts".

Cohen (2001: 258) expresses the need for further research "to delineate the ways in which technology, textual production, reception context, and profiles of individual audience members interact to shape the reactions to media characters". This is where this study becomes pertinent as it is concerned with the uniqueness of a soap opera viewer (primarily focusing on black females living in townships) and the impact that television soap opera texts, especially embedded in stereotypes, has on the construction of their identities. Technical production, the viewer and character do not operate independently in silos; for each to work effectively, the other (at times more than one) is needed. Technology requires people to operate it, and these people are societal members who invariably make up viewers. Identities of viewers are unique. However, they are constructed through individual and social group experiences, culture, values and beliefs. Characters themselves belong to a society and are developed by the technical production team. For example, soap opera involves script writers and storylines, and requires the viewer to test the effectiveness of its content. Thus, identification (although an imaginative process) is a culmination of various elements that contribute to mediated texts and the viewing experience.

Cohen (2001) offers multiple hypotheses in that narrative genres, like soap operas, ought to promote greater levels of identification since such genres provide an alternative reality, even if momentarily, that transports the viewer. Soap operas therefore have to promote more identification as opposed to talk shows and news which speak directly to the viewers reminding them of their role as viewers; a feature that promotes parasocial interaction (Horton and Wohl 1956). Because identification is a process where viewers see themselves as the character, it is crucial therefore that scriptwriters generate content or narratives where viewers can see themselves as being similar to the character. The more exposed the viewer is to the character, the more likely they are to see themselves as that character (Rubin and McHugh 1987). This leads to perceived realism, an important concept used to show how viewers react to mediated texts (Press 1989). Realism, however, is not how similar a character's behaviour is to that of the viewer, as this can be clouded by stereotypes which viewers have of another social group which they are watching on the screen (e.g., a poor viewer's stereotyped opinion of a rich character).

Other scholars hypothesised factors such as demographic, age, gender, socio-economic status, and culture as predictors of relations between a viewer and character (Mccoby and Wilson 1957; Turner 1993). Others have listed psychological variables such as confidence and self-esteem to predictors of relations (Turner 1993; Cohen 1997; Cole and Leets 1999). Identification leads to persuasion, altered viewer-identity, more inclination into socialisation, boosting of confidence, memorable meaning of media texts, and provision of a glimpse of possible behavioural and identity change of the viewer (Bandura 1986). This exceeds the imaginative process of identification through which a viewer takes on the identity, goals and perspective of the character while temporarily unaware of the self; viewers carry the adopted characteristics of the fictional character into their own reality.

Figure 2.2 shows that the three elements comprising technical production, characters and viewers are cantered around identification. Thus, identification is determined not only technologically through the eyes of the director during the technical production, but as narratives shown through characters which increase character-attributes and decrease critical interpretation of the mediated texts by the viewer. Television viewers are unique in that they suffer from a condition of temporal self-awareness during the viewing of a

mediated text as they take on the life of the character. In other words, viewers see media texts through the identity, goals and perspective of the character: this encapsulates the process of identification.

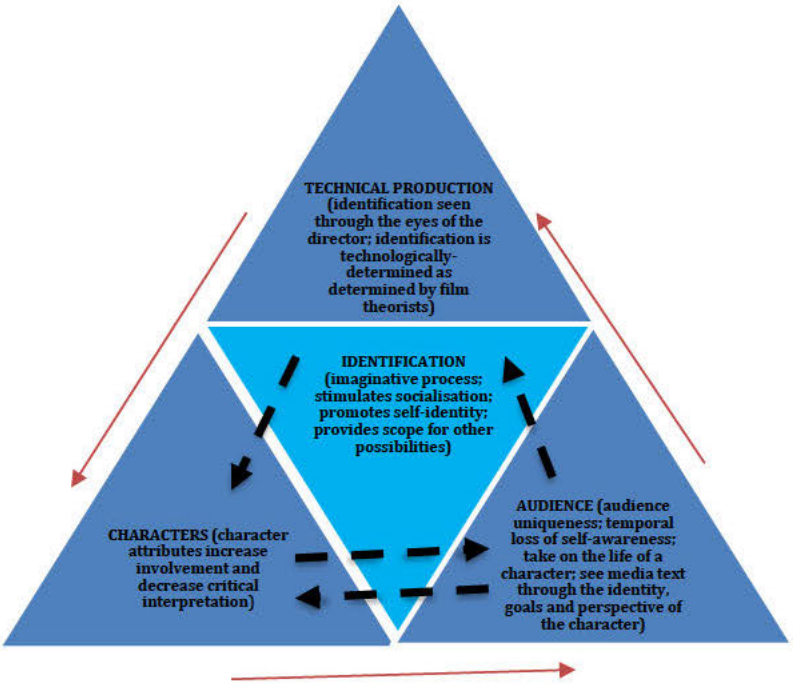


Figure 2.2 Elements involved in the process of identification.

The relationship between television and its viewers remains a complicated one. Previous studies were conducted during the height of the popularity of the television medium with the hope of comprehending the relationship between this medium and its viewers (Benjamin 1969; Bandura 1986; Flitterman-Lewis 1987; Fiske 1989; Auter 1992; Cole and Leets 1999). Many, however, focused on the medium or its content and not many studies have been conducted over the years to understand the relationship between the television text and its viewers (Benjamin 1969; Houston 1984; Wilson 1993; Oatley 1994). In his study, Cohen (2001) elaborates on the concept of identification but also falls short of developing a standardized model which appropriately measures identification. There undoubtedly remains a crucial relationship between mediated texts and the viewer and the effects which that text (portrayed through characters) has on the development of the self-identity of viewers.

2.9 Social media

Literature mentioned earlier shows that television viewers are not static as they transcend through other media platforms, specifically social media[12] platforms, following television characters on social media (McBride 2015). Viewers, through social media, shape narratives. Previous studies have also found this to be the case. According to Benedict (2013: 2), "the social media platform allows fans to directly help promote and encourage the growth of the audience base" through viewer interaction on social media platforms. Additionally, McBride (2015) commends how social media, especially Twitter, is bringing back the social and communal aspects of television through its interactive element. Television content and characters are no longer exclusive but are integrated in the lives of viewers through social media. This fluid relationship enables for more chances of the identification process to take place through parasocially interacted relationships. This relationship is no longer one-sided and mediated. The viewers are able to follow the lives of the characters outside of television, relate to them, admire and interact with them through commenting on their social media posts and at times 'talking' to the character through these posts. This enables the viewer to get to know characters even more as the 'relationship' is intensified when viewers gain insight into the lives of characters. Through this frequent interaction, there is perceived intimacy between viewers and characters (Perse and Rubin 1989).

Actors are also put under pressure at times to maintain characteristics of those they portray on the television screen. In an article published by The Conversation, Sara Reimer notes the aesthetic labour pressure that actors are put under by both the technical production and the viewers. Reimer (2019) defines aesthetic labour as the "physical and emotional effort that goes into making and maintaining an appearance" for one's work. She adds that this ongoing work goes beyond working hours as it relates to the application of makeup, how you dress, what you eat, your body/weight size, and ultimately how you conduct yourself in public forums including social media. According to Reimer (2019):

> …acting is embodied work and, as a result, actors carry their work with them at all times. In performance, an actor's body tells a story through what it does. Whether that is talking, singing, dancing, crying, shouting, or any other physically expressive act. It also tells a story through what it represents. And this closely relates to the social meaning attached to physical appearance.

[12] According to McBride (2015:8) "broadcasters have realized that social media is a great way to interpret what people are discussing". Examples of social media include Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

Invariably, the more actors post about their social lives on social media platforms, the more their identity makeup is put under scrutiny by viewers or followers. "Celebrities are often associated with attractiveness, though in parasocial relationships, attractiveness includes physical appearance and personality, or perceived commonalities" (Rasmussen 2018: 283). One can argue that this is anything but a mutually beneficial relationship. This is a parasocial interaction as opposed to a parasocial relationship because "communication is one-sided as the personae's action can be observed by the media user, whereas the media user's reaction can only be anticipated, but not directly observed by the personae" (Schramm and Hartmann; 2008: 385). Although viewers are able to interact with characters and grow their relationship, and characters receive viewer feedback about the character they play, the media's reaction is not seen but anticipated. It therefore remains a crucial question as to who bears more power over the other, the viewers over the actors, or is it the actors over the viewers? Undoubtedly, one does influence the other, be it directly or indirectly, and it is the purpose of this study to find out the extent of this influence using a Parasocial Interaction Scale.

The intersection of the three elements of identification, namely, the technical production, the characters and the viewers, is complex. There are now other underlining factors that have crept into the identification process, such as viewer engagement on social media platforms and how that is perceived by actors and how it ultimately feeds into their acting craft. On social media platforms, viewers are of the perception that they are interacting directly with characters from their screens, disregarding the reality of who actors are outside of characters they portray. Because viewers religiously watch actors on their screens, viewers are experts on their knowledge of actors. Owing to their confidence in actors, viewers see actors as trustworthy sources. This is why some individual viewers believe in what actors say and do. Narratives and actions are then simulated and permeate into the lives of the viewers. Viewers perceive actors' faces as the source of credibility through attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness as predictors of credibility as listed by Ohanian (1990). One can say that actors feed onto this perception, as they are fully aware that viewers follow them on their social media platforms owing to the characters they play on the screen. Viewers are also attracted to the physical appearance of actors.

Parasocial interaction is no longer one-sided, since Internet-mediated communication from both parties does take place. Individual viewers post comments and send direct messages to characters who then respond to those messages. This interaction feeds into the technical production. It is thus not only actors who are affected by viewer feedback, but the technical production too. The availability of content at the palm of the viewer's hands, at their own preferred time and location adds to the perceived power of the audience. fuelled by the rise of mobile, social and digital media (Brennan 2019). It comes as no surprise, then, that audiences would want to directly contribute and shape the direction of storylines. Turow (2012: 2) adds that creators of media content ought to acknowledge the power held by individual audience members, because, whether they like to admit it or not, viewers do "exercise unprecedented control over the creation and distribution of media products", like the scripting of soap operas. Although viewer-feedback across various media platforms is at times taken into consideration during scripting of narratives, viewers do not always get it right. However, viewer feedback is undeniably present and "represents a new kind of editorial raw material, which fuels the innovation process within contemporary TV production" (Gunn 2012: 134). Although there are new trends in production, content and reception through multi-platform viewers participatory channels which has strengthened the relationship between the viewers and producers, the overall authority of deciding the direction of storylines still rests with content producers like scriptwriters. Viewers can at times see themselves as better scriptwriters when they suggest recommendations on directions that some storylines ought to take.

No doubt that through the rise of multiple digital platforms, television content like soap operas generates production of conversations through various social media platforms. These conversations are enabled through the prominence of parasocial interaction (Gunn 2012: 135). Television content transcending the television medium is one of the ways media influences viewers. Influence is two-way; producers influence viewers through television content, and viewers influence producers through feedback on social media platforms. When viewers watch a soap opera, they involuntarily engage, whether positively or negatively, with that specific media content. They can identify with media characters (Cohen 2001), be deeply immersed or transported through storylines (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000), or be emotionally invested (Van Monsjou and Mar 2018) in a character or fictional couple through relating their own lived-experiences with those

they see on the screen. The viewer forms close parasocial bonds with characters (Horton and Wohl 1956). Therefore, soap operas are not harmless entertainment programmes that provide for escapism, but are influential in the viewer's identity construction and overall behaviour through being shipped and transported (even if it is momentarily) into the lives of characters on their screens. Four primary ways in which viewers engage with and are affected by the media include: (a) transportation, (b) character identification, (c) parasocial interaction and (d) worship. Transportation is a mental process that refers to the ability of a narrative to momentarily remove viewers from reality and emotionally and psychologically immerse or transport them into the fictional world of characters (Gerrig 1993; Green, Brock, and Kaufman 2004). Transportation lends itself to character identification, a phenomenon where the viewers' self-awareness decreases as they develop an emotional and cognitive connection with a character. This results in the viewer taking on the identity of that character including how they think, act and even the adoption of their goals (Cohen 2001). Unlike character identification, parasocial relationship occurs when a viewer strongly feels a relationship with a character. The viewer does not take on the identity of the character but actually feel as if they are forming a relationship or bond with a character (Horton and Wohl 1956). Parasocial relationships simulate real-life relationships as viewers respond to characters as they would to real-life acquaintances, resulting in a one-sided relationship between a viewer and fictional character (Schramm and Hartmann 2008; Dibble, Hartmann, and Rosaen 2016).

The fourth construct, which is worship, establishes a more intense media engagement (Maltby, Giles, Barber and McCutcheon 2005). In this phenomenon, the viewer follows the media character outside of the scripted storyline into his/her celebrity life and social media activities. Worship can be low-level (where the viewer closely follows the actor's life outside of their character life) or high-level (where the viewer would do just about anything for their idolized character or actor in real life) (Maltby, Houran, and McCutcheon 2003; McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, and Maltby 2003). This has resulted in the growth of celebrity cults over the years. Various ways of celebrity worship have become normalized by mainstream media (Maltby *et al.* 2003 2004). Researchers over the years have coined the term "shipping" to make better understanding of viewer media engagement (Cohen 2006; Van Monsjou and Mar 2018). This term is used when the viewer develops "an emotional investment in fictional relationships" (Van Monsjou and Mar 2018: 1), be it in soap operas or any other genre in any media platform. Shipping is

derived from the word 'relationshipping' and undoubtedly, relationships form an integral part of the viewers' lives and everyday experiences. Most people are said to prefer to be in a relationship rather than be single (Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff, and Maurer 1996; Blakemore, Lawton, and Vartanian 2005; Poortman and Liefbroer 2010) and this is witnessed in the prominent role of relationships in contemporary publishing (Tapper 2014) and our everyday lives and interaction with other individuals. Romantic relationships are one of the main themes in most soap operas worldwide (Hogan 2003). Therefore, the level of engagement of viewers with romantic relationships of fictional characters comes as no surprise. Shipping has also been popularized by mainstream media over the years to the extent where we see award shows like MTV's Fandom Awards including a category for "Ship of the Year", where fans can vote for their favourite fictional relationship or couple (Magaldi 2016). When shipping, viewers do not only romantically pair characters, but they become emotionally consumed in the relationship of those characters to the extent where they see themselves, through character identification, involved and being players in that relationship.

2. 10 Parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship

Transportation, character identification, parasocial interaction, and worship are attachments that form the foundation of the relationship viewers share with media characters. According to Stern, Russell and Russell, D. (2005: 223):

> …parasocial attachments, defined as viewer relationships with fictional characters interpreted as real people, enables these surrogate companions to function as meaningful referent to others – agents of socialisation and sources of information – able to influence viewer's norms, desires and behaviours.

Parasocial relationships do not replace relationships in the viewers' lives, but are an extension of those relationships, because long-term viewing of images on television "influence a viewer's perception of social reality" (Larson 1996: 98). This can be witnessed when viewers see actors in social settings outside of their screens, for example, at the mall. The viewer identifies the actor by the character they portray on screen. Viewers do not identify with the actual person, their real name or personality. Parasocial relationships blur the line between reality and fiction as fiction is spilled into both the viewer's and actor's real life through character association. Parasocial relationships influence the viewer's behaviour, aspirations and desires (Stern, Russell and Russell

2005: 223). Information presented by media characters thus becomes essential and real to viewers' lives to an extent that viewers at times model behaviour exhibited by their favourite characters. The production of realistic content which not only entertains but informs and educates viewers thus becomes crucial in shaping perceptions and encouraging development.

The media, in this case, soap operas, do not reflect reality but construct an imitation or distorted version of reality (Hall 1997b: 23). Although content, in this case of soap operas, is not real and the viewers are at times aware that they are watching fictional narratives, they accept a set of assumptions about the fictional world that they view, thereby interpreting fiction as reality, even if momentarily. In other words, the viewer is aware that content they are consuming is fictional, not real, but this thought is put aside for the sake of being entertained and experiencing viewing pleasure. The point is not about the soap opera events or narratives being real or not, but about the meanings derived by the viewer entertainment provided by soap operas (Cohen 2006: 184) and the viewing pleasure they provide (Hobson 2003). Cohen (2006: 184) offers another proposition by stating that "our suspension of disbelief is not 'willing' in the sense that it is not active, but rather that our propensity to believe fictional events is natural, and that it requires mental effort and purpose to remind ourselves that what we are viewing or reading is fictional". Through the development of parasocial relationships, viewers perceive characters as their friends and want them to be affiliated with their social world (Rubin, Perse and Powell 1985). In other words, parasocial relationships are an extension of, and not a substitution for, real life relationships, and these include para-romantic love and para-friendships (Tuchakinsky 2011).

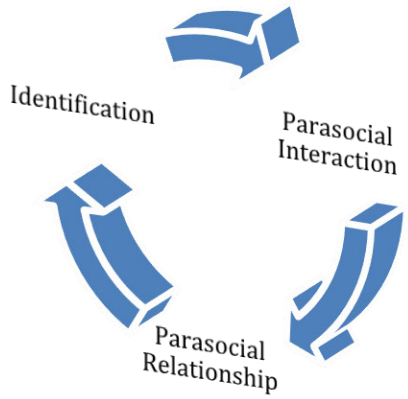


Figure 2.3 Development of parasocial interaction with media texts

Figure 2.3 shows the cyclical process in which a viewer develops parasocial interaction with media texts. This interaction is extended and develops into a parasocial relationship between a viewer and a character. However, for both parasocial interaction and relationship to occur, the viewer first undergoes the process of identification. Thus, for parasocial interaction to take place, viewers need to make recognition between soap opera characters in relation to themselves and people in their own lives. Recognition leads to familiarity, both processes which enable for parasocial relationship and interaction to take place. Viewers build imaginary friendships and intimate relationships with soap opera characters. Through constant viewing, they become 'involved' in the lives of characters. In turn, media characters influence viewers' social and cultural perspectives of life. Pitout (2018: 409) agrees that "television programmes are popular topics for discussion [and that] they serve as a cultural forum for social discourse about aspects of the represented reality in these programmes". The intimacy of this relationship is inevitable as it is built through cultural viewing of soap operas, that is, on a daily basis and at the same time slot. Storylines and plots transport viewers emotionally in the life journeys of characters by sharing their joy, hardships, successes and failures. Thus, viewers see themselves involved in the lives of characters and see it is their right to demonstrate their opinions on characters.

Figure 2.2 shows how viewers do not isolate themselves when watching media content but become active participants who receive, interpret and interact with media messages, a process which leads to parasocial relationships. According to Cohen (2001: 246), identification "shapes the development of self-identity and social attitudes". The process of identification also allows for the viewer to understand the goals of the character, and events of the plot in reference to the goals, and to experience feelings and emotions as a result of the interaction of the goals and plot (Oatley 1994). This in turn impacts on their own identity, goals and events in their lives. This is a psychological merging in which viewers internalize the characters and their emotions and momentarily detach themselves from being merely a viewer from a distance and become an active participant in both the character's life and their own lives. In fact, the distance between fiction and reality is non-existent at this time. There is no reality and there is no fiction, as fiction is perceived as reality. Viewers feel happy when the goals of a character are met and feel a level of anxiety when those goals are threatened. The viewer empathizes with the character and

adopts the character's identity (Cohen 2001). "As the narrative progresses, the audience member simulates the feelings and thoughts appropriate for the events that occur" (Cohen 2001: 252). As this process continues, it might be interrupted by an external stimulus such as the ringing of a mobile phone, or a textual stimulus like a direct reference to the viewer, or the end of an episode.

Some viewers read media texts as spectators while others identify closely with media characters. The difference and distance between the two are measured through the level of identification felt by each viewer. Wilson (1993) notes the movement of viewers in and out of film while Fiske (1989) contends that identification increases referential reception (where viewers perceive media characters as though they were individuals in their real world and compare them to real life experiences) and decreases the distance needed for logic and critical reception of media texts. Identification is also defined as being in someone else's shoes and seeing the world through their eyes (Livingstone 1998b). Identification is crucial in understanding parasocial relationships as it leads to temporal loss of self-awareness as viewers not only watch media texts but transport their beings into the text that they are watching. Therefore identification does not only deal with emotions or perceptions, but a process of "heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character" (Cohen 2001: 251). Soap opera producers create textual characters that provoke identification through the types characters they cast and the storylines created. Identification with media characters is therefore a carefully constructed process.

For the viewer to identify with a character, the viewer must enter the textual world. The level, development and strength of identification is dependent on multiple factors including "the nature of the character, the viewer and the text" (Cohen 2006: 186). We have established that identification offers viewers momentary suspension of reality. Viewers are able to empathise with characters and develop feelings not just for the text but for a character. Identification is also linked to one's life experiences, values and beliefs. Viewers identify with characters with whom they have shared-beliefs and behavioural patterns. The opposite is also true. Viewers can also identify with characters who represent power-positions which they do not have in their real lives. In other words, a viewer can identify with a mean character in the text, even if the viewer is a kind person in reality. The viewer identifies with such a character because that character possesses

the ability to be the person the viewer is not. This aligns with Cohen's (2006: 188) contention that "people often identify with characters that represent what they wish to be or to whom they are attracted to, rather than what they are". This could be due to various reasons, including societal pressure, religious beliefs, family values and the viewer's socio-economic position in life. The boundary between the viewer's world and that of the character is referred to by Oatley (1994) as a semi-permeable membrane where the reader-viewers enter with their own identity into the created-fictional world. The viewers carry their own identity into that of the character's fictional world and are still able to move in and out of identification. Some viewers, however, become so immersed in the text and their identification with the character that they do not just momentarily suspend their own reality, but transform fiction into reality through their inability to discern between the two. This danger is evident when some viewers resort to genuine feelings of like or dislike for characters outside of the text and into their social lives.

Lines between fiction and reality are sometimes blurred, especially when some viewers develop strong identification with characters. This may be due to the fact that some viewers re-live their lives through those of characters they watch. Women develop stronger parasocial relationships with soap opera characters than men (Turner 1993) attesting to Gleich's (1997: 42) statement on gender differences in identification where "women put themselves into the place of the TV person to a greater extent than men". With respect to age, Gleich (1997) adds that women above the age of fifty identify and develop a stronger parasocial relationship with soap opera characters. Cohen (2003) argues that teenagers also have a stronger parasocial relationship than adults and this could be due to their transition into sexuality, defining their sexual identity and psychological needs of their developmental stage (Raviv, Bar Tal and Ben Horin 1995; Karnoil 2001; Tuchakinsky 2011). Tuchakinsky found that adolescents have a higher parasocial love for characters than adults, whereas adults have a higher parasocial friendship than adolescents, making these two groups easily susceptible to stereotypes portrayed by characters in the media text. In the context of the parasocial relationship, the viewer's friendship with the character is embodied by feelings of trust, respect, and understanding. These are similar to feelings expressed towards real friends in the viewer's life. According to Livingstone (1988:70), "after a while the characters do become real people, and we are concerned for their wellbeing just as we are concerned for our friends and colleagues". A parasocial love, on the other hand includes feelings of

intimacy, trust and disclosure (Tuchakinsky 2011). Tuchakinsky (2011:76) and Rubin (1973) further state that "the difference between love and friendship parallels the difference between liking and love (where love involves a strong desire to be in the other's presence, longing for physical closeness and need for approval and care)". Fehr (1994) elaborates on parasocial love, highlighting the fact that love embraces various relationships including maternal love and platonic love.

Parasocial relationships therefore make it easier for stereotypes to be interwoven into the lives of characters and ultimately the lives of viewers. Media characters go through a process of screening before they are cast to play their roles on television. Choices of media characters follow social stereotypes and this is reflected in the choice of characters from which viewers can choose. A female character typically has to be beautiful and a male character ought to have a physique that appeals to the eyes of (especially female) viewers. Villains in soap operas are generally males who are strongly built. Heroes also tend to be mostly males. Female characters are portrayed as damsels in distress, to be rescued by a male character. Female boss characters do not have their own families, and this feeds into a subtle yet obvious stereotype that a woman has to choose between her career and having a family. Female characters in soap operas generally do not have stable relationships and tend to engage in multiple intimate relationships. Soap operas are also rife with cultural stereotypes. Ultimately, there is a character for every viewer. Repeated viewing of such characters leads to internalization of the media texts and therefore accelerates the formation of parasocial relationships and clouds the viewers' judgment. According to Cohen (2001: 249), "if identification involves internalization, it is likely that repetitive internalization of powerful and seductive images and alternative identities of media characters may have some long-term effects". Although viewers may identify with multiple characters, they construct their identities using characteristics they identify with from characters. Identification is one of many reactions that viewers feel towards media characters. Table 2.3 lists examples of other reactions, and demonstrates the close relationship between concepts of identification, parasocial interaction, affinity and imitation.

It can be deduced from the table that the theoretical roots of these concepts are embedded in psychology as they call for an emotional, interactional, attitudinal and behavioural change. Viewers use these concepts to position themselves as learners, as their selves, or

as a character. Emotions felt towards characters easily blur the line between fiction and reality, making it easy for social stereotypes to stealthily creep in. Social stereotypes impact the relationship between viewers and characters. Because soap opera content is influential to viewers, it is important that soap operas provide context on how they choose to represent social discourse. Soap operas have the ability to be drivers of social change and not merely provide watered-down versions of reality or represent selective reality. To understand further the relationship viewers, have with soap operas, it is thus imperative that one understands how a television text is constructed, one of the key points of meaning-making.

Table 2.3 Identification compared with similar concepts (Table 1 in Cohen 2001)

	Identification	*Parasocial Interaction*	*Liking, Similarity, Affinity*	*Imitation*
Nature of process	Emotional and cognitive, alters state of awareness	Interactional, (para)social	Attitude	Behaviour
Basis	Understanding and empathy	Attraction	Perceptions of character and self	Modeling
Positioning of viewer	As character	As self	As self	As learner (self as other)
Associated phenomena	Absorption in text, emotional release	Attachment to character and text, keeping company	Fandom, realism	Learning, reinforcement
Theoretical roots	Pyschoanalysis, film studies, social psychology	Psychology, interpersonal communication	Social psychology	Experimental, psychology, social learning theory

2. 11 Intertextuality

Connection between the viewers and the media text is linked to intertextuality, a concept that Gee (2011: 165) defines as "text that quotes, refers to, or alludes to another text". For intertextuality to take place, it requires connectivity between individuals and the text itself for "connections across contexts of situation create understanding, establish relations, construct identities" (Hodges 2015: 53) and "yield social formations" (Agha

2005: 4). These may lead to shared ideologies[13]. Although soap opera viewers may have some shared ideologies, such as following a similar media culture through their viewing habits and patterns, each viewer is individualistic in his/her beliefs and values, how he/she thinks, his/her perspective of the world, socio-cultural and socio-political positioning, and his/her overall identity. Each viewer connects, comprehends and interprets media texts differently to the next viewer. Those with shared ideologies become part of the same social group (in-group) and viewers who hold different ideologies are seen as the out-group. Relations are easily established within viewers of the same group as they at times have shared identities. Soap operas cater to viewers who belong to both the in-group and the out-group. Power-relations leading to social and cultural differences soon erupt, leading to contestations among the groups. Producers of soap operas, especially script writers, study their viewers and have knowledge of gaps among the groups.

Gaps are widened by texts packaged through stereotypes which further heighten divisions among groups. Such divisions are not only seen through themes of hatred, revenge, disloyalty and violence in storylines but they also exist in the social world of viewers. In later chapters we will see how viewers are active in their engagement with television texts, why such texts does influence public opinion and behaviour, and why it is important to analyse soap opera texts, as it contributes to how viewers construct their identities. Texts carry meaning and viewers interpret those meanings according to their social and cultural context, and their extra-textual resources. Gender, class, age, race, and ethnicity form extra-textual resources and they affect how viewers interpret media texts, as suggested by Pitout (2018), as they are stereotypically represented through media texts. Stereotypes[14] play into the social context, the cultural context and the extra-textual resources. Browne, Firestone and Mickiewicz (1994: 8) assert that stereotypes "extend throughout society, and frequently serve as trend-setters, taste-makers, labellers, and the raw material for daily conversation". Media stereotypes are deliberate and intentionally evoke specific emotions for specific purposes. For television soap operas, stereotypes

[13] According to Hodges (2015: 53), ideologies are "systems of thoughts and ideas that represent the world from a particular perspective and provide a framework for organizing meaning, guiding actions, and legitimating positions". French poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1972) likens discourse to an ideology in that both are concerned about how people think about a topic, and where those thoughts are rooted.

[14] Stereotypes are selected exaggerated images or cheap representations of original images used to evaluate individuals, groups or ideas. Stereotypes have a powerful effect on people (Neuman 2014) and they thrive on power imbalance, social, cultural and economic gaps that exist in society.

disguised as entertainment are used to increase viewership numbers as television production is commercial and profit-driven. As stereotypes are selected exaggerated representations commonly used for entertainment, the entertainment hook in soap operas therefore supersedes that of informing.

2. 12 Meaning-making

Television soap opera texts is content which television viewers or readers, interpret and derive meaning from. There is a connection between the text/content and the viewer/reader. The importance of the content is not permeated in the content itself, however, it is made inside the connection between the content and the reader. Senders encode meaning in their texts according to their own views and ideals and viewers decode meanings according to their own views and ideals (Hall 1993: 91). Hall (1993) lists three positions the receiver can take: the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional view. The dominant-hegemonic position occurs when the receiver decodes textual meanings as intended by the sender. The negotiated position occurs when the receiver negotiates the sender's intended meaning according to the dominant cultural and societal views. The oppositional position occurs when the receiver decodes another unintended meaning within the text. These positions as stated by Hall are not just mere positions, but, when examined closely, are positions of power in which viewers can situate themselves when decoding soap opera texts. Even though the viewer is aware of the fiction in soap operas and their unrealistic plots and characters, viewers have power in deciding whether to invite soap operas into their homes, the power to choose to continue watching various storylines, the power to choose a parasocial relationship[15] with a character, the power to feel emotions and relate to the character and their storyline, and the power as receivers to decode media texts according to its intended meaning, to negotiate the sender's intended meaning or completely oppose the intended meaning. The world is said to be about the power of choice contrary to popular belief shared by Participants (1996) in a Policymakers Roundtable Discussion Session on Mass Media and Free Trade, where many stated that consumers did not have the power of choice in television as broadcasters decide which programs to air based on the monetary value of those programs. However, there have been changes since 1996 in the shift of power from

[15] Parasocial relationships are "attachments defined as viewer relationships with fictional characters interpreted as real people" (Stern *et al*. 2005: 223).

media content producers to viewers. Years subsequent to South Africa becoming a democratic country, viewers had more access to engage with media content and were comfortable to provide feedback on content without any prejudice experienced in the years preceding 1994. Years later, viewers *do* have power over which content to watch and how to interpret that content. Viewers' power also shapes the direction of storylines in soap operas. Thus, viewers are no longer passive consumers of media content but are active members exercising their opinions, especially on social media platforms where media producers gauge the popularity, or not, of their storylines by the amount of viewer engagement and direct comments.

2. 13 Viewing space and experience

Viewers draw their interpretation and meaning-making based on their social positioning and cultural context. In a nuclear household that consists of a mother, father, daughter and son, different interpretative communities may exist within that family. For example, the wife may be drawn towards soap operas, the dad may be drawn towards sport programmes, the daughter may be drawn towards reality shows and the son may be drawn towards action hero movies. All the interpretative communities within that family favour their preferred programmes and frown upon the other. It does occur at times that there is cross-interpretative interaction that happens between members of a family while trying to make meaning of their own programmes. Negotiation of meaning thus takes place as each family member formulates their interpretation based on their social and cultural context.

The family described are the viewers and are a group of people who have a shared interest in consuming the media, in this case television. The viewers have a shared culture in how they view television content, when they view it, how often they view it, and can at times have shared values and beliefs in what they see. It can be deduced that for viewers to engage with television content, they have to view it. But the viewing experience may be different for a viewer watching the same television programme (as seen during focus group discussions later in the study). Shimpach's (2011: 62) three distinct moments define the gratification of needs during the viewing experience, localisation of content, and the content being viewed within its located environment.

To sum up, these three aspects relate to the viewing experience itself, the preferred viewing locale, and the choice of actual content, and the viewers, in their specific social context. These form the crux of this research, as this study aimed to investigate the content broadcast, the viewer's interpretation of the content, and the identity which the viewer constructs from this process, which is partly determined (as suggested in Shimpach's third point) by the viewer's social identity and context. While the intersection of space, medium, content, and subject are powerful and compelling, the viewing process, viewer and locale are positioned at the end of the communication process, and are considered to be part of the reception, rather than production process (Shimpach 2011: 63). In this study, active viewer engagement with content, and its impact on gender identity and gender stereotypes, were explored.

2. 14 Conclusion

This chapter mapped out television viewing as a culture and elements used as storytelling techniques that draw viewers towards the television soap opera genre. Through this chapter, the importance of soap opera texts and how narratives are constructed has been illustrated. It can be concluded that a text is as important as visuals and other storytelling techniques in the representation of black women. This chapter also distinguished between ritualized and instrumental viewers, and showed that viewers play an important role in the production, interpretation and overall existence of soap operas. It was through the literature that viewers of Generations and Isidingo can be viewed as ritualised media users. Texts and intertextuality were shown to establish parasocial relationships between media characters and viewers. It was also shown how soap opera texts represented as stereotypes affects how black South African women construct their individual identities. The next chapter further extends the literature by reviewing works surrounding semiotics, effects of stereotypes, representations of black South Africa women and situating them within an African feminist perspective.

CHAPTER 3: THE SEMIOTICS OF GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES

3.1 Introduction

According to Suggs (2019: 15) "stereotypes found in television can have some effect on the ways minorities view themselves and the majority groups". The representations of black women using stereotypes not only influence their perspectives of other racial groups and social classes, but they influence how they perceive themselves and construct their own identity (Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yarchi 2017). This chapter reviews some of the semiotics, that is "actions and artefacts we use to communicate" (Van Leeuwen 2005: 3), contained within soap opera texts. It further discusses how black South African women are represented in soap operas and situates them within an African feminist lens. It can be seen that soap opera content is constructed through the knowledge and meaning which exist in the world of those who produce it; and in turn, viewers comprehend and interpret such texts, giving meaning to it according to their own knowledge. The chapter cautions the use of stereotypes and its effects on viewers.

3.2 Semiotics

Television storytelling is a meaning-making technique. Fiske and Hartley (1978: 17) describe television's ability to afford its viewers the power to make meaning of their reality through its presentation of reality giving viewers an understanding of how society works. It is for this reason that an analysis of the semiotics[16] of some of the scenes became important for this study. Semiotics from frames of different scenes in Generations and Isidingo were also analysed for analysing meaning that viewers derive from each sign. Scholars (Pierce 1958; Saussure 1974; Hawkes 2003) have provided different definitions for semiotics. However, for this study Fiske and Hartley's (1978: 37) definition was used, defining semiotics as the "science of signs; how they work and the ways in which we use them". Simplified, semiotics concerns itself with the relationship between signs and their meanings and the way those signs are combined into codes. Characters portrayed by black female actresses exhibit stereotypes such as Angry Black Woman (defensive, uncooperative and cruel), Jezebel (highly sexualised and exhibits western beauty

[16] Seiter (1987:31) defines semiotics as "the study of everything that can be used for communication: words, images, traffic signs, flowers, music, medical symptoms, and much more … Every sign is composed of a signifier, that is, the image, object, or sound itself – the part of the sign that has material form – and the signified, the concept it represents".

features), Mammy (domestic, nurtures and voluptuous), and Sapphire (very loud, opinionated, and domineering). The following frames provide a stereotype linked to each female character and also illustrates how semiotics are used in soap opera scenes:

Frame 3.1 Sphe as the Mammy or Strong Black Woman stereotype

Culture:

Sphe's character (in Generations The Legacy) exemplifies a modernised definition of the Mammy or Strong Black Woman stereotype. She exemplifies academic success as she is a doctor, yet contrary to liberal feminist beliefs of academic empowerment equating to gender equality, Sphe is not exempted from the cultural oppression of submitting to the male gender within her family. She is nurturing, ensures that the family is happy and fed, and puts the needs of others before her own. Hence, Worden (2013: 147) suggests that "television creates and mirrors culture in ways still to be understood". In this scene, Sphe practices her traditional gender role as a black wife; making breakfast for all the men around the table, and when she brings Mazwi (the husband) his tea, she kneels slightly next to him and places her left hand on the right arm. This is a sign of respect in the Zulu culture suggesting the woman is below the one she is serving. She also does not look Mazwi, who is the head of her household, in the eye while she is serving him. As a married Zulu wife, she is dressed in conservative clothing as her body is only for the eyes of her husband. Her wardrobe consists of undertone colours. She also refers to Mazwi as "Babakhe" (although they write Mazwi on the subtitles) which solidifies that he is her baby-daddy. In the Zulu culture, it is deemed disrespectful for the wife to call the husband by his name. The use of the word "Babakhe" is a sign of respect which can also be interpreted as Sphe affording Mazwi his position not only as her husband, but as a father to their child.

Men with a wife and children in the Zulu culture are granted more respect compared to those who do not have children. The décor of this room shows how the Morokas live admirable lives. They have businesses and a family legacy. The window is half opened which can be assumed that even though outsiders have an idea of the lives the Morokas live, they still partially maintain their privacy.

Frame 3.2 Tshidi as the Angry Black Woman or Sapphire stereotype

Gender-based violence:

Tshidi (in Generations The Legacy) symbolises the Angry Black Woman or Sapphire stereotype. Her character also portrays characteristics of a Jezebel. This scene is representative of some of the gender-based violence that takes place in soap operas where black women tolerate being abused, are powerless and voiceless in relationships. The women in soap operas do recognize that they are being abused yet they remain in the relationship. In this frame, Tshidi is engaged in a heated argument with her husband Kumkani as he delivers her belongings in a box after finding out that she is impregnated by another man who happens to be his worst enemy. It is still the morning so she is wearing her robe and her hair is not done to its usual. She uses her hands a lot, symbolizing emphasis as she tries to remind him of the times that she has had to forgive him for his infidelities and his physical abuse towards her. Tshidi uses a lot of facial expressions which align with the tone of her voice. Her eyes widen as she raises her voice. She tilts her head to the left side as though to let Kumkani's harsh words about her not being a better wife, slide pass her. Tshidi keeps a safe distance between her and Kumkani during this argument because she knows how violent he can get when he is angry especially since she has been in the receiving end of his attacks. Tshidi's character is a medium between feminine and masculine and her dress code in a lot of

the scenes symbolizes such. The door to Tshidi's flat is half opened symbolizing that Kumkani is halfway out the door in their marriage.

Frame 3.3 Nolwazi as the Jezebel stereotype

Female-related stereotype:

Nolwazi's character (in Generations The Legacy) falls under that of a Jezebel stereotype. Too often soap operas Generations and Isidingo portray women as damsels in distress needing to be rescued from themselves and their actions and protected by men. Such a stereotype portrays women as hypersexualised beings reducing them to their physical attributes. They are sexually objectified by the media, intellectually weakened, and in need of masculine men to rescue them. Such a stereotype is endorsed by television soap operas. Nolwazi's character is usually dressed in floral patterns, polka dots, and stripes disassociating her with strength and power due to the colours and patterns of her clothes. If her clothing item is black or any other dark colour, it will have a bright flower or pattern on it. She is light skinned and what others refer to as a "yellow bone", a compliment given to light-skinned women as they are perceived as being more beautiful than those who are dark-skinned. She wears tight short dresses and skirts to show her light skinned legs. Nolwazi also uses minimal makeup. She does not have her own man but is usually the woman whom men in committed relationships lust after. Being chased by somebody else's man excites her and boosts her confidence.

Frame 3.4 Sphe as the Angry Black Woman stereotype

Desperation/identity loss:

This frame is a depiction of a stereotyped representation of black women's desperation in marriage, a characteristic aligned to the Angry Black Woman stereotype. They are generally represented as willing to go through any means to get and keep a man/marriage. In this frame (in Generations The Legacy) Sphe is drugging her daughter to fall ill so she can get her husband Mazwi's attention. In her mind, it is the only way she can get Mazwi away from the office and away from the clutches of Nolwazi. This storyline portrayed her as a desperate wife and uncaring mother. The irony in this frame is the use of the colour pink which symbolises sweetness. Sphe is holding the needle up and is about to inject her daughter. Such actions are anything but sweet. Several props are used in this frame, such as pictures of baby art on the wall, a baby's laundry basket, pink and gold bed cushions and a baby's crib. In this frame Sphe is supposed to be checking that her child is safe from danger, but the Moroka family is unaware that danger lurks within them in the form of the desperate Sphe.

Frame 3.5 Zitha as a combination of the Sapphire and Angry Black Woman stereotypes

Zitha's character (in Generations The Legacy) is a combination of a Sapphire and Angry Black Woman stereotypes. She is in a loveless relationship with Jack and she recognises that he does not prioritise her needs. Her self-esteem is so low that she now believes that she needs Jack more than he needs her. She cannot fathom her life without Jack. Zitha's character dates only the "modern thugs" in the Generations soap. These are businessmen who have legitimate businesses but also dabble as gang-lords in the criminal underworld. In this scene, Zitha is having lunch with Sphe, her boyfriend's daughter. Jack is old enough to be her father and she is aware that he killed her father. However, the absence of her father in her life makes Jack fill the fatherly void and allows him to play two roles in her life, that of being a boyfriend and a father to her. This is one of the reasons we can see her in the frame saying that she needs Jack more than he needs her. Zitha is dark skinned, tall and has the body of a model. She is the ideal 'trophy girlfriend' for the businessmen she has dated and continues to date. However, the makeup artist always ensures that her eyes are highlighted with a visible eye shadow. She may appear innocent, but does have a dark side, which is seen as the storyline progresses when she drugs Jack to keep him staying with her.

Frame 3.6 Nina as a combination of the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes

Influence:

Nina (in Isidingo The Need) is the daughter of the drug-lord Georgie Zamdela and possesses characteristics of a Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes. She had to learn from childhood to develop a tough exterior as her world was a dangerous one. She has taught herself not to love and believes a relationship to be symbiotic where each partner benefits (emotionally or physically) from the other. Nina's character is always dressed in dark clothing symbolising her dark and dangerous side. She dresses in provocative

clothing, as shown in the frame. Her upper clothing has to show her cleavage partially, and most of the time, this is combined with short skirts. Nina knows how to flaunt her body towards men to get what she wants. She always wears makeup which includes a bright coloured lipstick, predominantly the colour red. Her office chair is red, symbolising her authority in her businesses and amongst her staff. Nina portrays a hard exterior, perhaps due to being raised in the drug world dominated by men. She is the 'son' that her father, the infamous Georgie Zamdela, never had. If her storyline is anything to go by, it can be assumed that men see Nina's cleavage before hearing what she has to say. Moreover, her hairstyles are always to the length of her chest, drawing more attention to her breasts.

Frame 3.7 Nikiwe as the Mammy stereotype

Pressure:

Nikiwe's character (in Isidingo The Need) is that of a Mammy stereotype. She is from the Sibeko family and grew up under pressure to live a life seemingly perfect and one that pleased her father. She has always had to lean on her father for protection. When her father is imprisoned, Gabriel takes advantage of Nikiwe and gets into a relationship with her which later turns into a physically abuse relationship. Nikiwe is not street smart. She has always been cushioned her whole life and is incapable of confronting Gabriel's abuse. Nikiwe mover her head a lot when she speaks to emphasise her points. She is usually dressed in sleeveless dresses, showing arms which depict her strength as a black woman in the mining industry. Her hair weaves do not exceed shoulder length and her makeup is kept to a minimal. Nikiwe is pressured by her father to not make mistakes in life. Striving for perfection, she maintains the appearance of having things in order even when they are crumbling around her.

Frame 3.8 Nikiwe as the Mammy stereotype weakened by relationships

Identity loss:

In their relationship (in Isidingo The Need), Nikiwe loses her identity as a woman and succumbs to Gabriel's manipulation and abuse. Nikiwe is not allowed to voice her opinions about any dissatisfaction in the relationship; instead, Gabriel always finds a way to turn his faults around, blaming Nikiwe. She appears very strong and direct in the boardroom but is very weak in the bedroom. She is in denial about their relationship working and convinces not just herself, but her friends that she is happy with Gabriel when she is not. Upon dating Nikiwe, the princess of the Sibeko palace, Gabriel's dress code changes to that of a respectable business person but he fails to conceal his abusive personality from Nikiwe. She is verbally, emotionally, and later, physically abused by Gabriel.

Frame 3.9 Kamogelo as the Jezebel stereotype

Identity loss:

Kamogelo (in Isidingo The Need) symbolises a Jezebel stereotype. She slept with her cousin's boyfriend Obakeng and fell pregnant. Desperate for his love, she believes that

they will become a happy family. Things change when Obakeng lets his feelings be known and that he does not love Kamogelo but does intend to be there for their baby. Kamogelo's personality changes during her pregnancy. She is no longer the vibrant and confident young woman who always took care of herself before the pregnancy. During the pregnancy, her self-esteem is low and her dress code reflects this. Kamogelo is a very emotive character when it comes to her being wanted and loved by Obakeng. She throws tantrums when she speaks and is adamant that she must have a perfect family with her child and Obakeng. Kamogelo sees herself incomplete without Obakeng in her life.

Frame 3.10 Morongwa as the Strong Black Woman stereotype

Identity loss:

Morongwa's character (in Isidingo The Need) portrays the Strong Black Woman stereotype. She is a street-smart woman who is determined to get herself and her family back home, out of poverty. She is a gender-breaker, working in the mine with males and holding a second job at the Shebeen, handling drunk men. She later gets a job at The Rec restaurant and thereafter a permanent position as a waitress at The Duncan Hotel. As strong as her character is, she is not immune to sexual harassment in the workplace. Sedima uses his position of power to solicit sexual favours from Morongwa, who needs her land compensation application to be accepted and approved by him. The frame shows how uncomfortable she is with obliging to his request of giving him a 'friendly' hug. The picture shows an intimate hug shared by individuals who have established a relationship with each other. Morongwa and Sedima barely know each other and in this scene, she does tell him that he should not take advantage of her because she is a woman and she is poor. In this frame, Morongwa momentarily loses her identity complying to Sedima's request of a hug due to her need to be approved.

Sedima has his hands around Morongwa's body seemingly enjoying the intimacy of the hug. Meanwhile, Morongwa's face shows that she is anything but happy and comfortable with her body being so close to that of Sedima.

The frames 3.1 to 3.11 are taken from both Generations and Isidingo. They show various black women and stereotypes aligned to the representation of their characters. All the episodes analysed contained stereotypes that show black women as desperate for a man's attention, dangerous, gullible, naïve, weak, low self-esteem, and generally not supportive of one another. Such traits promote negative stereotypes of black women as they are portrayed as the Angry Black Woman or Sapphire, the Mammy, Strong Black Woman, and the promiscuous Jezebel. Such representations do not promote the empowerment of and respect towards black women, but instead exacerbate gender, racial and class oppression of black women. There is "a heavy physical and psychological toll associated with coexisting with such images" (West 2018: 154). Black men are also not immune to negative stereotypes, as they, too, are portrayed as violent, uncaring, controlling, abusive, aggressive and obsessive, among other negative qualities.

3.3 Soap operas and representation

Media representation shape public beliefs and behaviour (Devereux 2013). When there is balance in audience power in challenging media content as they shape their public perceptions, minimisation of misrepresentations can be achieved. Misrepresentation on camera lends itself to misrepresentation off camera, and this starts in the skewed representations of men and women in the production team. Such imbalance cascades into real life. In The Television Studies Reader (Allen and Hill 2004), Professor Julie D'Acci lists four factors affecting representation, namely, production, reception, media landscape and social/historical context. These factors affect representation in the following ways:

- Production: composition of the workforce affects representation, that is, the gender and race of those involved in production affects how gender and race is represented in media images.
- Reception: how the viewers receive a representation is different to that of the producer, that is, socio-economic and socio-political including religious beliefs and life experiences affect how viewers receive and interprets a representation.

- Media landscape: a representation cannot be understood in isolation but the whole programming system of genres, narratives, codes and conventions must be considered.
- Social/historical context: what happens in society affects how ideas, race, gender and different groups are represented in the media.

Representations are said to be a product of the social and cultural environment of those who produce media messages. In a country that still struggles with gender and racial inequality, researchers question media representations of images and stereotypes portrayed in some of the shows (Furnham and Spencer 2002; Barnard 2006; Coleman, Reynolds and Torbati 2020).

3.3.1 Gender representation

Gender is a social construct that men and women use to define what it means to be masculine and feminine (Brooks and Herbert 2006; Mueni 2014; Abbott 1992). Television, through its representation of gender, affords viewers to learn about different gender roles, expectations, ideologies and gender socialisation (Cox and Ward 2019). Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory in Mkhize (2015: 22) hypothesises that "gender is different from biological sense" and Lacan (1982: 137) states that "identity is constructed and not biological or inherent" due to the influence of the outside world and social requirements (in Mkhize 2015: 22). This study adopts Freud's viewpoint on gender and that of Lacan regarding identity since it is concerned with the impact of television soap opera content on the gender identity construction of black female viewers, that is "sex roles into which one is socialised" (Connell 1987: 194).

It must be noted, however, that black women were not oppressed in pre-colonial times (Moagi and Mtombeni 2020), as they contributed to the empowerment of their communities and households by being actively involved in economic, political, spiritual and social activities (Ndlovu 2008). It was the advent of colonialism which led to black women being forced into domesticity and oppression (Guy 1987; Hanretta 1988; Walker 1990) through the introduction of a patriarchal ideology (Diop 1989; Saidi 2010). Colonialism not only introduced racial and ethnic segregation, which resulted in black men working far from their homes, but black women were forced into domestic jobs in patriarchal and racially discriminatory environments (Phiri 2004).

In similar fashion, in modern-day times, soap operas, the object of this study, commodify black women and negatively portray them through misrepresented media texts using stereotypes. Viewers use media representations to construct their gender as commodified media texts, portrayed as segments of social constructs of race and gender shape, which is "how individuals construct their social identities, how they come to understand what it means to be male, female, black…" (Brooks and Hebert 2006: 297). Representation of black women in television soap operas is questionable as it contains subtle stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality (Mapokgole 2019). This study looks at gender to discuss "the social, cultural, and psychological aspects that pertain to the traits, norms, stereotypes, and roles of women and men" as guided by Mueni (2014: 23). The representation of gender in Generations and Isidingo soap operas necessitates a closer analysis on the representation of black women, in particular, because they impact our own sense of identity (Gauntlett 2008: 1), cultural assumptions and practices which govern our social construction (Barker 1999).

Devereux (2013: 192-200) illustrates four ways to analyse representations namely codes and conventions, discourses, framing and narrative analysis:

- Codes and conventions: these are technical and symbolic codes used in communication.
- Discourses: it is easier to understand the representation when one understands the discourse it represents.
- Framing: contextualising a representation within a certain point of view.
- Narrative analysis: packaging a representation within a pattern or familiar story.

These four codes of analysis can be found in soap opera texts which makes up media content, a powerful source of meaning-making. Therefore, analysing media content is important to understand where power resides in creating meaning for the viewer so as to "identify the intentions and other characteristics of communicators, detect the existence of latent propaganda or ideology, reflect cultural patterns of groups, reveal the foci of organisations and describe trends in communication content. It is often used as a way of comparing media content with the 'realities' of the social world" (Devereux 2013: 193).

a. Monetary gain and representation

There has been a significant growth in shows focusing on black women, their image and other interests. Although these shows are informative and educational, they lack the entertainment element that soap operas provide, if viewership numbers are anything to go by. Women are still drawn in large numbers to soap operas, even though this genre contains storylines that promote gender and racial stereotypes and its representation of women and their concerns remains questionable. Representation of black women as sex commodities is also embedded in the cultural, religious and political traditions. Power relations still dominate in that women are confined to certain social spaces like homes, and are denied full access to public spaces dominated by males. Although the increase of women's programmes and their inclusion gives an illusion that women's issues are being addressed in and by the media, a closer analysis shows that women are being accommodated within the confines of an existing patriarchal discourse and system. One cannot question the output or media product such as soap operas without looking at who owns the media. Ownership and output are interlinked; one cannot be divorced from the other. Generations and Isidingo are part of the South African Broadcast Corporation which is state-controlled thus its limited representation of black women "is a part and parcel of hegemonic process which supports women's subordination in society" (Patel 1995: 13). Furthermore, television's heavy reliance on advertising revenue limits the public channel's mandate to inform and educate society. South African soap operas air in the evenings during prime time, a slot "most sought by the advertisers for advertising their products" (Kaul and Sahni 2010: 16) due to the number of viewers glued to their screens.

The more the soap opera genre attracts advertising, the more revenue the channel gets. This cycle can easily dilute the mandate of a public service broadcaster such as the SABC to not only entertain but also inform and educate viewers. Advertisers care about viewers buying into their products, as a demand in product results in revenue for the channel and job security for those who produce soap operas. Adverts, too, have sexualised images of women which reinforce a patriarchal ideology in society. Without digressing from the study, it is worth noting that mainstream mass media has its linkages to the capitalist system through ownership and control, hence the challenges of gender and racial stereotypes. Rizos (2012: 38) calls this "pornification", when referring to the misrepresentation of the image of black women due to "capitalism and the increasing

normalization of the commodification and commercial exploitation of sexuality". Women's movements across the globe continue to engage critically with mass media's representation of women and call it to account for perpetuating stereotypes. When producers of soap operas compromise on being an informative tool and opt for entertaining masses, owing to fear of losing viewers to other programmes or channels and commercial interests, the social impact can be detrimental in a country like South Africa, which is struggling with gender-based violence amongst other social ills. The effects of such compromise impact on the viewer's social and cultural position in society. Viewers need not be 'beaten up' by soap opera storylines with content that looks down on them; content ought to be encouraging and compel viewers to change negative perceptions and own their narratives. Television is not only for entertainment, but it should also transmit public knowledge and influence viewers to shape their public opinion (Patel 1995: 16). Therefore, media should "sensitize issues in their perspective" and refrain from "commercial manifestation" (Kaul and Sahni 2010: 20).

b. Black women's bodies

Sexualisation of black women's bodies is still prevalent in television soap operas (Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yarchi 2015). Thabethe (2008: 5) hypothesises that Mfundi Vundla's[17] long stay in America has influenced the way that black women are portrayed in the Generations soap opera, "as most black African women character's bodies reflect western ideals of beauty; this is where the body is synonymous with beauty, success, extreme concern about health and self-control". This representation is in contrast with De Cassanova's (2004) contention that traditional body features of black women are symbolised by a heavier body, natural unrelaxed hair, big bust, broad hips and dark skin. These features ironically promote body shaming and colourism[18] amongst black women. In her study looking at the transmission of images of women of colour on Twitter and television screens and stereotypes, Williams (2015: 136) states: "black women's bodies have been despised for more than 500 years, from the time European travellers set eyes

[17] Mfundi Vundla is the executive producer of the soap opera Generations.

[18] According to Alice Walker, colorism is "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (Walker 1983:291) whereas Burke (2008:17) states colourism to be "the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin" where "light skin is preferred and dark skin is devalued" (Eddington 2020:7). Colourism is rooted in slavery where light skinned black people (born out of forbidden mixed-race intimacy) enjoyed preferential treatment from their masters due to their European features and dark-skinned black people were deemed as dirty, unsophisticated people who were at the bottom of the social chain (Coard, Breland, and Raskin 2001; Maddox and Gray 2002; Hall 2003).

on them to contemporary degrading mass media images". Cox and Ward (2019: 543) argue that black women's bodies are stereotyped in their representation on television, and this emanates from the period of slavery where black women were perceived as The Jezebel, "characterized as an attractive, flirtatious, hypersexual, and manipulative black woman", a perception that was used to justify the rape of black women by their owners. Years later, stereotypes of contemporary black women as Jezebel and the Angry Black Woman remain in mainstream media and popular culture (Stephens and Phillips 2003; Fascular, Carry, and Miller 2014).

The image of a black woman in South Africa has evolved and been impacted by her socio-economic status in society and what she perceives to be her identity. Thus the identity of a black woman is not constant, and has changed drastically from De Cassanova's defined features of what constitutes a black woman's body. What mass media, through soap operas, portray as images of black women is left to public criticism. Their journey to discovery is ongoing, as past research, which shows that black women have not yet discovered their true identity, and it requires that their minds not be contaminated by soap opera stereotypes if they are to discover who they are (Breakwell 1993; Curti 1998; Adler 2002; Gauntlett 2008; Goredema 2009; Bamberg 2011). Constitutional laws and gender policies have enabled for black women to explore with and take ownership of their bodies. Black women's bodies are remade through their representation in various television programmes, but this, too, comes with its own limitations. Actors are cast according to a specific body type of the character scripted by the writer(s) and are concerned with securing acting jobs without questioning their on-screen characters. This is known as 'politics of the stomach', where actors cannot jeopardise their jobs by contesting how their characters are stereotypically portrayed or depicted in storylines.

Elements used to construct the identity of a black woman are shown in Figure 3.1. It is evident that emphasis is placed on the physical attributes of a black woman as perpetuated by soap operas. Thabethe (2008: 5) highlights the fact that beauty in Generations "is defined in terms of thinness, light complexion and long, fine-textured hair". Hooks (1994:179) contends that "light skin and long, straight hair continue to be traits that define a female as beautiful and desirable in the racist white imagination and in the colonized black mindset". Hudson (1998: 249) suggests that "these stereotypes simultaneously reflect and distort both ways in which black women view themselves (individually and

collectively) and the ways in which they are viewed by others". Brooks and Herbert (2006:297) caution against such identifiers of hair and skin colour, stating that they are "imperfect indicators of race".

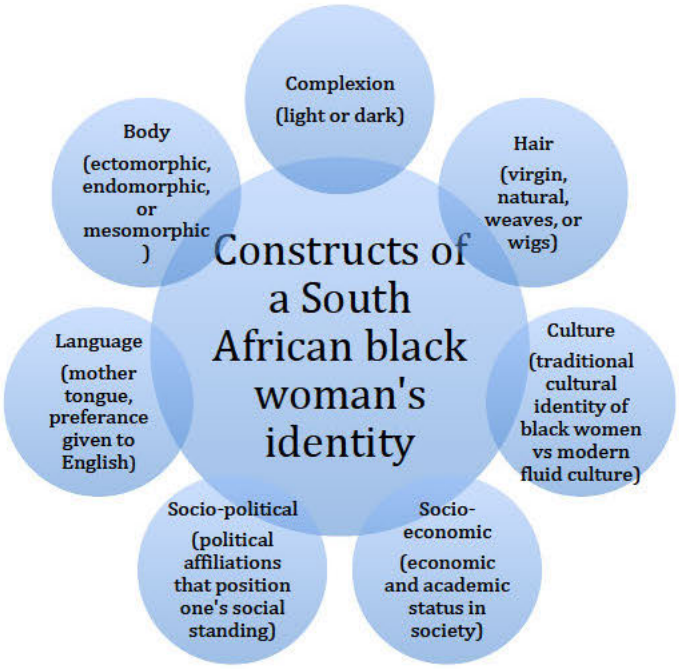


Figure 3.1 Pictograph showing constructs of a black woman's identity

Wykes (2005) categorises women's bodies as falling into three types: ectomorphic (thin build), endomorphic (voluptuous/fat build), and mesomorphic (muscular build). During the period of his study, Wykes found that women who were of thin build were social-misfits and withdrawn, women who were fat were aggrieved and considered lazy, and women who were muscular build were seen as strong and dominant. Soap operas have a combination of these body types, with less focus on mesomorphics due to the femininity of women characters in soap operas. Fifteen years after Wykes' study, the characters in the Generations and Isidingo soaps exhibit the opposite characteristics of those defined in his study. Ectomorphics dominate soap operas, and almost all leading roles are given to them, whereas endomorphics are found in the shadows portraying seasonal storylines in their supporting roles. This can be attributed either to the evolving representation of black women's bodies in the mass media over the years, or the westernisation of South African soap operas, which was influenced by the cosmopolitan nature of the South African population. South Africa is a boiling pot of mixed cultures (Thabethe 2008: 5),

and such an environment has the ability for one culture to influence the other through mass media's representation of one culture to the next.

Thabethe's (2008: 5) findings suggest that images of black women have evolved over the years in both Generations and Isidingo. These soaps now include voluptuous women with darker skins, and short natural hair. Characters that embody that image in the past year include Cebisa from Isidingo (she is tall, light-skinned but with short natural hair), Phindile (she too is light-skinned, has natural but fashionably styled hair, and has a full-figured body type), Aunt Tilly (she has a voluptuous body and wears her hair naturally). Generations now has the characters of Siphesihle (dark in complexion, fully-figured and wears her hair naturally without ever using a weave or wig), Gog'Flo (wears her natural hair). The remaining characters who wear their hair naturally in Generations are three of the younger cast members. A closer analysis at both soap operas reveals that these characters do not play key roles but are seasonal with short-term plots (with the exception of Sphesihle, who has been with Generations for since 2016). Prominence is given to characters who fit the image description highlighted by Thabethe (2008: 12), who suggests that "the body's traditional centrality to feminine identity can be divided into a variety of codes of appearances: the ideal body shape and size, appropriate forms of makeup and cosmetic care of the skin and hair, and lastly, the adornment of the body through clothes and accessories".

c. Black women and social spaces

Some of the challenges faced by black women during colonialism included illiteracy, racial, class and gender-related discrimination. The traditional gender roles of African women stipulated by culture required that they get married at a young age, bear children, and labour in the fields or as domestic workers. The apartheid regime introduced in 1948 continued the oppression of black women creating an environment which limited their space for social, economic and political growth. Black women exhibited androgynous gender identities as they were expected to be simultaneously masculine and feminine (Cox and Ward 2019), a feminine ideal that resulted in the emergent of what is now known as the Strong Black Woman. Mass media images perpetuated the oppression and suppression of black women in society, as they (media) were filled with misrepresented images of gender and racial stereotypes which promoted patriarchy, oppression, gender and racial inequality. To date, black women have better access to socio-economic

opportunities compared to those in the past fifty years. However, mass media in South Africa continue to be filled with negative images of black women.

The South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF) Living Standard Measure (LSM) of South African soap operas Generations and Isidingo is between 4-7, a group made up of individuals from low to middle class categories of society, an average education, low to average household income, and are generally from rural to semi-urban areas. In an interview about *Tracking South Africa's tastes in television* (Chronis 2013:10), Dr Tiffany Tracey, senior technical support executive at the South African Audience Research Foundation (Saarf), said that Generations and Isidingo appeal "to a wide audience, with each age bracket from 15-24 up to 50+ comprising around 20% of the total viewing base. Viewing is skewed three to two towards females". The fact that women make up the majority viewership makes them more susceptible to stereotypical media content represented through soap opera storylines. A closer look at storylines reveals a glimpse of an alternative world which women would not otherwise access in their reality. Another attraction of soap operas for women is their strategic use of sets which are designed with props that women can 'see' in their own homes. These may include furniture items and objects a female viewer has in her own home or items/objects the viewer does not own, but through the love and loyalty she has for the soap opera, she can visualise that item/object in her own home. Such projections tap into the viewer's needs and gratification. Such items may include a fridge, bedding, a flower vase, bookshelf or a mirror. Some props like an alcohol bottle placed on the kitchen counter or bedside table of a character normalises drinking. Viewing space and props associated with that space thus become essential to a viewer's life. However, Ross (2017: 6) cautions against the use of ornaments or decorations that do not "suggest the personality or history of its incumbent" but instead display lack of cultural distinction in the homes providing "no signs of a provenance outside white mainstream culture".

d. Black women and the township space

An environment or space is an ideal sight "for understanding social life, social change and cultural diversity" (Keating 2015: 244). Space influences people's interaction with one another, and one such space is the township. Townships are situated on the periphery of urban towns and are considered "a specifically South African 'invention' but they were inspired by colonial town planning" (Pernegger and Godehart 2007: 6) and can be found

in other parts of the African continent. In South Africa, most townships were built after 1950, and following the establishment of the apartheid era and through the Group Areas Act of 1950, non-whites were forced to relocate to spaces known as townships. These underdeveloped spaces were allocated to non-whites (Blacks, Coloureds and Indians) for residential use during segregation, and were designated for control and exclusion. Over 11 million people in South Africa live in the country's 76 largest townships (FinMark Trust 2004; The Township Database NDP Unit 2007). The effects of South Africa's history are very much visible in townships. South Africa is a patriarchal society that continues with traditional practices of the African culture which have been devised to favour the dominance of men. South African townships are no exception as they are a breeding ground for such a system. Townships are socially, culturally, and economically diverse. They consist of densely populated low-cost housing and neighbours are within an earshot of each other. Townships possess of low levels of community facilities and commercial investment. The compact environment produced many socio-economic challenges, such as the fact that the basic needs for the sustainability of society have not been met. Violence is rife, education is of a poor standard and social challenges are a lived experience of many who cannot afford migrating to better parts of the country.

Financial implications of living in the townships come with their own social challenges. Although the ethos of communal living is encouraged, statistics of gender-based violence and femicide reports are high. Statistics South Africa in its 2019 report showed majority that the majority of cases on gender-based violence come from townships. The leading township in such reports is Inanda Township, located north of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. Demographics at Inanda define the broader townships of South Africa: congested housing, semi-rural, unemployment and violence. Frustrations are taken on the most vulnerable, who are women and children. Businesses that operate within the townships, also known as economic activity nodes[19], include public transport (taxis, buses, railway trains), spaza shops/supermarkets (food), hardware stores (for construction material), hair salons, tailoring outlets, and numerous taverns or shebeens (alcohol bars). Unemployment, teenage pregnancy, poverty and low-income households are high in townships. Individuals who break through the poverty cycle relocate to better urban places. Entertainment in townships is characterised by taverns and music lounges.

[19] The NDP Unit (2007) define nodes as "concentrations of activity in township areas … they are dynamic and react to the social, political and economic changes and pressures".

Although not a direct correlation of a person's financial status, townships are a good indication of those who are affluent in society compared to those who make ends meet. Ultimately, finances play a role in social spaces and experiences of some people.

However, almost every household in the township has a television set either on free or paid cable. A fair number of households have satellite dishes and those who do not, are still connected to the public broadcaster (i.e., the SABC). Such connections give community members access to the media, especially television and radio. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the television medium. Television provides community members with alternative lives where they get to escape to fantasy worlds of the characters seen on television screens. One of the historical characteristics that define a black person is the love of storytelling. It therefore comes as no surprise that township community members gravitate towards soap operas as their preferred genre for television entertainment. Producers of soap operas see this as a return on their investment and create storylines which they perceive resonate with this particular audience group. However, one close look at soap operas like Generations and Isidingo shows that stereotyping is glaringly evident. However, not all residents in townships are media-literate enough to decipher the stereotypes found in soap opera storylines. Instead, they consume soap opera content and relate to it as though it represents their truth. This is achieved through parasocial relationships that viewers develop with soap opera characters.

There is a need for personal transformation as well as the transformation of spaces like the township and the media, and the television soap opera genre has a role to play for such transformation to occur. As The Urban Development Framework of 1997 states:

> …rebuilding the townships cannot occur in isolation from integrating strategies. The intention is to move actively away from the segregation of different parts of the city and to ensure equity across the urban landscape, thus offering all urban residents access to opportunities and facilities … The townships and informal settlements represent an under-utilised resource for the future. These have to be transformed into sustainable, habitable, productive, environmentally healthy and safe urban environments, free from crime and violence (Department of Housing 1997: 13).

Rebuilding, re-integration and both individual and communal development cannot happen in isolation. Television soap operas such as Generations and Isidingo are vehicles

for communication and have a role to play in the development of South Africa. An understanding of the gender identities of females in townships and the role media play in how black African females in townships construct their identities may offer ideas as to the role of soap operas in the re-integration of this vulnerable group into the wider socio-economy. The township is a choice of location for this study because "space and location influence the discursive production of identity, including local identity and other forms of identity" (Keating 2015: 249).

3.2.2 Feminist representatation

Feminism is a broad field, thus my intention is to briefly illustrate the relationship of that which is key between feminism and gendered representation. One cannot explore and challenge the representation of black women in television soap operas without looking at the pertinence of the concept of feminism for their empowerment, as feminists have for years campaigned for media reform regarding the representation of women (Byerly and Ross 2008). Liberal feminists challenge the existence of gender inequality between men and women in society and claim that it can be done away with if there is a sameness between women and men in the workplace, education sector, or media representation, and other societal domains. Radical feminists, on the other hand, act against patriarchy and blame men for being the main beneficiaries in the oppression and exploitation of women. This study is closely linked to Marxist/socialist feminism, which paints a non-discriminatory environment of men and women based on their gender. Among the different types of feminism, African feminism as a theory provides a guiding framework for this study, given its location in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and thus needs to look at feminism from an African context. Since African feminism concerns itself with cultural, socio-political, economic, racial and religious issues pertaining to African women and women in the continental diaspora, African feminism as a guiding framework becomes relevant. Given the difficulty of conceptualising African feminism, as it is informed by various strands of contestations against inequality in various sectors including academic, health, economic, political, religious, Ahikire (2006: 8) points out that "feminism in Africa has been a boiling pot of diverse discourse and courses of action. Far from being constructed in simple opposition to Western feminism, feminism on the African continent constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences and points of departure". As a theory, African feminism is set to highlight the importance of equality and quality of black women, especially since experiences of black women in South Africa

are not peculiar to their geographic location, but the challenges black women face transcend borders. While African feminism is not the focus of the study, one point on which many feminist scholars agree is that African feminism opposes patriarchal customs of all kinds across all communication platforms. Such customs include, but are not limited to, the television soap opera representation of black African women.

a. Historical context of African feminism

Goredema (2009: 2) describes African feminism as:

> …a feminist epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments, which validate the experience of women of Africa and of African origin against a mainstream feminist discourse. It is a justice that aims to create a discernable difference between women who were colonised and those who were deemed colonisers, and a social movement that aims to raise a global consciousness which sympathises with African women's histories, present realities and future expectations.

African feminism is not only confined within the Diaspora but is inclusive of the experiences, realities and expectations of women both in and outside of the continent. Even within the continent, feminist struggles are different for differently located countries. This is why Mkhize (2015: 43) suggests that the assumption of there being one African feminism "is problematic". Goredema (2009: 35) lists different categories that African feminism puts a spotlight on as 1) Culture/Tradition, 2) Socio-economic and socio-political issues, 3) The role of men, 4) Race, and 5) Sex and/or sexuality. These same categories can be found embedded in explicit stereotypes of soap operas Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need.

History shows that African women did not always live under oppression. For example, Zulu royal women held various positions of power in the army, economy and religion during the reign of King Shaka and after his death, but before the complete state of colonialism. One such example is Princess Mkabayi KaJama (Shamase 2014). Her duties included "rain making, administering ritual medicine and custodianship of sacred objects" (Weir 2007: 8-12). Therefore, it can be argued that, pre-colonialism, African women were empowered in various sectors. Notable women have fought for women's rights and empowerment, and at times were frontline soldiers in the armies. Such women include the Dahomey Amazons, Queen Nanny of present-day Ghana, anti-apartheid

activist and singer Mirriam Makeba, Queen Ninga Mbandi, Gisele Rabesahala, Sarraounia Mangou, Sayyida Al-Hurra, Ilen Embet, to name but a few. Historical narratives attest to the actions of strong, selfless and empowered black women, showing that both men and women had important roles to play in the community without either gender oppressing the other.

Colonialism created a hostile environment which exposed women to oppression, ridicule, inferiority and disempowerment. Effects of such a past are still a reality to this present day for some. Although women have more accessibility than before to participating in socio-economic affairs of the country, their representation does not equate to them having positions of power in decision-making. Women still occupy a limited number of senior positions in the media (Ross 2014). Gwendolyn Mikell in Salo (2001: 60) argues that contemporary inequality is a result of "traumatic colonization by the West" as African women were integrated into pre-colonial structures. Black women have always united in their desires and daily practices to repress and challenge gender inequalities in religion, politics, socio-economic, and cultural spaces. African feminism dates far back to the histories of the Diaspora, even though recollections and literature were inaccessible or not documented at all prior to the nineteenth century; this is largely due to it being "neglected, limited access to materials, literacy levels and a decentralized approach to information management" (Daymond 2003). The oppression felt by African women globally inspired them to be empowered and to be active agents in the forefront fighting against imperialism, colonialism, racism and sexism. Media ownership at the time was controlled by an elite few who did not document the key role played by women in the liberation movement.

Political transformation offered women a pathway to carve their distinct identity and involvement in national issues. This gave rise to the visibility of African feminist struggles. An example would be the Women's March, on the 9th of August 1956, to the Union Buildings in protest against The Pass Law in South Africa. This historical moment is entrenched in the history of the country but not necessary in the history of all women. To this day, there is a considerable representation of women in national politics, but such presence does not equate to their representation against struggles unique to women.

b. Present day African feminism

African feminism is a result of the combination of the various types of feminism which have risen over the years, all of which have continued to shape African feminist struggles. African feminism as a concept does not discriminate but is inclusive of both women and men from other races (Goredema 2009: 41). One can conclude that African feminism deals with equality of African women and women in Africa by ensuring that they have a fair ground to be empowered in life. Although women's struggles are centred around race, gender/sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and socio-political issues, African feminism as a concept cannot accommodate all African women, because African women themselves have different struggles of inequality in life from various parts of the continent.

In the context of African feminism, mention needs to be made of identity and gender. African feminism is not a Third World type of feminist movement but it the result of the many struggles that African women have had to endure during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. African women in the Diaspora have had challenges of identity and representation. Du Bois (2009: 8) terms this as "double consciousness" referring to a "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, two identities warring in one body". This can be seen to occur through women constructing their identities through the eyes of soap opera characters and producers, which means that their true identity is at odds with the false identity constructed for them. Mama (2001: 67) states that "identity is all about power and resistance, subjection and citizenship, action and reaction". She suggests that "rather than simply passing over identity in order to rethink power, we need to profoundly rethink identity if we are to begin to comprehend the meaning of power" (Mama 2001: 67). All identities are gendered (Freud 1977). As gender remains a focus area in African feminism, it therefore becomes crucial to take a closer analysis of gender as represented through television soap operas. The media, in the form of visual texts through soap operas like Generations and Isidingo, have a crucial role to play in promoting different shades of blackness, beauty, and overall identity of black African women. The production of entertainment content is easily achievable as opposed to content that stimulates the minds of viewers and challenges public perception and opinion. However, economic development should not supersede social development as the value of money is linked to the empowerment of people.

3.3.3 Black (Zulu) culture

The previous section places emphasis on soap opera representations containing gendered roles of men and women. Traditional African culture dictates that black men work to provide for their families. Their role as the head of the household is not seen as a patriarchal one but it is earned through their hard work and providence for their family. Traditional African culture also stipulates that men are to protect, care and be role models for their families and communities at large. However, the same culture requires that women submit to their husbands physically, emotionally and, to an extent, psychologically. Culture dictates that women manage their house and turn it into a home. After a hard day's work, the husband must come back to a home that is a place of tranquility and love. African culture regards black women as directors of their families and give guidance to not only the children, but to the husband and extended family. In this traditional setting, gender roles are respected and clearly articulated. Each member is aware of her/his gendered role and executes it. The challenge comes when one gender sees itself as superior to the other and its dominance suppresses the ability and goals of the other. Women's equal representation to men in the media remains questionable, as the media represents what is 'acceptable' cultural behaviour in society. The media are accused of under-representing and misrepresenting women through their perpetuation of stereotypes that foster gender inequality. According to Kaul and Sahni (2010: 15):

> …women are basically seen as performing a decorative function and being marginal to national growth and development. Their primary place is seen as being with in the home and this value is reflected in the content and setting of most of the television content … This results in reinforcement of the stereotypes image and role specification of woman in an unidimensional projection of their reality.

Soaps ought to play an active role in developing positive gender identities and equality. Mueni (2014: 6) argues that "scriptwriters and producers need to be empowered to understand the role their works can play in the attainment of gender parity". Soap operas affect women more, because women spend more time indoors as opposed to men (Jyotin 2002).

Hekman (in Thabethe 2008: 24) states that "the different ideologies that define women are produced socially, psychologically and culturally by the people living in and creating their social, cultural and psychological worlds". Hekman (1994) argues that all cultures

place a lower value on women than men. Shamase (2014: 15) points out that "historians, following chauvinistic tendencies, wrote about women in a manner that considered them as inferior citizens whose existence was limited to the confines of homes and the care for children". Hekman's evaluation thus becomes a generalisation, because "Africa in general and South Africa in particular, are replete with examples of female dynasties, regents and rulers who took up positions of leadership through periods of nation-building and wars of resistance" (Shamase 2014: 15). Zulu history demonstrates that in the 18th and 19th centuries, women were in the forefront of battles, were advisors to kings and other leadership, and women were regarded as high beings in society due to their ability to give and nurture life, contrary to soap opera representations of black women, who are portrayed as powerless and socially disadvantaged. This is aligned with Hekman's (1994) statement that men's dominance in society is due to them being creators of meaning, like producers of soap operas. In other words, they dictate and shape society's opinion by highlighting patriarchal dominance in their representation of women in the media. This further endorses social stereotypes as opposed to changing them. Stereotypes exist because of the imbalance of power in society, and, until this aspect is fixed, the media will continue to capitalise on such an environment regardless of repercussions in society. It is a known secret that Western culture influences how black women are represented in Generations and Isidingo. Until South African soap operas like Generations and Isidingo shift away from the mindset of whiteness being synonymous with beauty, black women's identity will forever be lost.

Soap operas' representation of culture and gender roles is skewed, and depicts men as the head of households without having to earn the respect due to that role, as men are assumed to be born with leadership ability and take on a role of superiority owing to their gender. Moreover, women are represented as not having a voice. Those who do are outcasts in society as their behaviour is interpreted as disrespectful (Figures 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate these and other typical stereotypes of black women and men as represented in soap operas Generations and Isidingo).

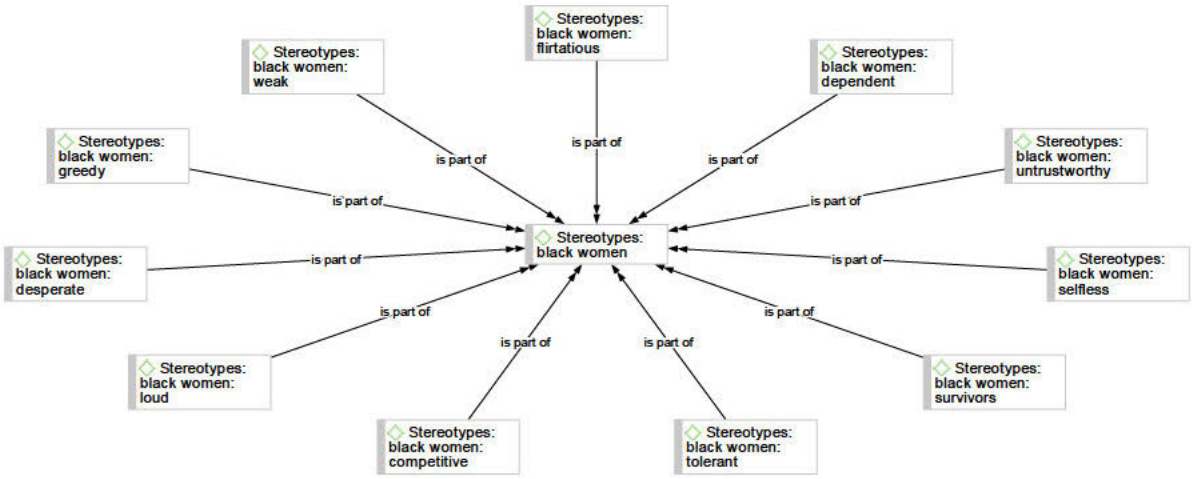


Figure 3.2 Stereotypes of black women as represented in soap operas Generations and Isidingo

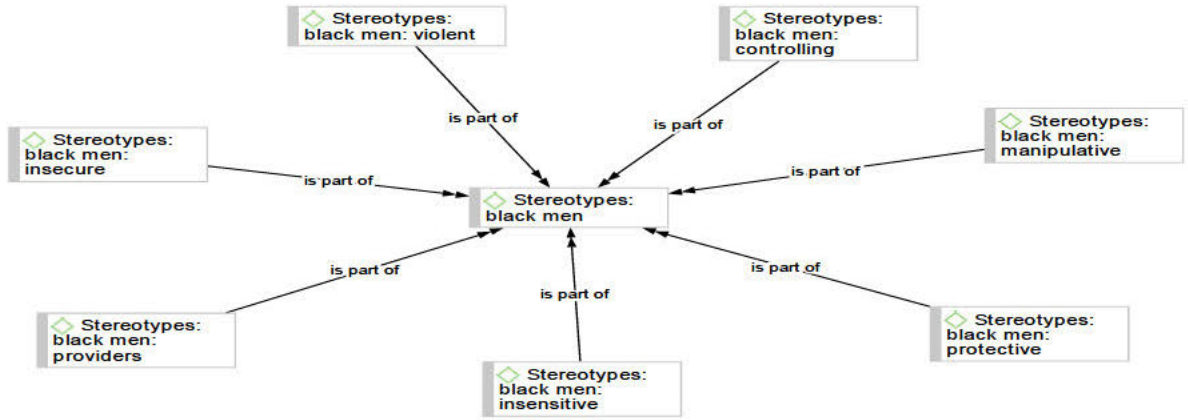


Figure 3.3 Stereotypes of black men as represented in soap operas Generations and Isidingo

Karthika (in Kaul and Sahni 2010) points out:

> …women shown in similar competing roles with men are far less in number and are considered to be oddities and deviations from norm, trait wise though there is a stereotype portrayal of women being congenitally much more than men. Even when women are presented as power holders, the patriarchal context is unmistakably present. In fact, the attributes of power and aggressiveness is portrayed as something unnatural to women and a challenge to the male ego.

Such women are those who cannot keep their marriage together, are married to their jobs, or have children who are delinquents. Television soap operas portray women and men in

their socially and traditionally appointed roles; women are in a domestic setting while men are professionals in a work environment. Since men are portrayed as bringing home the butter, this insinuates that men ought to have their sexual demands met by women to ease their work frustrations. Soap operas misrepresent, under-represent and over-represent by adding black women as cast members but with no significant storylines thus making their fight against stereotypes and gender inequality invalid and futile. Images of women portrayed in soap operas "have a definite impact on the thought patterns of society" (Kaul and Sahni 2010: 15). Quoting Desai (2010) Kaul and Sahni (2010: 15-16) state that women "are projected as non-thinking, sacrificing, and suffering beings while educated and motivated women are seen as the scourge of the patriarch order of the society". Media is an important platform to promote positive change. Kaul and Sahni (2010: 16) further encourage women "to ensure that media reflect images that create positive role models of men and women in society, which will alter damaging stereotypes", as representations lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes in society. There is nothing wrong with culture if presented in a progressive manner regardless of one's gender and race (Wood 1994; McKoy 2012). Culture is evolving. Generations and Isidingo ought to portray evolved cultural roles paralleled to the shift taking place in society.

One cannot talk of culture without mentioning language, as culture is communicated through language. One of the aims of soap operas is to increase viewership and attract advertisers through showing the dominance of the English language. After all, the dominant global language is English (Crystal 2012). The identity of black women includes their vernacular languages, but the dominant language spoken by predominantly black women on soap operas Generations and Isidingo is English. If a character speaks her/his vernacular language, English subtitles are provided on the bottom of the screen. This can be interpreted as soap operas educating non-vernacular language speakers about vernacular languages. However, the challenge lies in the absence of balance. Soap operas influence society and shape public opinion, and when one language dominates the television screen, such preference and stereotyping can easily ripple into large areas of society, broadening cultural and linguistic differences. Without getting much into the debate of the dominance of the English language which is not the aim of this study, producers of soap operas need to strike a balance in their representation of languages and

the identity of black women. Take away a person's language and her/his identity is lost (Mda 2010; Tabouret-Keller 2017).

As previously mentioned, soap operas contain multiple storylines broadcast in each episode. Most storylines provide discourse but lack context as scriptwriters try to maintain momentum and keep viewers entertained. Although soap operas transport viewers to a fantasy world through non-existent characters, focus group discussions show that not all viewers are active viewers and not all viewers are dominant viewers that decode the intended messages encoded by soap opera producers. Some viewers negotiate the sender's intended meaning according to the dominant cultural and societal views. Others, take an oppositional position decoding an unintended meaning within the soap opera texts. I elaborate on this on the section containing focus group data analysis. For now though, I give a brief description of some of the stereotypes using Atlas.ti networks for illustration.

Figure 3.4 is inclusive of frames taken from various scenes and storylines depicting the desperation of black women in relationships. Some of the characters fall pregnant to trap the man into a relationship (and at times marriage) as seen in Kamogelo's storyline in Isidingo. She sleeps with Obakeng and falls pregnant by him even though he is in love with another woman. Sphe in Generations is involved in an arranged marriage between the Cele and Moroka families. Both families see the marriage as a business deal to solidify their legacies. Sphe eventually falls for Mazwi who, unfortunately, is infertile. The families instruct Smanga, Mazwi's brother, to sleep with Sphe and impregnate her without Mazwi's knowledge. This is a traditional practice in some cultures where, if the husband or wife is unable to bear a child, their siblings have to step into that role of giving birth to that child. The belief is that the family's blood still runs through the veins of that child and the 'ihlazo' (family's secret) of that family is kept within their walls. It is also seen as 'ihlazo' if a black Zulu woman divorces her husband or if her husband leaves her. Therefore, she has to exceed all expectations in her wifely duties to please him, often at the expense of her own happiness. This is why we see Sphe, who is a doctor by profession, being so desperate for Mazwi's love and attention that she goes to the extent of putting her own daughter's health at risk. She knows that her family, the Celes, will disown her if she cannot keep her marriage together. Culture and tradition always place the blame on women when the marriage fails.

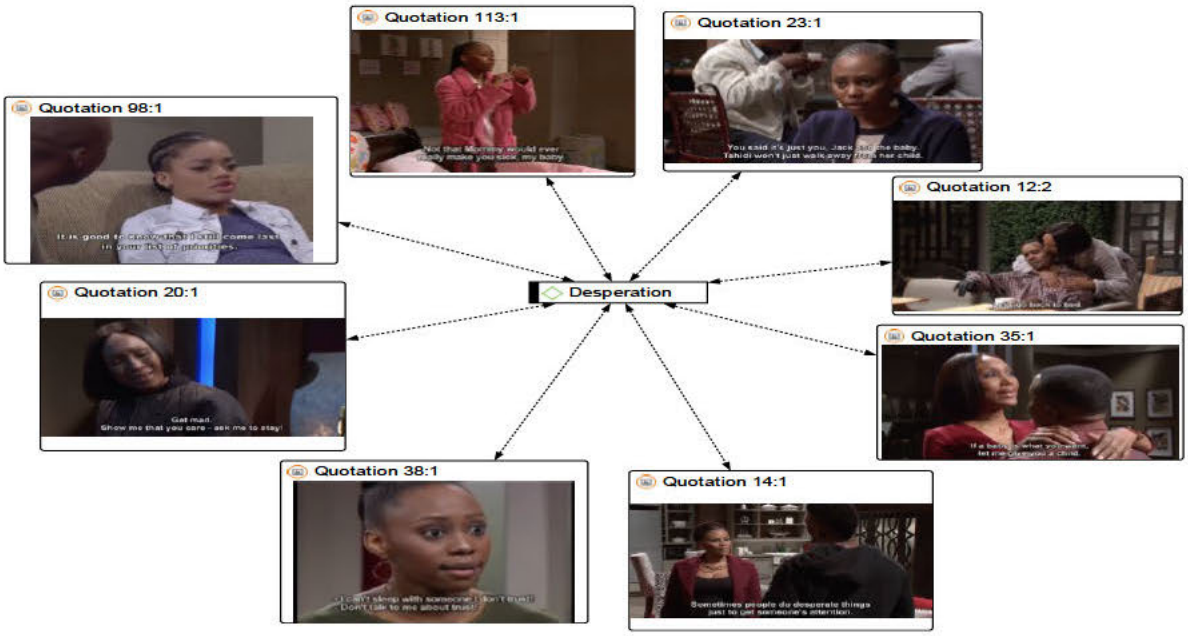


Figure 3.4 A network of snapshots depicting desperation of black women in relationships

A closer analysis reveals a linkage between stereotypes. Cultural stereotypes require that woman be submissive in their relationship or marriage. From the onset, Sphe's traditional gender role is to please her husband emotionally, physically and otherwise, all this at the expense of her own happiness. Society, and soap opera storylines, dictate that she is incomplete and not enough if she cannot have a man and keep him. One of the results of such social and cultural dictations is women's subjection to ill-treatment and different forms of abuse by men. Some of the themes in Generations and Isidingo include gender-based violence (see Figure 3.5). Such storylines show how men can be emotionally manipulative and break down the self-confidence of even seemingly strong characters like those of Nikiwe and Tshidi. Some storylines about gender-based violence provide some context, but their ending is questionable as justice is not served when perpetrators either go unpunished for their deeds or they pay minor penalties like losing a business deal in which sense, the very same character is resurrected with a different plot to their storyline. The danger of this as was seen in some of the focus group interviews discussed later, is that storylines are lived experiences of some viewers and they trigger traumatic experiences among viewers with no immediate counselling available to help viewers deal with emotions experienced during a particular scene.

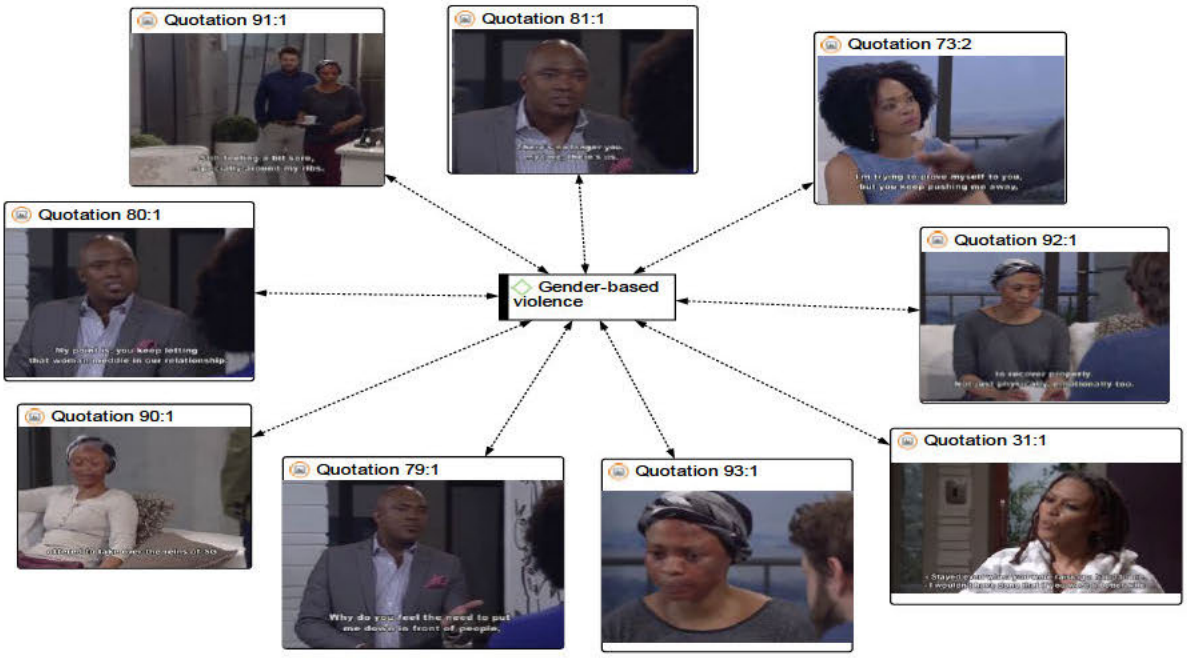


Figure 3.5 Snapshots showing the submissive nature of women in relationships leading to gender-based violence

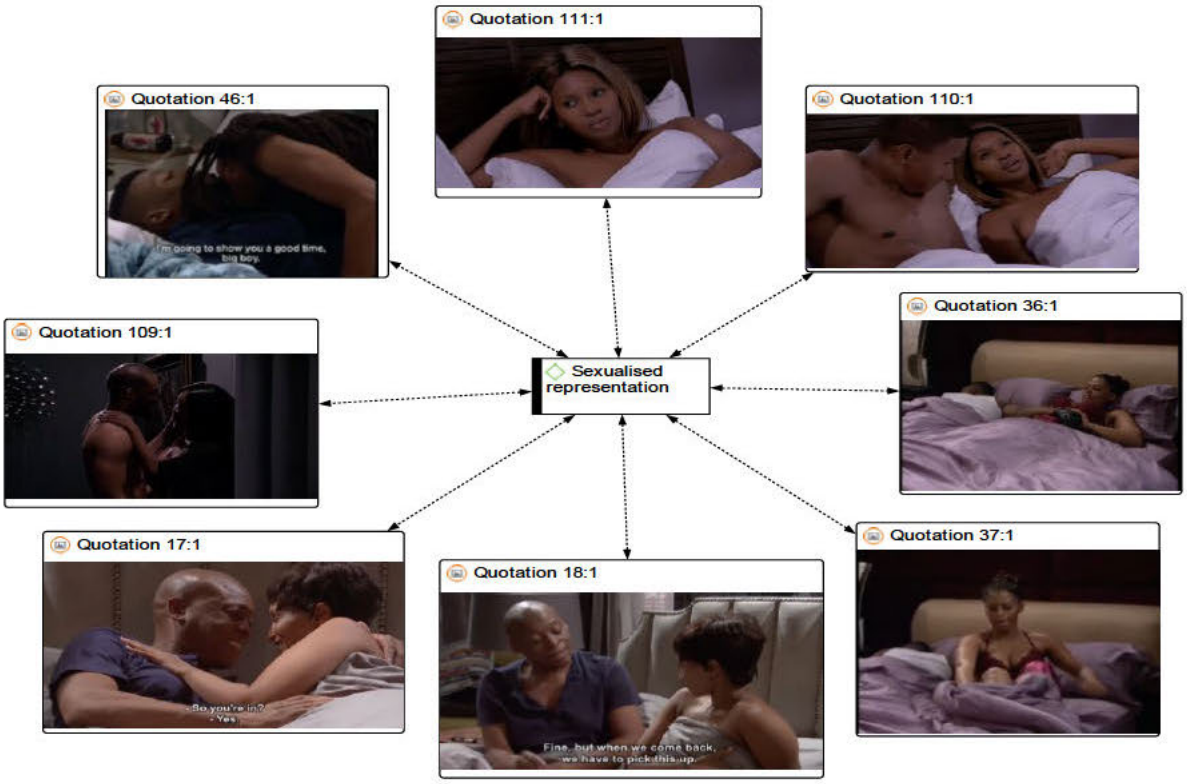


Figure 3.6 Snapshots showing the portrayal of sexualisation in soap operas

Scenes that viewers see too often in both soap operas are those illustrating intimacy in the bedroom between partners, as shown in Figure 3.6. The network shows frames demonstrating such scenes. These scenes are usually shown at night as the couple is about to sleep or in the morning as they wake up. Focus group participants stated that sexualised scenes, especially in black households, remain uncomfortable to watch when viewing takes place in the presence of elders. Women's bodies are sexualised in soap opera storylines through wardrobe and makeup that give them provocative looks. This can be seen through women's bodies being clothed in short dresses or skirts, tops revealing their breasts. The images in the network of Figure 3.6 often show women topless, but the male will have a T-shirt on, contributing to the objectification of women's bodies in a sexualised manner for men's pleasure.

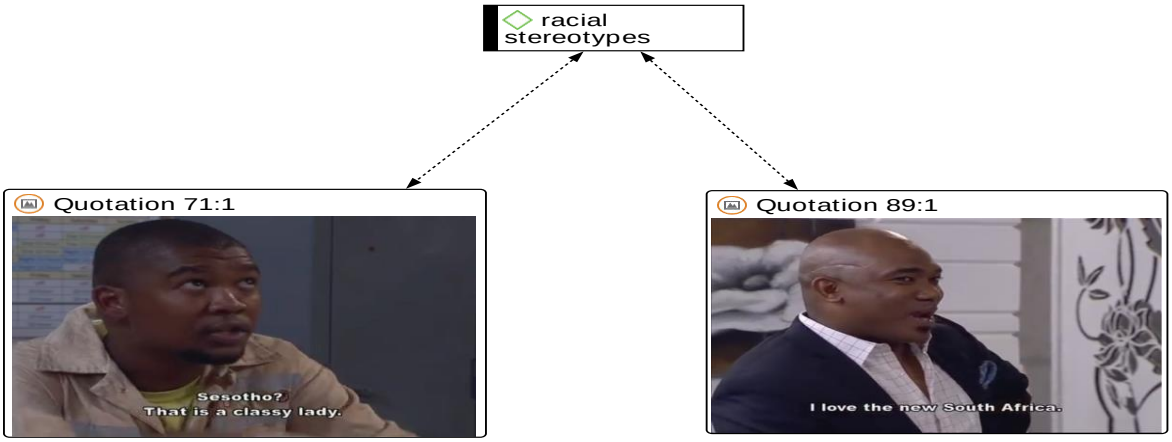


Figure 3.7 Frames of scenes involving racial stereotypes

Some stereotypes embedded in soap opera storylines include those with racial undertones. Racism is a reality in South Africa and other parts of the world, and racist incidents are often reported in news reports across various media platforms. However, television soap operas seldom, if ever, contain storylines that interrogate all factors dealing with issues of race. One of the reasons for this could be that race and racism remains a sensitive topic in society. However, a closer analysis in soap operas does reveal some racial stereotypes. The frame on the left of Figure 3.7 is extracted from a scene where Matlala and Hendrik are having a conversation about a letter of apology that he is writing to Kgothalo for using inappropriate words during a protest. With the hope of impressing Kgothalo, Matlala writes the letter using complex English language and phrases that even Hendrik, an Afrikaner character fluent in English, finds hard to understand. Hendrik advises Matlala

to write the letter in his own vernacular language or in Kgothalo's language so the letter is more 'genuine' and 'meaningful'. However, Matlala looks down on his Sesotho mother tongue and insists in writing the letter in English because Kgothalo is a 'classy' lady who is 'top shayela' and therefore will not be impressed with a letter written using vernacular language. In this scene we see the superior positioning of the English language not necessarily by Matlala, but by the script writers who ultimately are accountable for the texts used in storylines. The second frame indicates Gabriel's sarcasm when he finds out that their new domestic replacing Grace is a white lady, Wendy. His remark that he 'loves the new South Africa' insinuates the irony of a black household having a white domestic because the apartheid days saw black people being domestics in white households. This, too, is a racial stereotype which has relevance for viewers aware of race and racism challenges in South Africa. Gabriel's remark is left hanging without providing much context and closer for viewers, so that any element of educating and informing viewers is lost here.

3.4 Stereotypes and their effects

Representations are constructed media texts that viewers comprehend and interpret leading to parasocial interaction and relationships between viewers and media characters. This ultimately leads to the process of identification. Representations can be judgmental when they endorse clichéd images in the form of stereotypes[20]. However, there is often an element of truth in stereotypes, and they help us to make sense of the world (Perkins 1979). Although stereotypes shape our behaviour, viewing stereotypes as simple and direct can be misleading, since stereotypes can be both "simple and complex" (Lacey 2018: 134-135). Stereotypes can also be both positive and negative. In their positive state, stereotypes provide an understanding of another social group, especially one with similar beliefs. But they can also be negative, when we make misleading assumptions about stereotypes, for example, that they are always incorrect, refer only to minority groups (and not our own), and that there is no evidence to support the stereotype (see Lacey, 2018: 134-135). What is common to all stereotypes is that they are distorted

[20] Stewart and Kowaltzke (2007:37) state that the word stereotype has its roots in the printing trade where "stereotyping was the creation of a solid metal printing plate that exactly duplicated a tray of moveable type, the letters of which had to be placed one by one. Until the invention of the stereotype, this moveable type had to be reset if a second printing was needed. The stereotype revolutionized printing, allowing cheap editions of books to be made. In the same way that the image on the metal printing plate is fixed and repeated from the original, so the modern stereotype is often applied whatever the circumstance".

representations of original images (Stewart and Kowaltzke 2007). They may look and perhaps sound like original images/texts, but they are not authentic representations. They are selected, exaggerated images which evaluate individuals, groups or ideas, and viewers then have to make their own judgment on them. Generations and Isidingo contain the following stereotypes:

- *The Angry Black Woman* (she is cruel, uncooperative, very individualistic in her thinking and ways and is not a team player, defensive, is not accountable for her actions and often blames those around her for her misfortunes);
- *The Diva* (demands attention, things must always happen her way, often times speaks down on others, is individualistic in nature);
- *The Jezebel* (is portrayed as a highly sexualised being, sleeps her way around, is usually slim-bodied and light-skinned, has long straight hair, and embodies beauty features of a white woman);
- *The Mammy* (this stereotypes is usually associated with being a domestic worker or housewife, is a dark-skinned and fully figured woman, she loves giving advice and is a mother to everyone, she is old-school in her thinking and behaviour, she is the glue which holds the family together, she can be very understanding and quite loyal to her employer);
- *The Sapphire* (she displays an exaggerated use of her body language, can be quite domineering, is very loud and bossy).

These stereotypes are dominant in the Generations and Isidingo soap operas and are portrayed repeatedly. The repetition method of stereotypes strategically makes them appear 'natural' over time. Stereotypes distort and limit the viewers' view of the world. Messages conveyed through stereotypes in media texts pose a threat to be incorrectly decoded due to cultural ambiguities of viewers. Stereotypes thrive on power imbalance, social, cultural and economic gaps that exist in society. In fact, stereotypes promote imbalance of power between members of society as one group sees themselves as the superior in-group in comparison to the out-group. Stereotypes have a powerful effect on people (Neuman 2014). Kaul and Sahni (2010: 15) argue that illusionary characters in soap operas portray women "in stereotypical, often fashionable way and never as an intelligent, confident and emancipated women". Stereotypes evident in the soap opera genre are not a reflection of society, but a tool perpetuating the imbalance of gender, race

and class in society. With millions of viewers who watch soap operas on a daily basis, it is important to reflect not only on the content consumed by the viewer and its role on how viewers construct their identities, but how content is produced and who produces it.

Figure 3.8 demonstrates the cyclical supply-and-demand relationship between content producers and content consumers. The demand for soap operas determined by viewership numbers can be interpreted as soap opera content being good. Misrepresentations and representations of both race and gender in soap operas ultimately promote stereotypes.

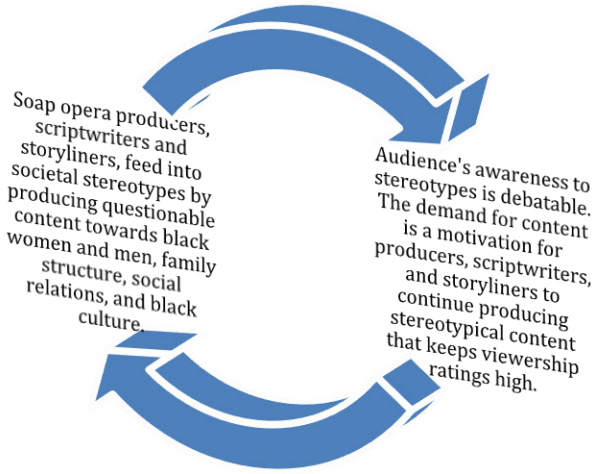


Figure 3.8 The cyclical supply-and-demand relationship between soap opera content producers and content consumers

Viewers relate to soap operas because images on soap operas parallel their lives and the inclusion of social issues in soap opera storylines make them relatable and more real as opposed to fantasy. This is one of the ways soap operas influence viewers. The element of repetition of stereotypes in soap operas cloud viewers' ability to recognise and interpret stereotypes embedded in soap opera storylines. Their repetitiveness make stereotypes appear 'natural' and believable as though reflecting real life experiences of viewers. It is debatable whether soap operas are utilising their platform to drive public discourse, as stereotypes enable the representation of mellowed versions of social issues. For example, a soap opera might include a character who loses her/his job and becomes unemployed. However, instead of the soap opera tackling unemployment as a social issue in a wider context, the focus will mainly be about the characters and what they did wrong to be unemployed, an insinuation of fault.

Stereotypes[21] are assumptions of one group about another group. These are borderline assumptions that are held by the in-group about the out-group, as defined by Davis and Harris. Stereotypes develop over time and have the ability to unite or disconnect society as they have a direct impact over an individual's identity development which can be correlated to how that individual is perceived by and treated in a society (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison 2008). Stereotypes vary by culture (Cuddy *et al*. 2010; Lips 2016; Fiske 2017) and are internally and externally motivated. In South Africa, this can be seen in how especially the black race view themselves and those around them. Historical racial discrimination is attributed to how one race is stereotyped and perceived negatively by the 'superior' race (Maylam 2017; Lauren 2018; Sanders-Phillips and Kliewer 2019).

Inferiority and superiority are categorised by repetitive media images that have played a role in South African history. Societal behaviour between different race and gender groups demonstrates a link between stereotypes and influence. It is crucial to contextualise this in the South African race and gender perspective of media exclusion and barriers of access through representation that marginalise black women. The media's representations and misrepresentations contribute to a societal divide. For example, the representation of black women during the apartheid era when they worked as domestic workers to other races deemed superior. Effects of racial and gender segregation are witnessed in the present day. Black women encounter barriers to access education and other opportunities to advance their lives academically, finacially and socially. Soap operas are filled with images of black women having a child out of marriage, changing sexual partners, and children growing up in dysfunctional homes being raised by one parent is a norm.

Black men in soap operas and the media in general are usually portrayed as hypersexual gangsters and thugs (also known as the Mandigo stereotype) "who lack sympathy and only show a penchant for violence and sexual activity" (Khaghaninejad, Dehbozorgi and Mokhtari 2019: 135). Independent black women are few in soap operas. This archetypal

[21] Khaghaninejad, Dehbozorgi and Mokhtari (2019:135) define stereotypes[21] as "characteristics and attributes" of a particular group, while Davis and Harris (1998:50) define stereotypes as generalisations about a particular group which explain their behaviour.

type of black woman is represented as being narcissistic and emasculating to men in her life (Harris 2015). The misrepresentation of the independent black woman is that she does not need anyone in her life and can selfishly take whatever she wants regardless of whom she hurts in the process. Although she has an admirable position in society due to her economic and social status, in reality she lives a very lonely life. On the other hand, the Angry Black Woman is shown as someone who is angry at life. This type of woman lacks happiness in her life and blames everyone for her misfortunes. She blames men and does not trust them. Another type peculiar to the representation of black women is that of a Jezebel kind. She is stereotyped as a sexually promiscuous woman with an unquenchable sexual appetite. Other stereotypes include that of the drug dealer/user and the welfare queen (i.e., the financially needy woman). In a world where gender inequality is rife and gender-based violence is experienced by women every second of every day, these stereotypes are seen to justify mishaps against black women and the oppressive masculinity by black men and other men in general.

3.5 Conclusion

Semiotics and stereotypes used in South African soap operas show black women as desperate for a man's attention, dangerous, gullible, naïve, weak, of low self-esteem, and generally not supportive of one another. Black men, on the other hand, are portrayed as violent, uncaring, controlling, abusive, aggressive and obsessive, among other stereotypes. Since media representations shape public perception and belief, such stereotypes foster gender inequality and discrimination. Although the use of stereotypes as entertainment correlates with viewership numbers, negative stereotypes of black women perpetuate negative perceptions about them, whereas positive stereotypes can yield the opposite effect. Mass media's reinforcement of gender stereotypes through selected images re-present reality and re-inforce gender stereotypes and a patriarchal culture. These selected images impact on how black women construct their identities. They also shape perceptions society has about gender, race, culture and identity. Patel (1995: 1) argues that, although women are no longer invisible in mass media, however, "old sex-stereotypes have continued in new forms". Women continue to be commodified, especially in the television medium, where the roles and characters they play revolve around their outward appearances. The relationships they engage in are sexualised and they are rarely given leading roles in soap operas. In a world where gender inequality is rife and gender-based violence is a daily lived experience for some, this kind of

representation serves to excuse social injustices towards women. Changing how women are represented in the media remains a challenge, as programmes are commercialised and sustained by their monetary value. Such representations and negative depictions through gender stereotypes are not only limited to television, but have an impact on how viewers interact with each other in the broader society (Yi and Dearfield 2012). According to Mueni (2014: 38), "violence against women is still a major problem, religions and cultural fundamentalisms are on the increase, discriminatory laws still serve to control women's lives and bodies, and harmful traditional practices still persist". Negative stereotypes portrayed on mass media continue to inflict oppressive standards on women. Instead of being a tool that promotes gender equality, accessibility and opportunities, the media highlight negative stereotypes that disable women to exhibit their full potential and claim their rightful place in society. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework and research design of the study.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an account on the use of reception analysis theory, social identity theory, and social representation theory. Each theory is defined in its broader context and then narrowed within the South African context to provide more depth and understanding of its use in this study. These theories provide a triangulated framework of understanding into how black women living in townships construct their identities through what they consume and negotiate in the soap opera texts. The chapter then looks at the research design, which is framed within the interpretive paradigm[22]. The ontological position of interpretivism is that reality is relative and, as Guba and Lincoln (1994: 110) suggest, reality is subjective and it differs from person to person. Our realities, as Scotland (2012: 11) suggests, are mediated by our senses. This means that reality emerges when consciousness engages with objects which are already pregnant with meaning (Crotty 1998: 43). In other words, the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it (Grix 2004: 83). Humans give labels and meaning to objects contained in the world according to their knowledge. This is inclusive of soap opera texts in the form of images, representations and even stereotypes. Soap opera content is constructed through the knowledge and meaning which exist in the world of those who produce it. Viewers in turn comprehend and interpret such texts giving meaning to it according to their own knowledge. Using the interpretive paradigm, my aim was to understand the phenomenon of soap operas from the perspective of individual viewers and their interaction with each other as individuals and also understanding the historical, social and cultural context of viewers.

4.2 Theoretical background

Bacharach (1989) regards a theory as "a system of constructs and variables in which the constructs are related to each other by propositions and the variables are related to each

[22] This paradigm is often used interchangeably with social constructivism. Creswell (2013:24-25) accords that "in this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings or their experiences … These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views … Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives".

by hypothesis". Fiske and Hartley (1978: 498) provide a more simplistic yet elaborate definition of a theory, stating that it is "a source of further information and discoveries, a source of new hypotheses and hitherto unasked questions; it identifies critical areas for further investigation; it discloses gaps in our knowledge; and it enables a researcher to postulate the existence of previously unknown phenomena". This study draws on the reception analysis theory[23] devised by Hans Robert Jauss as its principal theory to explore possible meanings derived when viewers (that is, African women aged between 18-50 residing in townships from the eThekwini Municipality) encounter media texts. This theory enabled me to test media culture and the influence of soap operas on the viewers' construction of their identity. The underlying principle of this theory is that viewers as active members interpret the meaning of the text based on the individual's cultural background and life experiences (Meidasari 2015). The importance of the content is not permeated in the content itself but is made in the connection between the content and the reader. Senders encode meaning in their texts according to their own views and ideals and viewers decode meanings according to their own views and ideals (Hall 1993: 91). Using this theory, I carried out an in-depth analysis of the viewers' interpretation of the meanings of soap operas (through their documented narratives) in their lives based on their cultural background and life experiences and the influence of soap operas on their identity formation. Previous studies have been conducted on the influences of television on its viewers (Huston and Wright 1996; Potts, Dedmon and Halford 1996; Bickham, Wright and Huston 2001; Greenfield 2014; Muindi 2016). This study aimed to address the relationship between media culture, social identity and representation, and to explore how these might contribute to the disempowerment or empowerment of women.

I also made use of social representations theory[24] founded by Serge Moscovici, which in essence deals with how individuals see their world not only through their eyes, but also through the eyes of the group that they belong to. Because individuals are social actors who take part in the process of production of a common knowledge, "social

[23]Reception analysis theory explores the meaning of "text (be it a book, movie, or other creative work) is not simply passively accepted by the audience, but that the reader/viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. In essence, the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader" (Meidasari 2015:6).

[24] According to Moscovici's hypotheses, social groups generate representations which serve group purposes. Intra-group dynamics or inter-group relations will direct or channel the formation of any specific social representation. Representations are embedded in complex representational networks and they are liable to change, whether subtle or global, as a result of their relationships to each other (Breakwell 1993).

representations help us make sense of our world and to interact within it with other societal members" (Voelklein and Howarth 2005). As I studied participants in a focus group and individual settings, this theory assisted in determining the system of values, ideas and practices (Moscovici 1973) that soap opera viewers shared to orientate themselves in their material and social world, and how social exchange took place in various aspects of their world and their individual group history (Breakwell 1993).

Finally, to get a sense of the viewers' individual identity, I used social identity theory[25] hypothesised by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner, which deals with a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) (Breakwell 1993). This theory states that individuals will place themselves into the best self-esteem enhancing group also known as the in-group (a group an individual wants to be a part of) whereas this group will discriminate against the out-group (a group an individual does not like nor wants to be a part of). Responses from participants helped determine if there is a correlation of age, identity and gender formation as women's ages increase from 18 to 50 years old.

4.2.1 Reception Analysis Theory

The reception theory was first developed by Hans-Robert Jauss, and holds that a message would be encoded and packaged for viewer consumption. Assuming that the viewer as the decoder of the text shared similar cultural background or interpretation with the encoder, the meaning of the text would not be lost. The reception theory was developed further by Stuart Hall when he took a closer look at the encoding and decoding processes, especially texts situated between an encoder and decoder who had different socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts. Hall concluded that, although coded media contains meaning, it is the television reader, in this case the viewer, who interprets the media texts for meaning. When interpreting or decoding media texts, the viewer's culture, gender, race and social experiences determines the interpretation of the message and meaning made. Livingstone (2007: 1) adds that "media texts, like other texts, are multilayered, subject to conventional and generic constraints, open and incomplete in their meanings, providing multiple yet bounded paths for the reader". The ability to interpret media texts situates viewers as an active reader because they *do* something, that is, interpret media

[25] The social identity theory is made up of three components namely social categorisation, social identification and social comparison.

texts. The meaning of the media texts however, is interpreted according to the viewer's social context. In other words, the viewer may not necessarily interpret or decode the meaning the same way it was intended by the encoder/author of the meaning. According to Livingstone (2007: 3), interpretation shows the cultural and contextual influences that distinguish between viewers. In other words, interpretation of media texts by the viewer is socially located and gives insight into the knowledge and experience of the viewer.

The reception theory is multi-layered and complex as it involves the reader's comprehension of the self before having the ability to read media texts, because readers draw on their extratextual resources when interpreting media texts. There is no miscommunication or loss of meaning here as the viewer/decoder shares the same ideologies as the sender/encoder. This is the preferred position for the message encoder. In the negotiated position, the reader makes a compromise by accepting the intended meaning of the text even if it goes against their personal beliefs. In other words, the readers/viewers have mixed reactions to the text as they both accept and reject it. The viewers see and accept the intended meaning but do not relate to it and hold their own opinion about the meaning. They negotiate a position where they neither accept nor reject the meaning of the text. The oppositional position is when readers understand the meaning of the encoded text but reject it and create their own meaning for various reasons. The text is not relatable, might be against their values and beliefs, and/or is found to be emotionally disturbing or morally offensive. The different positions a media reader can take attests to a mismatch of meaning or what media studies theorist Umberto Eco coined as 'aberrant decoding'. If the viewers' culture, gender, race and social experiences determine the interpretation of the message and meaning made when decoding media texts, the same is true for the senders; their culture, gender, race and social experiences determine how they encode media messages. If the sender (encoder) and receiver (decoder) have no shared culture, gender, race and social experiences, then there is bound to be a mismatch of meaning of the text. Hartley (2012) suggests that comprehension and interpretation of media texts are affected by difference in culture, beliefs, mood, language barriers, socio-economic status and viewer's experiences. According to Hall (1973) the preferred reading happens when the viewer interprets the message with the same intended meaning that it was encoded.

In the context of Generations and Isidingo, senders and receivers have different social and cultural experiences. How producers encode soap opera texts might be different to how viewers decode and make meaning of the text. Viewers of soap operas Generations and Isidingo vary in their age, educational levels, geographic location, and socio-economic status. Thus, it can be assumed that soap opera viewers are found in all three categories of readers when interpreting texts, as witnessed during focus group discussions in Chapter 5. Some viewers are dominant readers as they interpret soap opera texts with the same intended meaning by producers. Other viewers negotiate and ultimately accept the intended meaning because they hold different beliefs to the text. But there are viewers who reject the intended meaning of the text as it goes against their values and beliefs. Texts containing stereotypes is accepted, negotiated or opposed.

4.2.2 Reception in the context of South Africa

When a viewer encounters media texts, there is some negotiation that takes place. There is an intimate relationship between the media texts and the reader/viewer (Poulet 1969). During the encounter between a media text and the viewer, the media gets inside the viewer and the viewer gets inside the media text (for interpretation to take place). During this encounter, boundaries are eliminated. The text is no longer confined within the hardware of the television medium and the viewers are temporarily transported from their viewing space into the text. During the encounter, the two variables become one as we embrace, adapt and personalise a text (Pitout 2018: 398). Examples of a media text becoming one with a viewer are seen when the text evokes some feelings out of the viewer; a viewer cries through a certain scene or movie; a viewer is angered by a character; or a viewer sees him/herself in a character. These are some of the ways that a viewer internalises media texts. Pitout (2018: 399) hypothesises that a text is incomplete without the readers making meaning of it. Therefore, readers must be aware of the text, that is, be active readers, to make meaning of the text from their experiences and logic. This is an unavoidable part of the readers' social and cultural life.

Wolfgang (1978) speaks of a wandering viewpoint which he explains using the metaphor of a traveller. According to him, the viewer cannot fully comprehend a media text in its entirety but can only understand it from a narrowed viewpoint. Soap opera viewers, for example, are in the journey of the soap opera life. They are transported through storylines to an expected destination. This expected destination is what Wolfgang (1978) refers to

as protension, that is, an expected progression of the development of a storyline or plot. Protension is linked to retention which refers to the knowledge viewers have of a storyline, characters or plotline. For viewers to have expectations of how a storyline or plot should develop (protension), they must first have some knowledge or reference of that storyline or plot (retention). The interaction between protension and retention enables the viewer to fill in the gap in media texts by drawing on their social and cultural knowledge towards the progression of storylines and plots. This interaction also shows that viewers are active in their reading of the media text. The concept of a wandering viewpoint attests to the specific agenda set by soap operas and the influence this has on viewers. The oneness between media text and viewers eliminates an objective perspective a viewer might have during the interpretation of media texts. In other words, the wandering viewpoint influences how viewers categorise and prioritise their extra-textual resources during interpretation.

The processes of engagement between the viewer and the text through protension and retention leading to interpretation, give way to identification. For identification to take place, viewers must engage with the media text, have the ability to comprehend and interpret it, and thereafter develop an emotional and intimate relationship with the text. According to Byerly and Ross (2008: 22), one example of how soap opera women are relatable to the viewers is through their multiple identifications that the viewers have experienced in their own lives. Like viewers, woman characters face daily challenges and sometimes make poor decisions. Such an environment gives rise to parasocial relationships between the viewer and media character where the viewer shares with the character's emotions and experiences, and ultimately sees the character portraying his/her life story (Pitout 2018: 401). Parasocial relationships enable the viewer to take part in the character's actions and emotional life.

The reception theory therefore provides a theoretical basis of the negotiation process between the media text and the viewer and thus refutes the notion of a viewer being passive towards media texts. This theory is aligned to the study of soap opera audience identity because of the "absence of any formal narrative closure in a specific episode" (Pitout 2018: 402). Characteristics of the soap opera genre (like regular exposure to soaps, the strategic interruptions from one storyline to the next, camera shots and movements, sound, lighting, flashbacks at the beginning of an episode and flash-forwards

at the end of each episode, and the overall editing technique) provide viewers with ample opportunities and positions to be involved in the process of meaning-making and interpretation.

4.2.3 Social identity theory

Oyserman and Markus (1998) state that quite often people question who they are and where they belong in the world. Such questions lead to individuals going on journeys to discover the self by taking vacations, climbing mountains, becoming rebellious and/or going through midlife crises. According to Oyserman and Markus (1998: 107), the answers to these questions "are a consequence of one's relative positioning in socio-political and historical context, and they are developed interpersonally and consensually". The shared answers form the social representations of selfhood. Oyserman and Markus (1998: 107) argue that although the journey to self-discovery appears individualistic, "it is also a collective and collectivizing one … social integration and the social order require that individuals of a given group have reasonably similar answers to the 'who am I' and 'where do I belong' questions". In other words, for people to discover who they are and what their position in life is, they have to do so in a social context and in an environment where there exist other people. Humans are naturally interactive social beings, and to discover one's identity means that one needs to first make a discovery about one's surroundings, and this includes the historical context, geographical, physical, emotional, socio-political and, for some, spiritual. Oyserman and Markus (1998: 107) refer to these elements as the "social representations of selfhood".

Chen and Li (2009: 1) define social identity as "a person's sense of self derived from perceived membership in social groups". This means that individuals, using their ethnic and cultural identity, have a tendency to categorise themselves (the self) based on their membership of the social group they belong to. The membership group is classified as the in-group. Members in this group define themselves according to a particular social category aligned with their individualistic attributes. The self is valued at group level. Their worth is defined by that of their social group against other groups. Their identity is preconceived by their social situations and they conform to the group's norms and stereotypes. The group's identity affects individual behaviour. Members of the in-group find strength in numbers as their strength is weakened when outside of the group. Individuals who do not belong to this group are categorised as the out-group, the outcasts.

They are discriminated against and seen as lesser beings in the social categorisation order by the in-group. Social identity theory was originally developed by psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and they hypothesised three components of social identity at process level: categorisation, identification and comparison. Chen and Li (2009: 1) posit that "categorization is the process of putting people, including ourselves, into categories … identification is the process by which we associate ourselves with certain groups … and comparison is the process by which we compare our groups with other groups, creating a favourable bias toward the group to which we belong". Soap operas, through storylines of characters, places viewers into different categories. A viewer thereafter identifies with people in his/her own category and makes a comparison with people not in that category, thereby creating a bias towards their category.

4.2.4 Social identity in the context of South Africa

For the social identity processes (categorisation, identification and comparison) to take place, labelling first occurs. Individuals are labelled according to their race, gender, class, culture, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and socio-political classifications. If social identity is who a person feels they are within a certain group (Chen and Li 2009: 1), people's sense of self is identity by their social contexts. Television soap opera viewers in South Africa are labelled as per various classifications, that is categorisation, identification and comparison. Soap operas Generations and Isidingo, through content, places viewers physically, mentally and emotionally as different groups that identify with their membership groups and compare themselves with the out-groups.

Categorisation, identification and comparison have long existed in South Africa under the guise of the apartheid era where members of society were defined according to their race and ethnicity promoting segregation. Such classifications resulted in a divided and violent society where there was competition for resources which were unevenly distributed. The divide caused by socio-economic and socio-political affiliations created tensions in society where whites dominated and enjoyed the better parts of the country. According to Smit (2016: 2), the apartheid regime with its unfavourable policies created hostile conditions for South Africa and the broadcast industry where the initial absence of television excluded the country from the global community. These separated the country from the rest of the global world. However, transformation in broadcasting and the concept of a 'rainbow nation' post-apartheid re-connected South Africa. Although the

year 1994 marked a period of transformation that re-connected South Africa's relationship with the world and created a sense of unity for citizens, however, complex traces of South African history through its television viewing and content remain (Smit 2016: 3).

To this day, societal divisions are visible throughout television content and narratives. Racial, gender, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic stereotypes are embedded in content disguised as entertainment. Parasocial interaction and relationships obtained through processes of transportation and identification inhibit the overall development of the country. These stereotypes are engrained in the mental process that enable media effects and influence where individual members of society, as television viewers, develop a sense of self against the 'other'. Gender stereotypes convey men in prominent leading roles in soap operas and women are visible in their shadows playing supportive roles. Racial stereotypes portray certain race or ethnic groups superior to other groups. Such imbalance images cascade into society where viewers exhibit behavioural and attitude changes influenced by television texts. Soap operas have long been a form of storytelling in South Africa with their initial medium of transmission being radio. It was on this platform that encrypted political messages were conveyed to the public in the form of entertainment. Decades later and the soap opera genre plays a role in the evolution of the country. Television soap operas, as an art of storytelling, are communicative tools that members of society use to further categorise, identify and compare themselves. Media, in general, influences social and cultural contexts of society and how individuals construct their identity. Nuttall and Michael (2000: 1-2) call for a transformed South Africa with a re-imagined future. Smit (2016: 3) adds that television as a medium that has been a catalyst in the some of the country's transformation periods, is a crucial medium for that re-imagined future to take place.

4.2.5 Social representation theory

According to theorist Sergei Moscovici (1963: 251), a social representation is defined as "the elaborating of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating". Sugiman *et al*. (2008: 5) define social representation theory as "a many-sided enterprise involving the individual level of behavior and the collective level of relationships and discourse". Simplified, social representation theory is an individual's behaviour within collective relationships shared with members of a community that

individual belongs to. The latter is the definition employed in this study. According to Sugiman *et al*. (2008: 5), "the object or fact is determined by the relationships that the members of the community maintain with each other as well as with their environment by means of communication and overt behaviour; thus, it is inherently social". They add that "social representation constitutes a socially constructed object by and for a social group" (2008: 5). Sugiman *et al*. (2008:6) further argue that mass media does play a role in how society constructs its meaning of the world around them. Soap opera fiction also transcends into the experiences of the viewers (Allen 1985: 91).

Individuals live in groups, and it is within this group's shared moral fibre, history, their definition of what is right and wrong, and their social practices (i.e., language spoken, religious beliefs, socio-political and socio-economic) that each person is enabled to determine his or her own identity. These social representations provide the answer to the discovery of self (Oyserman and Markus 1998: 108). It is assumed that when the self is discovered and is 'okay', then the entire group within which that individual falls is thereby 'doing okay'. However, in the process of discovering the self, an individual rarely considers the appropriateness of the social standing of his/her group but broadly is concerned with the self. Oyserman and Markus (1998: 109) quote Baldwin (1911: x) that "the knower does not start out in isolation and then come to some sort of agreement with others by 'matching' his world of independent sensations and cognitions with theirs. On the contrary, he starts with what he and his neighbours' experiences in common verify, and only partially, and by degrees does he find himself and prove himself to be a relatively competent independent thinker" or self.

What this means is that, as a child, one defines his/her sense of self by constructs of social representations s/he is subsumed in. These can be in the form of language, schooling, media representations, culture, religion, and moral understanding and beliefs of their social context. However, as an individual grows in age, s/he feels a need to journey to find who or what her/his position and purpose is in the world. This need is a result of one's independent interpretation of social representations. Simply put, an individual wants to find out why s/he exists and what is her/his importance in the world, as illustrated in the cycle shown in Figure 4.1.

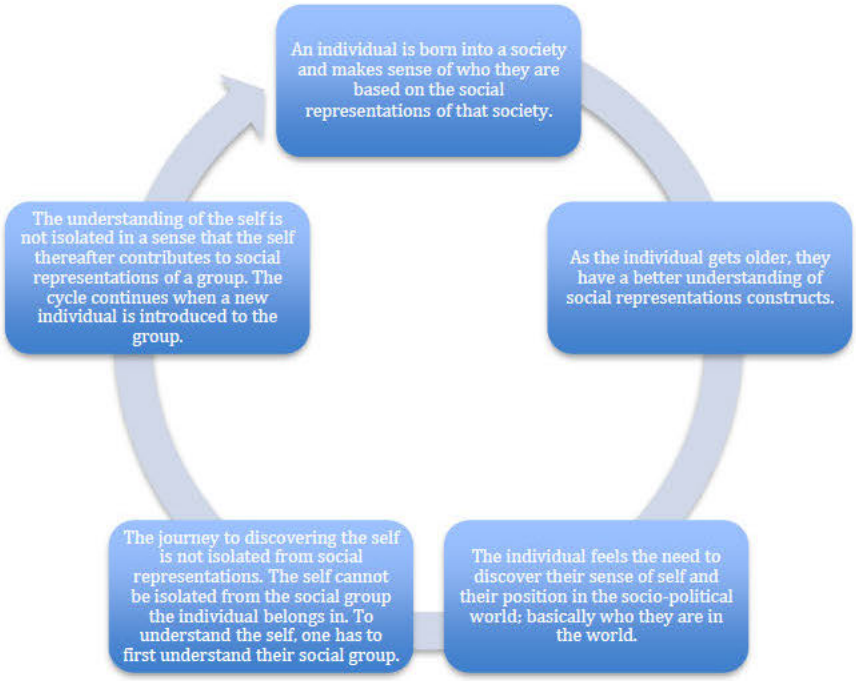


Figure 4.1 Cycle illustrating the journey to the discovering of the self

The cycle in Figure 4.1 illustrating the journey to discovering of the self is aligned with Godelier's (1986: 1) assertion that people produce and are part of the society in which they live in. Moreover, Figure 4.1 suggests that individuals do not necessarily draw their knowledge from first-hand experience but from shared social representations which allow them to communicate and behave within a group (Oyserman and Markus 1998: 109). In other words, we come to know what we know through our interaction with others and the realisation that what we know, other people in our group knew before us. Thus, information and realities are shared. Quinn and Holland (1987) refer to these as cultural schemas. Quoting Moscovici and Hewstone (1983: 15), Oyserman and Markus state:

> …there is perhaps no experience, however concrete or novel, that is not informed by shared models which specify what is in the world and how it works … Social representations refer to a substratum of images and meanings which are essential for societal functioning. They are cognitive matrices coordinating ideas, words, images, and perceptions that are all interlinked; they are common sense theories about aspects of the world.

These become patterns and are culture-specific, playing a role in society's interpretation of and behaviour in the world as represented by Quinn and Holland (1987: 4). Social representations are specific to a specific group. In other words, two groups may not necessarily find a similar experience in one thing. Experiences are dependent on group-

specific and culture-specific behaviour, thoughts and feelings. This is one of the reasons it is important that the soap opera production crew is inclusive of various race and gender groups to be representative of their viewers. If the production crew is unequal and uneven in its representation, the result is a product that is filled with content containing negative stereotypes about the non-represented group while the represented group is portrayed in images of superiority. It is also important that soap opera content promotes the discovery of self and highlights identity in an individualistic and collective context. Soap opera viewers spend hours of their lives consuming content thereby increasing viewership number which ultimately translate into revenue. Soap operas like Generations and Isidingo are aired on the SABC channel which is mandated to provide content that is informative, educational and builds the nation. Oyserman and Markus (1998: 110) define individualism and collectivism as "different systems of ideas, images, and understandings about people, groups, and society". Individualism focuses on self-actualisation and the success of elements surrounding the self-presupposing that if the self is successful, then an individual plays a better role within their in-group (Georgas 1989). Whereas with collectivism, the focus is on maintaining social norms and performance of social duties by the in-group (Sinha and Verma 1987).

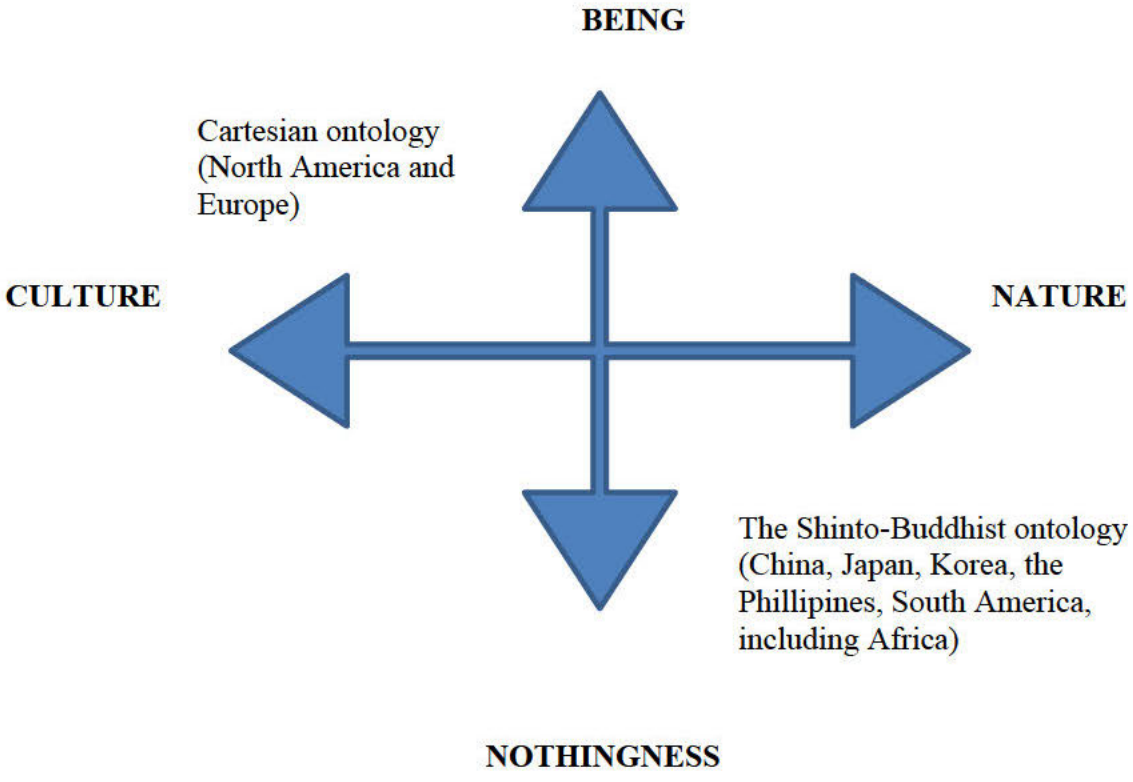


Figure 4.2 Lebra's (1992) contrasting ontological differences of the self to what it means 'to be'

Figure 4.2 illustrates contrasting ontological differences of the self to what it means 'to be'. Lebra (1992) argued that the West (North Americans and Europeans), symbolised by the Cartesian ontology, locates itself in the quadrant defined by Culture and Being whereas the East (Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Phillipinos, South Americans, including Africans) symbolised by the Shinto-Bhuddist ontology, is defined by the quadrant located between Nature and Nothingness. The Cartesian ontology's goal is self-objectification and the highlight is on the experiencer and what is experienced. The focus is on self-knowing and self-knowledge. Much emphasis is placed on the self as individualistic. This view is characteristic of "North American and European, but particularly white, urban, middle-class, secularized, contemporary people" (Oyserman and Markus; 1998: 113). Using the analogy of a body, the Cartesian ontology's emphasis is the head. In the Shinto-Bhuddist ontology, collectivism in the form of one's connection with others and the surrounding context is promoted. The self in relation to others is focal to individual experiences. In the analogy of a body, the Shinto-Bhuddist ontology's emphasis is on the body and feelings. The self is a fraction that becomes whole when interacting with others and immerses with the wants and needs of others.

According to Lebra (1992), Africa's ontology is similarly to that of The Shinto-Bhuddist, where collectivism is encouraged and the self in relation to others is focal in individual experience. Some of the elements promoted by soap opera storylines include selfishness, greed, violence, hatred, jealousy, dishonesty, broken families and relationships; elements associated with the Cartesian ontology of self-objectification, self-knowing, self-knowledge and overall individualism (Lebra 1992). This contradiction to the Shinto-Bhuddist ontology of collectivism proposed by Lebra (1992), found in both Generations and Isidingo, correlates with views that content of these soap operas is very Western and remains a fantasy to South African viewers. Currently, soap opera content is filled with gender and racial stereotypes that do promote self-actualisation and individualism of viewers. Images of representation are oppressive and misdirect viewers' identity, position and role in society. Literature has shown that such content stems from historical positioning of the superior in-group against the inferior out-group (Barnett 1999; Zegeye and Harris 2003; Narunsky-Laden 2008; Haupt 2012; Smit 2016; Bradfield 2019). However, soap operas attraction of millions of loyal viewers positions the genre in an

ideal place to play an active role in the public discourse to shape public opinion and be a change agent against misconceptions of gender and racial bias and discrimination.

4.2.6 Social representation in the context of South Africa

Specific to the South African context would be a creation of the third quadrant that merges both the Cartesian and Shinto-Bhuddist ontologies. This quadrant is the interconnectedness of Being, Culture and Nature, as shown in Figure 4.3. The circled area of Figure 4.3 (emphasis on the northern hemisphere of the pictograph) is as a result of the merged Cartesian and Shinto-Bhuddist ontologies resulting in the formation of an Individualised Communal ontology which ideally promotes elements of both individualism and collectivism. Given the South African historical context and evolving nature of socio-political and socio-economic activities, this study concludes that a combination of the Cartesian and Shanti-Bhuddist ontologies would be best suited for this country. This ontology promotes self-actualisation, but in a social context. I argue that the success of an individual is rooted in the success of his/her community. The opposite is also true, where a community's success is attributed to the success of individual members.

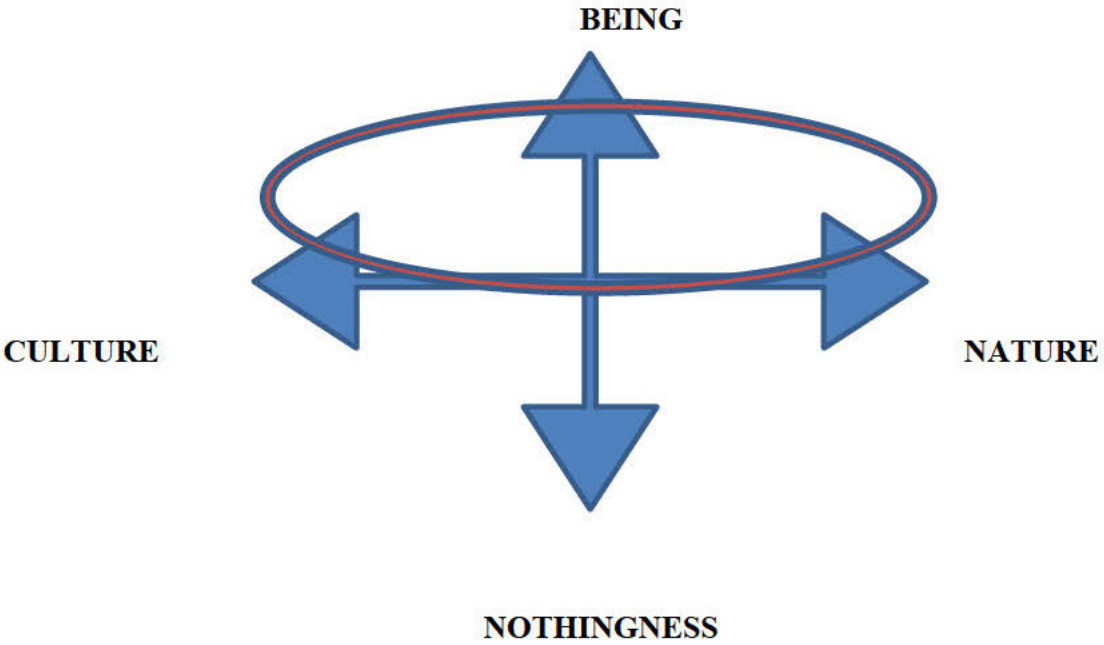


Figure 4.3 The interconnectedness of the Being, Culture and Nature quadrants as representative of the South African context (developed from Lebra 1992).

Constructs including, race, culture and gender determine the success or failure of a society. Mass media, especially television, play a pivotal role in shaping mindsets and public opinion which shape the identity of individual members of society, their individual and collective role, and their interpretation of the world, where and how they position themselves in it. Therefore, media content in the form of soap opera storylines should provide tangible tools which encourage the success of individuals but in a communal setting. Such content would deconstruct barriers between the in-group and the out-group. Each viewer is realistic and sees their own success in the context of the success of others. However, modernisation and evolution compel producers and scriptwriters to provide content that is aligned with the current realities of society. If culture and language are not static, transformation ought to be evident in the soap opera representation of images of black women. It requires producers and scriptwriters to study cultural, social, political, and economic patterns of viewers to be able to produce and align realistic content that promotes individual and collective growth. Development ought to be a shared responsibility. Social and political processes in modern society are, to a large degree, driven by mass media communication. Consequently, mass media and their role in public meaning making are a pivotal part of social representation research since the inception of the theory (Moscovici 1976; Bauer 1998; Bangerter and Heath 2004).

4.3 Research design

By employing the interpretive paradigm[26] I showed how viewers make meaning of soap opera texts and how my own views and interpretation are positioned in the analysis of the data. Since my philosophical argument is for the assumption that reality is socially constructed, the data analysed attests to there being no single reality, as focus group discussions show how viewers make multiple realities and interpretations of the same event, that is, the soap opera text. Data collected in this study was analysed in the following three categories:

- Interpretative textual analysis, done through the analysis of video episodes;

[26] This paradigm is often used interchangeably with social constructivism. According to Creswell (2013:24-25) "in this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings or their experiences … These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views … Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives"

- Discourse analysis done through the analysis of group discussions and one-on-one interviews with the cast and crew of Generations The Legacy;
- Parasocial relationship scale, conducted to decipher the extent of the parasocial relationship between television soap opera characters and viewers.

My background in teaching television studies, and having worked at a television news station informed my situating of this study within a media and culture framework where the two are indivisible. As previously mentioned, this study employs the interpretive paradigm which suggests that humans give different labels and meaning to objects contained in the world according to their knowledge. The interpretive framework views research as a communal process which includes participants' realities, the researcher as co-creator of meaning, and knowledge frameworks informing a particular society (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smith 2004).

4.4 Reflexivity of researcher

Since the qualitative researcher is an instrument in their own work, it is crucial that reflexivity takes place. Reflexivity refers to the researcher conducting self-introspection, identifying possible biases from the inception of the study, that is, in the research topic, questions, choice of methodology and methods of data collection, participants in the research, location of the study, and choice of data analysis tools. I chose to embark on this study because, as a Television Broadcast lecturer, I have a professional interest in television as a medium which communicates cultural and gender stereotypes; as a black South African woman, I have a personal stake in identifying and challenging gender stereotypes which might disempower me or limit my human potential. I am a black Zulu female who grew up in a township watching Generations and Isidingo, among other soap operas. This genre has also intrigued and fascinated me in its ability to provide women like me an alternative life to our own (i.e. black) reality that has been consumed by socio-economic issues, among other factors. My own experiences aroused interest in wanting to explore and study how the soap opera text influences how we construct our identity as black women residing in townships. Through this research project, I wanted to know the extent that participants were aware of gender stereotypes contained in these soap operas; way/s that stereotypes contributed to their individual and social identities; whether stereotypes viewed limited viewer's individual potential in any way; alternative portrayals of women in soap operas which might contribute to their empowerment; and

how women viewers negotiated dominant gender representations in order to fashion their identities. For convenience of geographical location, the study was located in KwaZulu-Natal and engaged with black women residing from townships around the eThekwini Municipality as participants. Participants for focus groups[27] and one-on-one interviewees were randomly selected, and I engaged with them only after providing an explanation of the study and logistics for collecting data. In my opinion, my race, gender, age and culture did not influence their responses because I made it clear to all participants that they must be comfortable in their responses and that their identities would be protected. Having a background in and knowledge of television production came as an advantage when interviewing cast and crew behind production. Since television is visual and includes images, I made a conscious choice to analyse data using Atlas.ti to present a visual illustration of my analysis and findings.

4.5 Methodology: qualitative research

Taking Crotty's (1998: 3) definition of methodology which states that it is "the strategy or plan of action behind the use of particular methods", this research explored the phenomenon of gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by soap operas Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need. Triangulation methodology was achieved through one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis.

This study was rooted in qualitative research as it concerned itself with what happens in people's lives and how they make understanding and meaning of their world in a social and cultural context, how they construct their world and how they interpret their experiences. Qualitative research involves soft data, for example photos, symbols, signs, words and sentences. Several scholars have supplied definitions to qualitative research and have each emphasised different characteristics (Babbie and Mouton 2001; Denzin and Lincoln 2013; Hammersley 2013; Nueman 2014). The definition suitable for this study is that of Van Maanen (1979: 520) who defines qualitative research as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain

[27] Morgan (1996:130) defines focus groups as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher". The use of the focus groups methodology in this study is further explained in Section 4.9

more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world". Qualitative research focuses on the process of the research as opposed to the outcome. However, I hoped that my findings would eventually come to inform the practice of television storytelling, especially in the soap opera genre. It must be noted that the participants in this study were interviewed in a natural setting rather than a controlled environment.

A quantitative methodology would not have been relevant to this study as this methodology looks at large "number of cases, people, or units, and measure features about them in the form of numbers" (Neuman 2014: 40). Methods of data collection for this methodology, which include surveys, experiments and statistics would not have yielded rich data concerned with how black women construct their identities using texts from Generations and Isidingo. This study was not concerned about the number of viewers who watch soap operas and their statistical account of measured effects but was concerned with narrated responses of how soap opera texts impacted on viewer identity construction.

4.6 Interviews

Conducting interviews "sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data" (Kvale 1996: 14), as interviews allow for a social encounter between the researcher and the interviewee. The interviewee is not merely seen as a data generating tool: it is crucial that the researcher establishes trust with the interviewee. This data collection method situates the interviewee as important data producers in the research, and enables the researcher to 'journey' with them as they explore an in-depth analysis of an issue. Interviewing as a method is intersubjective, it is neither objective nor subjective, as both the interviewer and interviewee become participants in the research. Unlike surveys, interviews provide immediate data and enable the researcher to probe for more data, through asking follow-up questions on the spot, where necessary. One of the differences between an interview and an everyday conversation is that interviews are less casual and ask specific questions that maintain a particular focus of the research. Interviews are intentional whereas everyday conversations can happen unintentionally (Roulston and Choi 2018). Given all the advantages of conducting interviews, this method was best suited for collecting data for this study.

I conducted one-on-one unstructured[28] or loosely formatted interviews to gain participants' views of their reality on and off set at Henley Studios in Auckland Park Johannesburg. Interviewees included producers, scriptwriters, directors, make-up and wardrobe department, social media specialist, camera, lighting and sound engineers. These individuals all play key roles in the production of the Generations soap opera. It was important that I speak to them on a one-on-one basis to extract in-depth data on elements for producing a successful soap opera. Generations and Isidingo are multicultural both on and off screen. The production team members come from various locations and cultures in South Africa, and this is said to improve the product's 'realness' on screen. Crew members have leeway to voice their suggestions when it comes to the incorporation of different languages and their pronunciation, how some characters dress for particular scenes, for example traditional weddings, and their overall semiotics. All participants' names have been concealed for the purpose of confidentiality, so as not to jeopardise their jobs or put them in compromising positions in society due to data provided.

I primarily used the inductive coding using the Atlas.ti software. In inductive coding, also known as emic, codes are derived from the raw data and then grouped into themes. Although there are no prior expectations from the researcher, findings are influenced by the research objectives and questions of the research, including assumptions and experiences of the researcher (Thomas 2006: 240). I was concerned, first, with thematic analysis and coding emerging from the data, looking mainly at what the data was saying and identifying patterns within the data. Next, using discourse analysis which according to Gee (2011:ix) is "the study of language-in-use" or "the study of language at use by the world, not just to say things, but to do things", I looked less at *what* the data was saying and more on *how* they said what they was saying; in other words, how meanings were constructed and how they shaped and constructed the subjects' perception of the world. Lastly, through the parasocial interaction I was able to identify the interaction and relationship viewers feel towards media characters. All three analysis tools indicated the

[28] Unstructured interviews follow no specific format. The researcher may prepare a few questions to prompt response from the participant. But, the interview follows a loose format where questions from the researcher emanate from responses provided by the participant. One of the advantages to this type of an interview is that it allows for a more casual talk between the researcher and participant, and topics are participant-driven (Roulston and Choi 2018).

extent of soap opera texts on identity construction by the viewers and the impact of stereotypes.

4.7 Use of Atlas.ti software for data analysis

In this study I made use of Atlas.ti, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, to upload and conceptually analyse video episodes from Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need. The same software was used for analysing focus groups and interview data.

The Atlas.ti software enabled me to create a new project and work on that project as an existing project in the during of the analysis. Data, which consisted of video episodes, audio and transcripts from focus groups and interviews, were imported onto the software. To open and code data, I selected the relevant document shown on the side panel and the document appeared under the document preview window, which enabled me to view each data set. I then highlighted portions from the text/video/audio to create quotations (see Figure 4.4). The highlighted portions from texts/video/audio created quotations and the labels given to the highlighted data created codes. The software also enabled me to make comments on each document as I assigned codes to quotations.

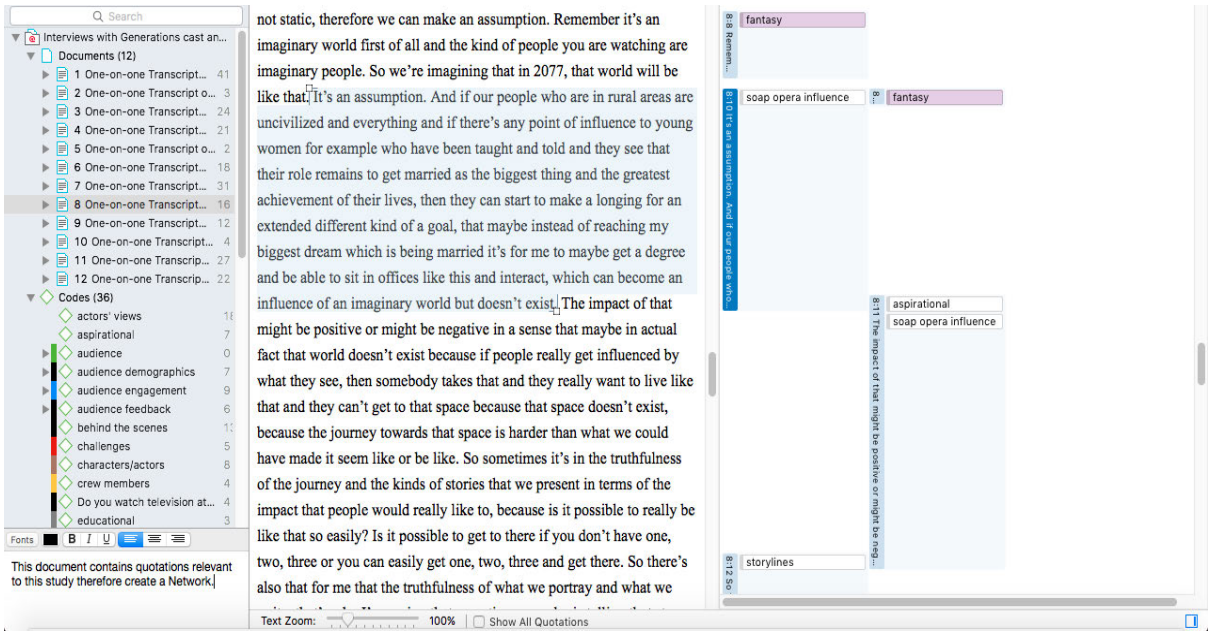


Figure 4.4 Screenshot showing quotations

I had a list of predetermined codes ready while the rest of the codes were generated from the data, which meant that both inductive and deductive coding were used. The software gave options to create new codes from raw data or choose from existing codes located on the left-hand panel. To generate a code, I selected the quotation and to add an existing code, I dragged a code from the left panel onto the quotation (see Figure 4.5).

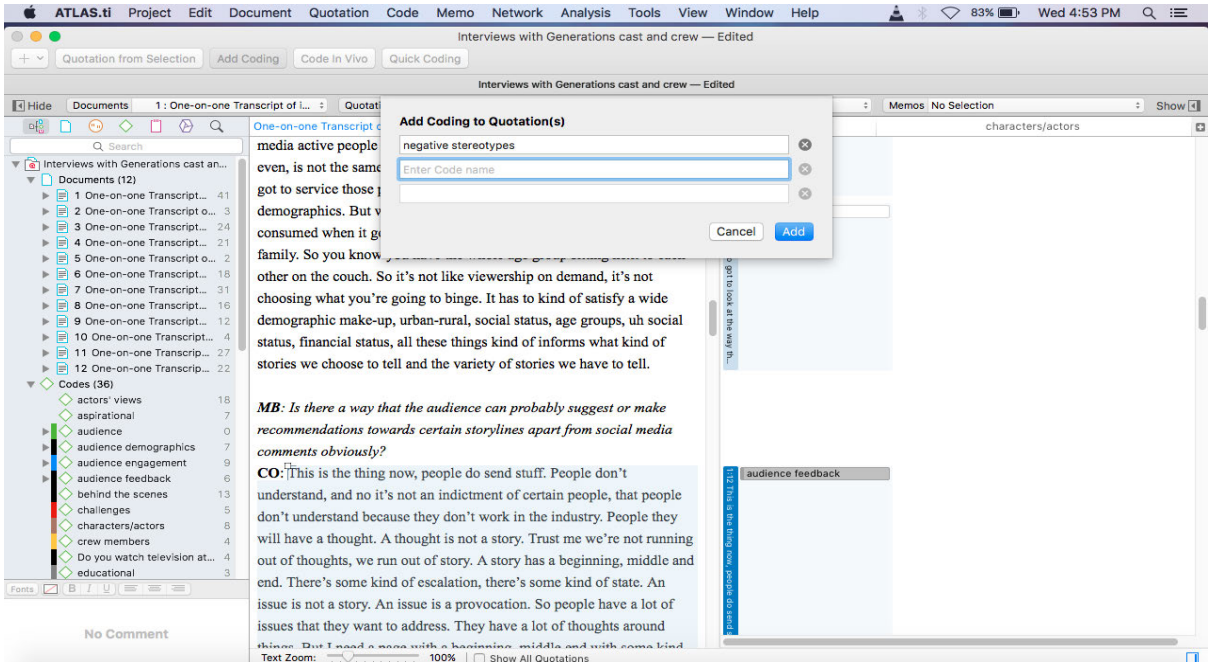


Figure 4.5 Screenshot of coding

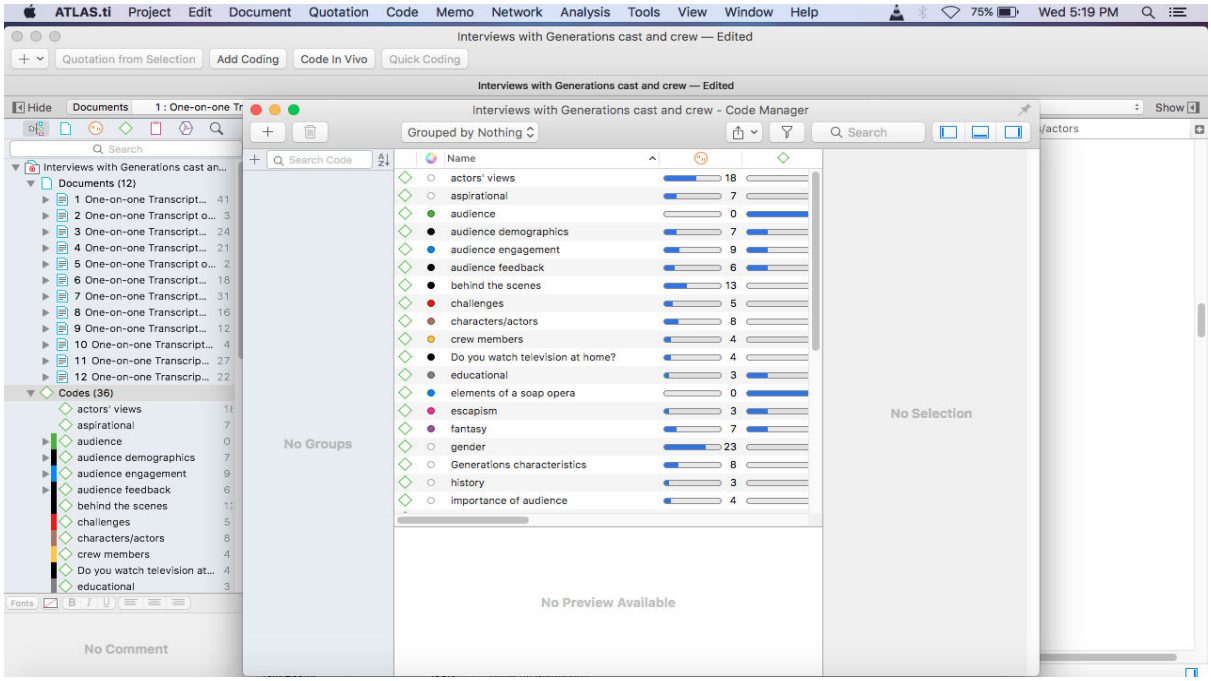


Figure 4.6 Screenshot displaying a code list as shown on Code Manager

Figure 4.6 shows the Code Manager, a window which displays a list of all codes which have been created and their frequency or usage in the data. For video episodes, I made notes of scenes that stood out owing to their direct linkage to my research project. Using Atlas.ti, I took snapshots of specific frames that spoke to the overall research questions; snapshots taken from scenes aided me to create quotations manually. Creating the list of quotations helped simplify the coding process because the list of quotations indicated points that were raised repeatedly through videos, focus groups and interviews. For videos, quotations were generated from scenes portraying stereotypes which emerged from the narrated script and visual texts. Using Microsoft Word, I drew two columns of stereotypes for each soap opera, which enabled me to group stereotypes into specific codes resulting in the emergence of themes. Themes were drawn from data obtained from video episodes, focus groups and interviews. From the themes I was able to develop Networks which enabled me to present my findings visually (see Figure 4.7).

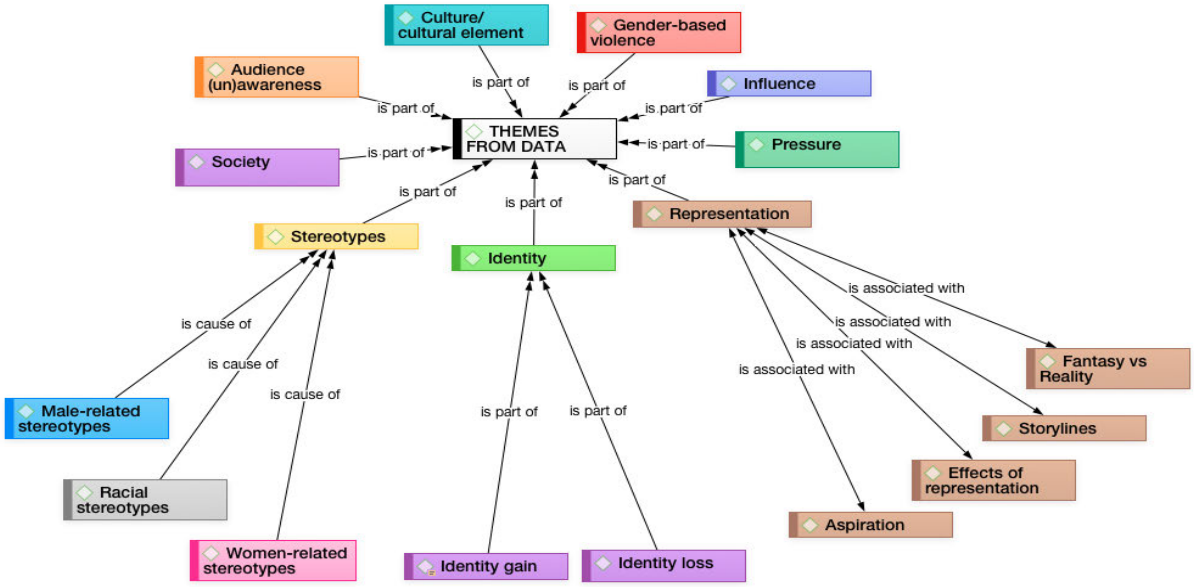


Figure 4.7 Visual diagram displaying a Network of codes

The software also enabled me to group codes by colours, which could have specific meaning or be applied randomly to each code. The latter was the case in Figure 4.7. The application of colours to codes gave an indication of the number of codes most prevalent from the data and enabled the display of colour-coded Networks. A Network is a visual display of code-to-code relationships/issues, and quote-to-quote relationships (as shown

in Figure 4.7). Visualisation is a key element in discovering connections between concepts, interpretation of findings, and communicates results effectively. The visual diagram showed the relationship between codes, quotations and documents, and pictures/snapshots. From the visual diagrams (also known as Networks), I was able to conduct an analysis of findings from the data.

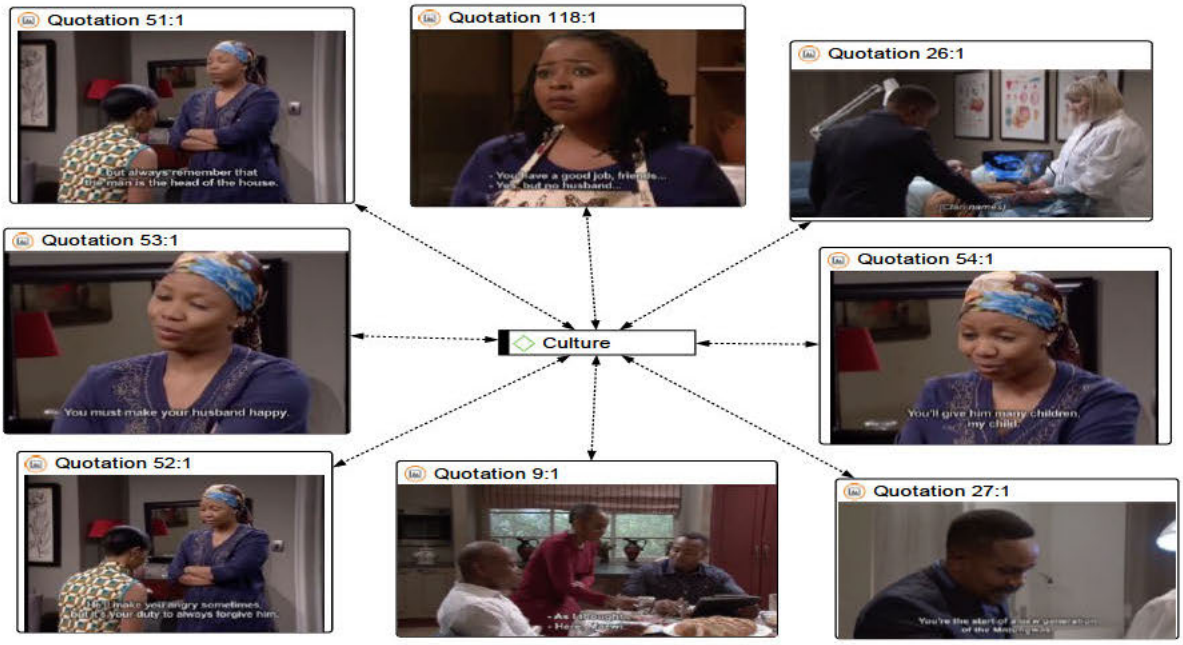


Figure 4.8 Network of frames depicting cultural stereotypes

Figure 4.8 shows snapshots from scenes containing stereotypes emerging from the video text. The reason for this was that I wanted to first get a sense of stereotypes that were emerging from the visual data and gauge my awareness of them as a researcher. This was also the reason why I started analysing data from the soap operas' video texts before analysing data from focus groups and interviews. I primarily used inductive coding by means of the software, as I was concerned, firstly, with thematic analysis and coding emerging from the data, looking mainly at what the data were saying and identifying patterns within the data. Next, using elements of discourse analysis, I looked less at what the data was saying and more on how it said what it was saying; in other words, how meanings were constructed and how they shaped and constructed the subjects' perception of the world.

4.8 Episodes used for focus group discussions and content analysis

Owing to the effects of soap opera texts over the years, viewers are unconsciously consuming content that does not challenge public opinion but rather, through stereotypes, promotes social inequality. According to Perse and Rubin (1988: 369), "people are differentially selective and goal-directed at different times: before, during, and after media exposure". Viewers' perceptions linked to gratification about a show before they watch determines their behaviour towards the show, and whether they will watch it or not. The extent to which viewers' gratification needs are met determines their length of exposure to the show. During exposure, parasocial interaction with media characters reflects the viewer's involvement and affection with the programme. Finally, viewers tend to rehash and discuss behaviour observed post-exposure to the programme, and this influences the basis of their own social learning. These three stages of viewing speak to cognitive expectations (motives) of, and audience activity (feelings, behaviour and attitude) while viewing a television programme, in this case soap opera. Reasons for watching soap operas include entertainment, to pass time, voyeurism (sexual pleasure by looking at pictures), escapism, perceived realism, and information.

Table 4.1 Soap opera episodes used for focus group discussions and content analysis

Generations The Legacy	Isidingo The Need
• Season 26 – episode 187 • Season 28 – episode 133 • Season 28 – episode 134 • Season 28 – episode 135 • Season 28 – episode 136 • Season 28 – episode 200 • Season 28 – episode 254	• Season 20 – episode 52 • Season 20 – episode 55 • Season 20 – episode 57 • Season 20 – episode 58 • Season 20 – episode 80 • Season 21 – episode 29 • Season 21 – episode 226 • Season 22 – episode 55

I used content analysis to extract meanings of texts within soap opera content contained in the selected video episodes (see Table 4.1). The videos were randomly selected from YouTube on the basis of them having full episodes. As the researcher I first watched all the episodes shown in Table 4.1 alone at my study corner to familiarise myself with the

data would be discussed by participants during their focus group discussions. It took me approximately 5 hours to view the 15 episodes. Although I made written notes during my own viewing experience, the notes did not influence any of the focus groups as the discussion was driven by participants and their responses. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018: 674) define content analysis as "the process of summarising and reporting written data – the main contents of data and their messages". Content analysis is a rigorous systematic set of procedures, "examination, replication, inference and verification of the contents of written data" (Flick 1998: 192). Holsti's (1969:14) definition is similar, as it states that content analysis is "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". Although different scholars provide different definitions of content analysis, the aim of qualitative content analysis is the same in each case: to shift from the original texts into the meaning underpinned within the text. Content analysis is inclusive but not limited to various media products such as television (visual) content.

I consulted the SABC mandate to get a sense of guidelines which could be used for content analysis. The mandate states that as a public service broadcaster, the SABC is mandated to:

- provide sound and television broadcasting services, whether by analogue or digital means, and to provide sound and television programmes of information, education and entertainment funded by advertisements, subscription, sponsorship, licence fees or any other means of finance;
- provide, in its public broadcasting services, radio and television programming that informs, educates and entertains;
- be responsive to audience needs, including the needs of the deaf and the blind and account on how to meet those needs;
- nurture South African talent and train people in production skills and carry out research and development for the benefit of audiences. (Source: http://www.sabc.co.za/wps/portal/SABC/SABCMANDATE)

4.9 Focus groups

Morgan (1988: 9) states that focus groups are "a form of group interview in which reliance is placed on the interaction within the group which discusses a topic supplied by the

researcher, yielding a collective rather than individual view". Focus groups save time and allow the group to create meaning among themselves. This method requires that participants interact with each other, and it is through this interaction that rich data emerges. Focus groups take place in a specific location with a set number of participants. The researcher decides beforehand the location and participant number. It is important that the researcher explains the research in detail and the purpose of the focus group discussion so that participants stay within the topic. Focus groups also enable the researcher to expand his/her views and knowledge of a topic as seen through the eyes of participants. It is for these reasons that I employed the method of focus groups as one of the three methods to collect data for this study. Participants seldom watch a soap opera in isolation. Those who do, later find themselves discussing its content with family and friends. This is why the method of focus groups was relevant for this study as it not only captures individual but also collective voices.

It was important that focus group discussions were conducted in a viewing space that simulated a safe environment for participants, enabling them to develop trust with each other and voice their opinions, thoughts and experiences. Allowing participants to sit in a circular setting allowed them to be part of a group and provided a sense of camaraderie. Focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed through the use of discourse analysis in Atlas.ti as I was interested not only in what the texts were saying but how meanings were communicated through texts. According to Chatman (1978: 19), "each narrative has two parts; a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and the discourse (*discours*), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated". Soap opera narratives also have two parts; the actual narrative where the story is being told through a chain of events, and characters bringing narratives to life using varied expressions against various set designs, which add flavour to the narrative being told. Herbert and Van Der Wege (2015: 408) state that "many narratives are told from one person's point of view".

Herbert and Van Der Wege (2015) identify four phenomena characteristic of narratives and narration:

1. *Experience*. People experience selective features of a story world almost as if they were actual, present experiences. These include the perception

of visual appearances, spatial relations, points of view, voices, and emotions.

2. *Depictive devices*. What people imagine is aided by depictive devices – direct quotations, gestures, stage sets, sound effects, and more. Unlike descriptions, these are physical analogues of the scenes they depict and are engineered to support people's imagination of those scenes.
3. *Participation*. Narrators design what they say to enable certain forms of imagination, but to succeed they rely on the willing cooperation of their audiences.
4. *Compartmentalization*. In participating in narratives, people distinguish their as-if experiences in the story world from their actual experiences in the real world – though not always without problems. (Herbert and Van Der Wege 2015: 415)

The phenomena characteristics of narratives and narration show that narratives are told not for mere understanding but to also transport viewers and enable them to experience that world. Soap opera narratives provide discourse[29] to be analysed by viewers. The intent of the discourse analysts is to understand and challenge social inequality. Those who produce soap operas have the social power to control not just texts and its context, but the effects a text has on viewers. Van Dijk (2015: 472) suggests that "controlling people's minds through such discourse is an indirect but fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony".

The focus groups were selected on the basis of access to participants, with thirty participants in all being selected, with six being in each focus group. While one was held in a township, the other five took place at DUT for ease of access. All participants were black; one group had male participants only, three groups consisted of females only, and while another group had three males and three females. Although males were not the primary focus of this study, I felt it was important to include them in some of the focus groups because soap opera viewership also consists of males. However, I had to be mindful that male participants did not exceed female participants as the primary focus of this study were female participants. I also made an intentional decision as a researcher to have one focus group that consisted of only male participants as I wanted to see if there were any differences in how males interpreted soap opera texts among themselves. This

[29] Van Dijk (2015:466) defines critical discourse analysis as "discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context".

focus group prompted me to conduct another focus group which included an equal representation of both male and female viewers. All groups provided interesting data which showed variations in how soap opera viewers interpret texts as individuals and as a collective and how stereotypes embedded within texts contribute to a viewer's construction and negotiation of her/his identity. All participants fell within the 18-50 age group. Each participant was recruited using the snowballing method. Guided by the research objectives and questions, each participant had to meet the specified characteristics of race, age, gender, geographic location, and soap opera viewership. However, more details on each network theme is provided under Chapter 5.

4.9.1 Focus Group One

This focus group was held at a residential location in Thornwood, Dassenhoek Township, in Mariannhill. Participants, selected using the snowballing effect, consisted of six black females aged between 18 to 39. The selection was based on location (i.e., a Township), viewing habits of participants, race and gender (i.e., Black female). After I had introduced myself and explained the purpose of the focus group discussion, participants watched video episodes from Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need. The discussion occurred after the viewing. Figures 4.9 and Figure 4.10 contain examples of networks of both male and female stereotypes discussed by Focus Group One.

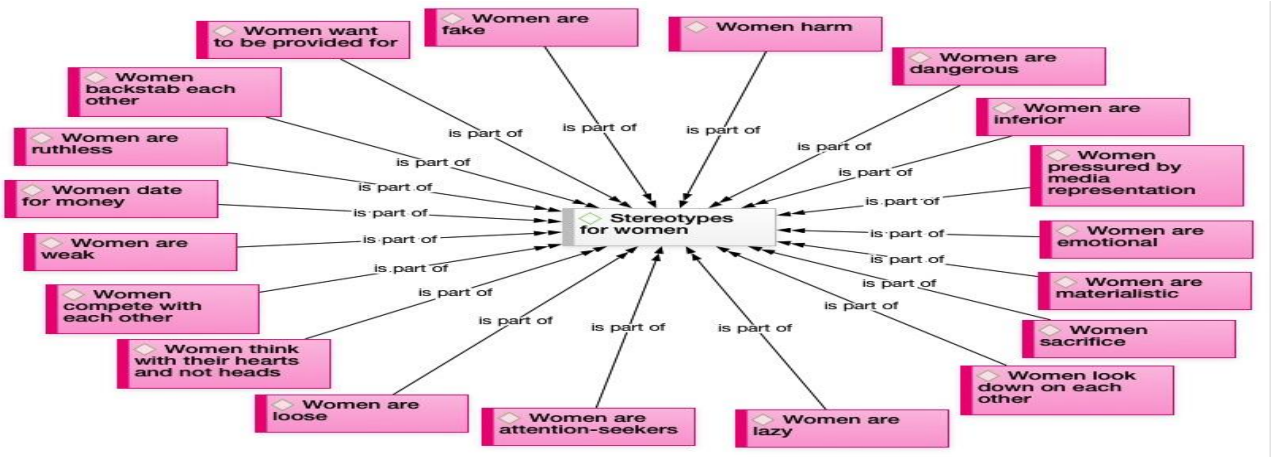


Figure 4.9 Negative stereotypes of women highlighted by Focus Group One

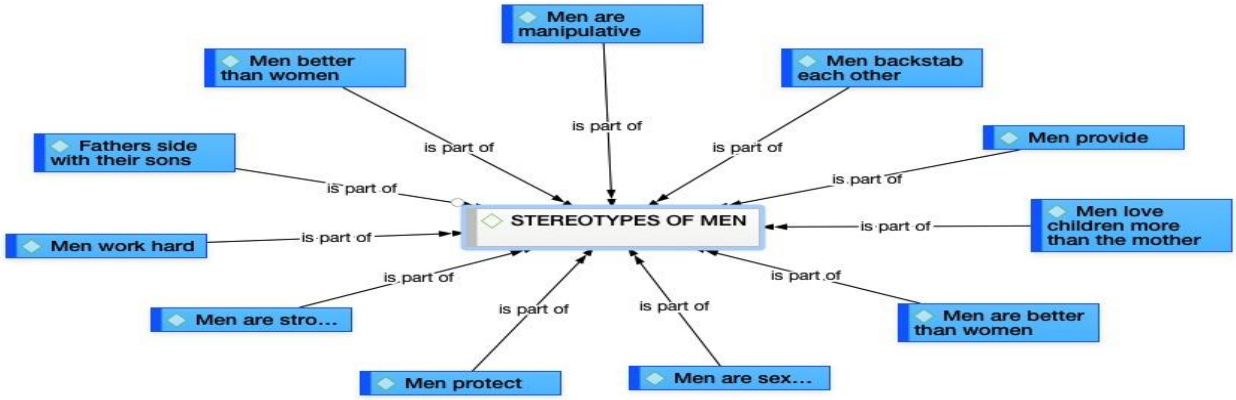
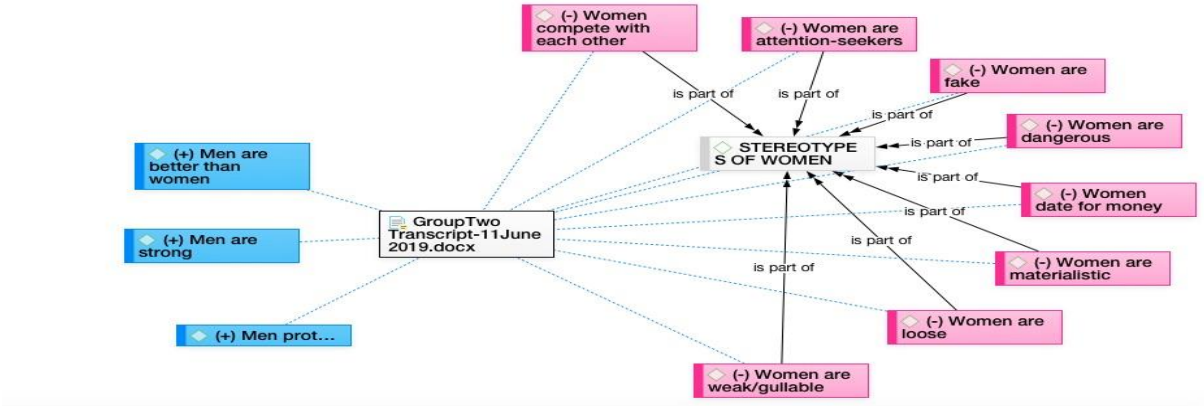


Figure 4.10 Stereotypes of men highlighted by Focus Group One

4.9.2 Focus Group Two

The second focus group was held at the Durban University of Technology's City Campus Library basement. Participants consisted of six black females aged between 18 to 39 who were selected using a non-probability sampling technique of convenience and snowballing sampling. After introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the session, participants watched video episodes from Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need. The discussion occurred after the viewing. Figure 4.11 is a network example of stereotypes pertaining to both men and women as identified by Focus Group Two.



4.11 Stereotypes of both men and women identified by Focus Group Two

4.9.3 Focus Group Three

The third focus group was held at the Durban University of Technology's City Campus Library basement. The group consisted of six black African male participants aged between 20 to 45. Although black men are not the focus of this study, it was important to incorporate their views in the study as they are also soap opera viewers. They watched videos from both soap operas and had a discussion after viewing the content. One of the unique features about this group is how all male participants were comfortable to discuss issues of identity with each other. During the discussion, they also shared their own experiences of what it means to be black men in South Africa and their views of how they are portrayed and stereotyped on soap operas. Focus Group Three identified stereotypes of men and women as shown in Figure 4.12.

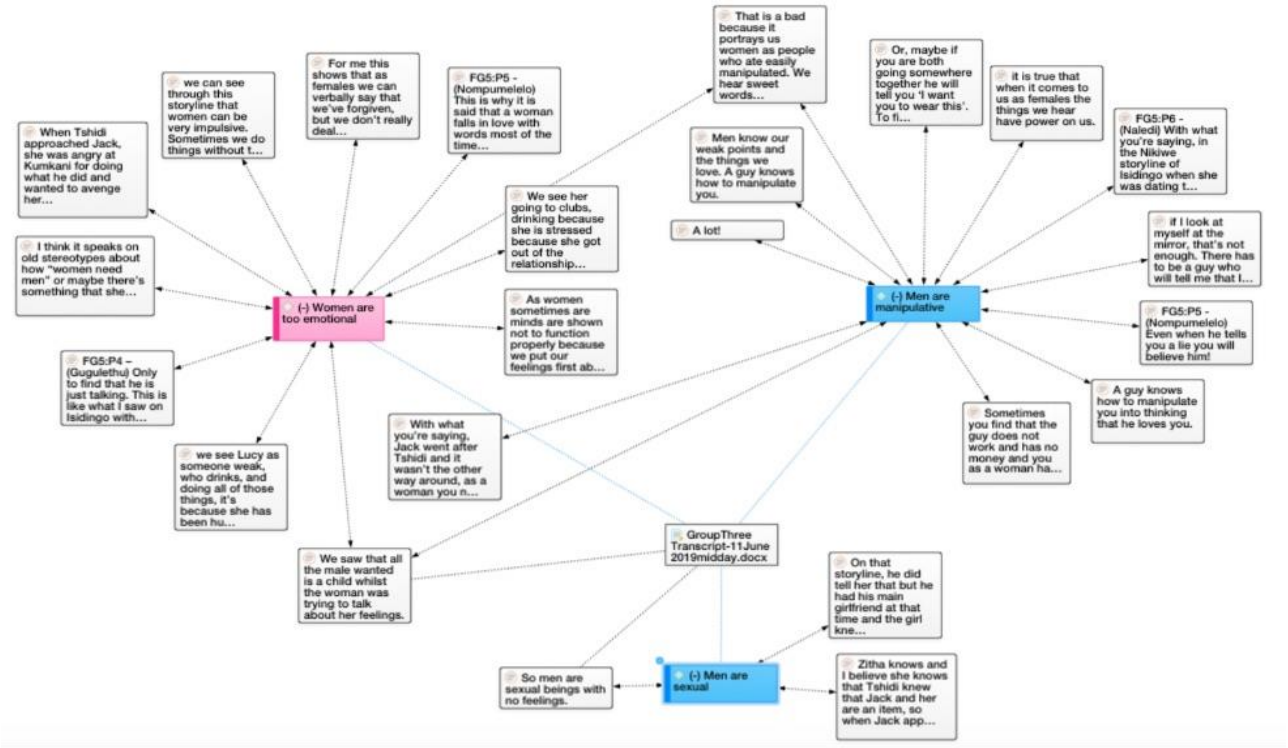


Figure 4.12 Stereotypes of both men and women as identified by Focus Group Three

4.9.4 Focus Group Four

The fourth focus group was held in one of the rooms upstairs the Durban University of Technology's City Campus library complex. Participants consisted of three males and three females aged between 24 to 30. One of the unique features of this group was that

participants could not wait until the end of the viewing session to engage in a discussion about soap opera content and their identity construction. Within minutes of viewing, participants stated that soap opera content is regressive and not progressive and commented on how soap opera content boxes viewers into thinking they can be only one version of themselves. They added that producers need to discern between what people want and what people or the viewers need without prioritising numbers in ratings. The group also raised concerns about how technology, in the form of television, is used to dilute black relationships and for black people not to get along with each other or wish each other any good. Figure 4.13 shows examples of stereotypes highlighting negative aspects of women as discussed by Focus Group Four.

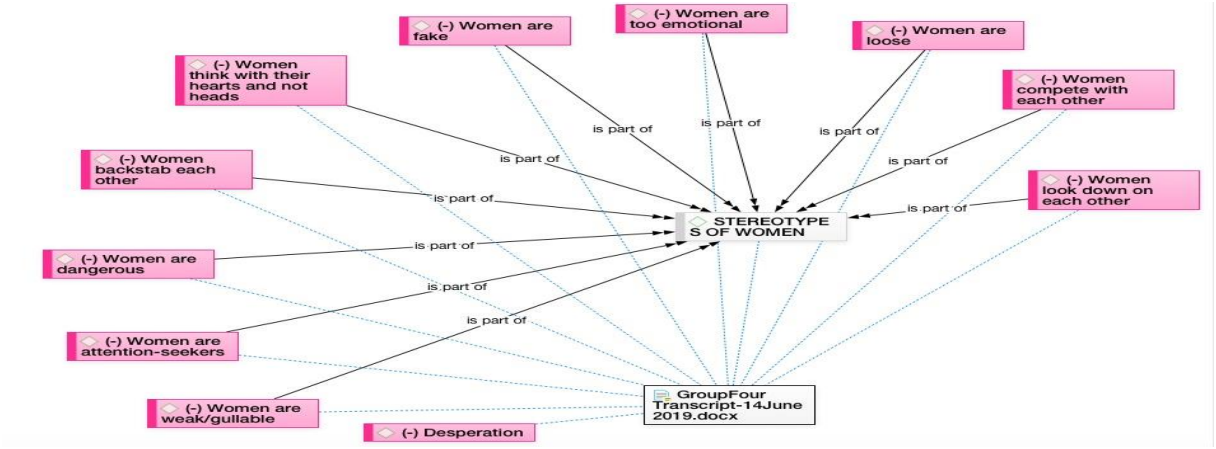


Figure 4.13 Stereotypes of negative aspects of women identified by Focus Group Four

4.9.5 Focus Group Five

The fifth focus group was held at the Durban University of Technology's City Campus and the participants were six black females. It took a few minutes for all participants to get comfortable with each other, similarly to the first and second focus groups. This was in contrast to Group Three participants, which consisted of all males, and who developed an immediate rapport with one another, and each participant was equally interested and engaged in sharing his opinion in the discussion. Focus Group Four participants, who were an equal representation of males and females, were vocal in their opinions on how the male and female gender is represented on soap operas and how that representation contributes to how they as individuals construct their identities. Stereotypes of both men

and women identified by Focus Group Five are shown in Figure 4.14.

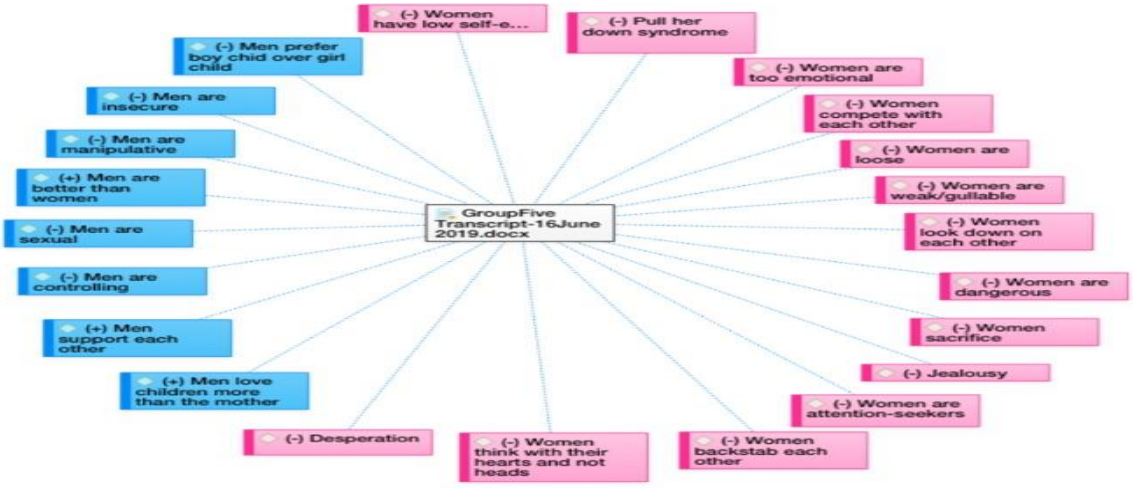


Figure 4.14 Stereotypes of both men and women identified by Focus Group Five

4.10 Conclusion

It can be seen in this chapter that one of the challenges of the media, in this case soap operas, is they are not a true reflection of society but are tainted with subjective lived histories of those who produce the image reflected on the mirror, that is, storylines. The blanket assumption is that viewers as mass audience are passive but research has shown this not necessarily to be the case (Hayward 1997; Meidasari 2015). Audience studies argue against the notion of passive viewers and have shown viewers to be in fact active in their viewing of media content (Wright 1978; Hearn 1989). The ability to interpret media texts situates viewers as active readers because they do something, that is, interpret, the media text. Through the use of the social identity theory, individuals, using their ethnic and cultural identity, have a tendency to categorise themselves (the self) based on their membership of the social group they belong to but still maintaining their individualistic attributes. The self is valued at group level and each viewer's identity is preconceived by his/her social situations while conforming to the group's norms and stereotypes. Thus, the group's identity affects individual behaviour. Lastly, the social representation theory illustrates an individual's behaviour within collective relationships shared with members of a community to which that individual belongs.

Data were collected through focus groups, one-on-one interviews with both crew and cast of Generations, and video episodes of both Generations and Isidingo randomly selected

from YouTube. These methods provided an insight into the pre-production processes of how soap opera content is constructed, what images are broadcast and how both actors and crew members produce content during production, and lastly, the viewers comprehension and interpretation of video text they consume and how that text contributes to their identity construction. Data were then analysed using content analysis for video episodes, and the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software enabled the coding of data: focus groups transcripts, one-on-one interviews with cast and crew members from Generations and video in episodes from both Generations and Isidingo. As will be shown in the next chapter, major themes included audience awareness, positive and negative stereotypes, misrepresentation and media influence on society. Elements of the parasocial interaction scale were evident in the participants' responses as they spoke about the relationships they had developed over the years with media characters. The next chapter provides an analysis of the results.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Before the chapter discusses the analysis of the research results, it first locates the analysis of the results from a framing and positioning framework to show how viewers establish a definition of a situation and how they produce the meaning of selves and identities for themselves and others in interaction. This chapter also includes sections of the main themes which emerged during discussions from focus groups. It further probes all themes that emerged from the data and provides a visual presentation of each theme using the Network method of the Atlas.ti software. The chapter concludes by linking themes to nation-building in society.

5.2 Framing and positioning

It is perhaps worthwhile to briefly discuss framing and positioning [30] ahead of the actual analysis process so as to establish how the viewers construct their social worlds (Gordon 2015: 324). Framing is not objective, as viewers frame a scene according to their social and cultural context of the world thereby providing an indication to their own identity. Positioning, on the other hand, enables the viewer to create his/her own identity and the identity of those they interact with. There are four processes which take place between production and media texts, namely, de-contextualisation, re-contextualisation, permutation and transformation, as shown by the first arrow in Figure 5.1. The same four processes also take place between the text and viewers (as indicated by the second arrow). Before viewers frame the soap opera text, they themselves are framed within a particular social and cultural context during the process of production by those who produce soap operas, as seen in Figure 5.1. When viewers decode/interpret the soap opera texts, they position themselves to the narrative bringing to those narratives their own "subjective lived histories through which we have learnt metaphors, characters, and plot" (Davies and Harre 1990: 52). When one positions the self, one also positions others. Positioning can be intentional and direct where the intended message is communicated to the receiver, or implied and indirect where the direct message is embedded or even hidden during communication, depending on the viewer's social and cultural context (Van Langenhoven

[30] According to Gordon (2015:324), framing refers to "how people establish definitions of a situation" while positioning addresses "the discursive production of selves, or how people create identities for themselves and others in interaction".

and Harre 1999: 22). Soap opera stereotypes contain both intentional and implied messages as their positioning of the viewer is dependent on where the message encoder frames and positions the viewer and where the viewer frames and positions herself/himself based on her/his social and cultural context and experience (as established in Figure 5.1).

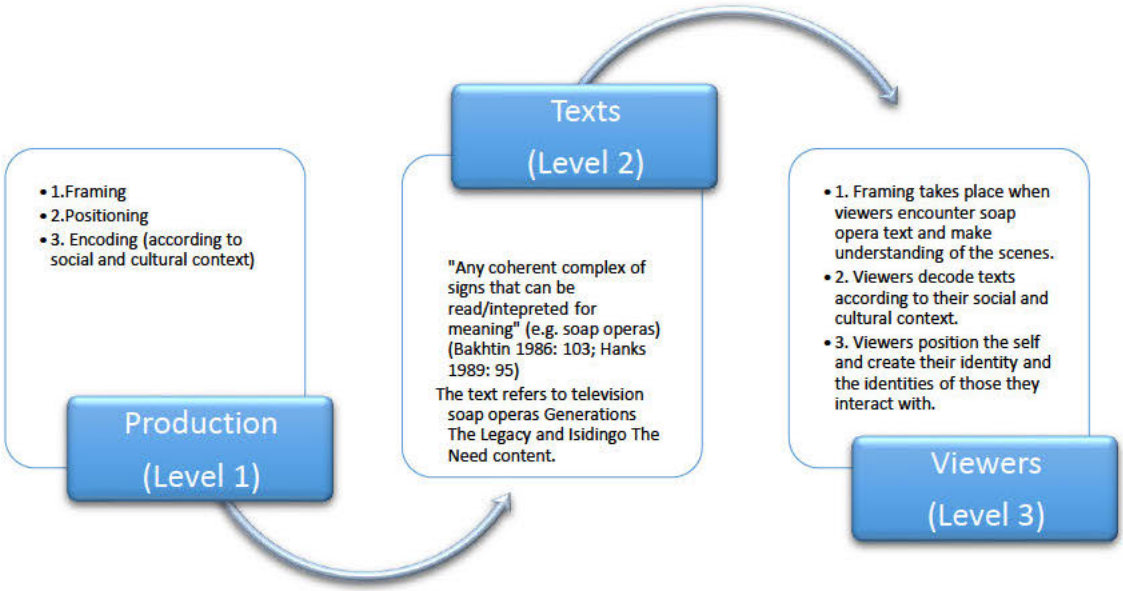


Figure 5.1 Developing from Stuart Hall's (1993) encoding and decoding process, this figure shows the intertextual connectivity between soap opera production and consumption (Bamberg 1997; Gordon 2015).

Figure 5.1 shows the connection between production, texts and viewers. Positioning itself has elements of intertextuality, as individuals (that is, producers and viewers) make reference to their experiences when positioning themselves and/or others. Some scholars identify three levels of positioning linked to identity construction (Talbot *et al.* 1996; Bamberg 1997; Van Langenhoven and Harre 1999). Citing Bamberg (1997), Gordon (2015: 332) states:

> Level 1 involves the positioning of characters vis-à-vis each other in the narrated events, or how the narrator positions himself or herself as a story character to other characters. Level 2 refers to the positioning of the narrator vis-à-vis his or her audience in the telling. Level 3 concerns the speaker's or writer's positioning of self as teller vis-à-vis self as character and in other ways that make more decontextualized claims about the self.

Positioning happens at multiple levels. With regard to soap opera storytelling, it can be seen that identity construction happens at both the production and consumption stages.

In the production stage, the production team positions their 'self' and others (in this case viewers) according to their own subjective lived histories. Scriptwriters and producers create soap opera content taking into account their own social and cultural context. If soap opera viewers are majority black African women, then there is a disjuncture in identity construction. This means that the viewer is consuming content and constructing his/her identity using material based on another's social and cultural context, that is, of different race, gender, and class.

Soap opera as a storytelling technique involves orders across all three levels, as seen in Figure 5.1. Content/texts/storylines are constructed in ways that involve mostly Level 2 (where scriptwriters and directors assume a position of superiority for themselves as narrators in relation to their viewers) and Level 1 (subjective lived histories of scriptwriters and directors are seen through how they position characters in relation to each other and how they position characters similarly to them in relation to other characters in the story). Level 3 is also evident in storylines where, if one takes a closer analysis, it can be assumed that production team members, through stereotypes, position themselves as storytellers in ways that make decontextualized claims about the self (in this case, the viewers and their identities). Framing and positioning is illustrated more in themes from focus group discussions, as discussed in the next section.

5.3 Analysis of themes from focus groups data

A Network representing various themes which emanated from the data is shown in Figure 5.2. It is then followed by an analysis of each theme based on content from Generations and Isidingo. Figure 5.2 shows themes emerging from the focus group data. The main themes are found within the circle at the top, that is, Audience (un) awareness, Culture, Gender-based violence, Influence, Pressure, Representation, Identity, Stereotypes, and Society. There were sub-themes that emerged from three themes, that is, male/women/racial stereotypes; identity loss/gain; fantasy vs reality, storylines, effects of representation, and aspiration, as shown at the bottom of the circle. From the themes shown in Figure 5.2 it can be deduced that both soap operas focused on personal relationships, work relationships, women having to choose between a career and family, the influence of culture, manipulation, being spiteful, gender inferiority and gender superiority, sexualism, emotional attachment, abuse of power, and loveless relationships.

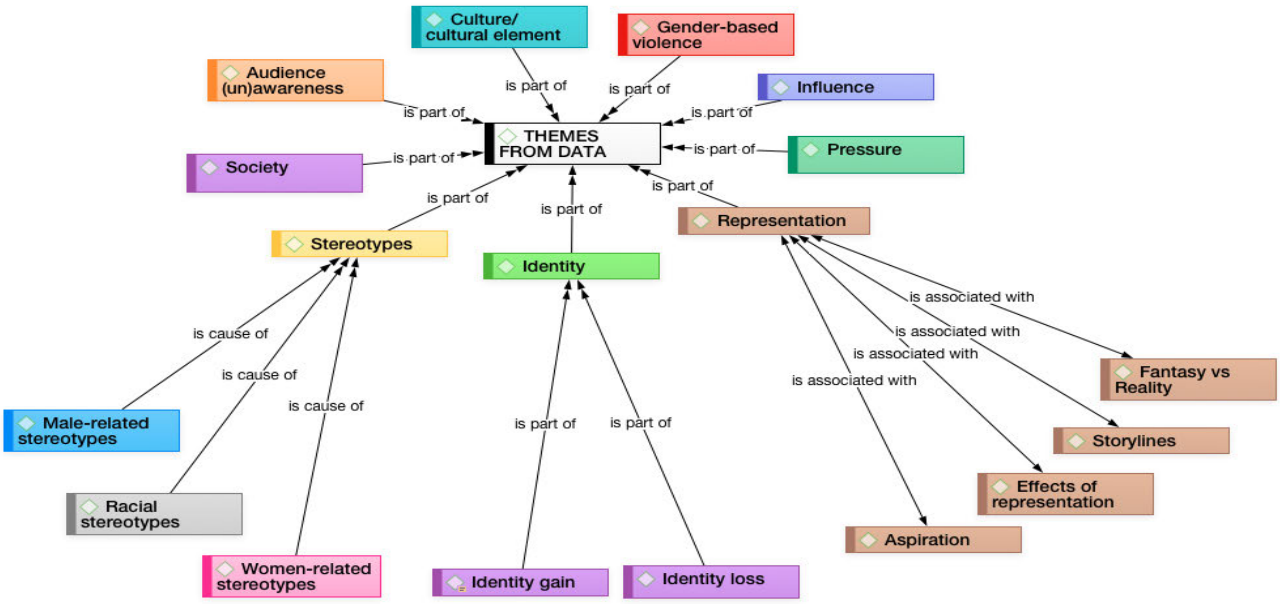


Figure 5.2 Themes emerging from the focus group data

Both Generations and Isidingo are business and family oriented. There were more stable love relationships in Generations compared to Isidingo. The latter's main focus was on economic development of characters as opposed to social development, as with Generations. Generations, however, showed how men could be emotionally detached in relationships and used women for sexual pleasures. Generations also highlighted how emotionally attached women were in relationships and at times, loveless relationships. Both soap operas showed how women could be spiteful towards each other when competing for dominance.

5.3.1 Participants' awareness of stereotypes in soap operas

Participants identified storylines related to their own experiences and explained how these had contributed to the construction, and at times destruction, of their own identities. They raised concerns about how highlighting the number of flaws women have in the form of stereotypes using the entertainment element does not empower women; instead, constant viewing of stereotypes by women disempowers them. Participants added that negative stereotypes of women fuel gender inequality in society. Most of the participants were outspoken, and at times, towards the end of the discussion, would talk over each other owing to their enthusiasm. They discussed how

they saw themselves in some of the characters and how their own lives paralleled some of the storylines. It could be seen through focus group discussions that viewers, in their active state, question the authenticity of soap opera content. Active viewers have the ability to decipher fact from fiction as they question the genuineness of storylines.

"We need to recognise what we are feeding to the nation because so many people watch this and it's not only this channel that shows this and it's not only this soapie that's bad." [Nonkanyiso - female]

"But they exist because we consume them! And we don't just consume them in our homes and that's that, but the following day we discuss these shows with our friends, family and colleagues, through WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook." [Gugu - female]

"We're complaining just for the sake of complaining, but then we feed into these things. We actually make them exist." [Gugu - female]

Viewers were aware that their demand for soap opera viewership, enabled their demand. Although they were unhappy with the content, they continued to watch the genre. It was also apparent that soap operas broadcasting stereotypes through storylines evoked the body insecurities of viewers. Participants emphasized they did not want to see flawless and unattainable lifestyles disguised as entertainment through characters. Viewers at times struggled to relate to media characters who portrayed flawless body types as this was far from reality.

"The sad thing is that the more we watch and consume these things like soap operas, we consume them and see how imperfect our physical appearance is." [Ntokozo - female]

"For me personally, my view is that it makes me love me less." [Londeka - female]

"It makes me, unfortunately as disgusting as this sounds, it makes me not want to be a minority. I think of myself as a white girl, if it makes me sleep better at night because it's too much of a burden being in this skin that I'm in." [Londeka - female]

"The portrayal of black people in both of the soapies it's very Western. Maybe it's because it's a modern soap opera, but they portray black people in a very white light from my perspective." [Themba - male]

It can be deduced that soap opera content through stereotypes at times oppressed viewers by subtly, through stereotypes, insinuating that they were not smart enough, not beautiful enough, not strong enough, not light skinned enough, not rich enough, not loved enough,

and not happy enough. Soap opera content has not evolved at a similar pace as lives of its viewers, as content is either stuck in the past atrocities of the country or portraying images of the West. Viewers questioned such misrepresentation and the agenda behind it as depicted in comments from focus group participants shown in Figure 5.3.

Participants acknowledged the amount of power they relinquished to soap opera producers and scriptwriters. Viewers also acknowledged that they themselves actually held the power in changing content and contributing to storylines which contain stereotypes which will positively impact the construction of their identities:

"You have people creating and packing the product which are soap operas and this product is shown through the television medium. You then have us the consumers of this product and we complain about this product that "oh but they are showing black men like this, black females like this" but actually, we are the ones who are increasing their ratings. Without us, there wouldn't be ratings and the shows wouldn't exist. We ourselves are feeding into this beast." [Sibongile - female]

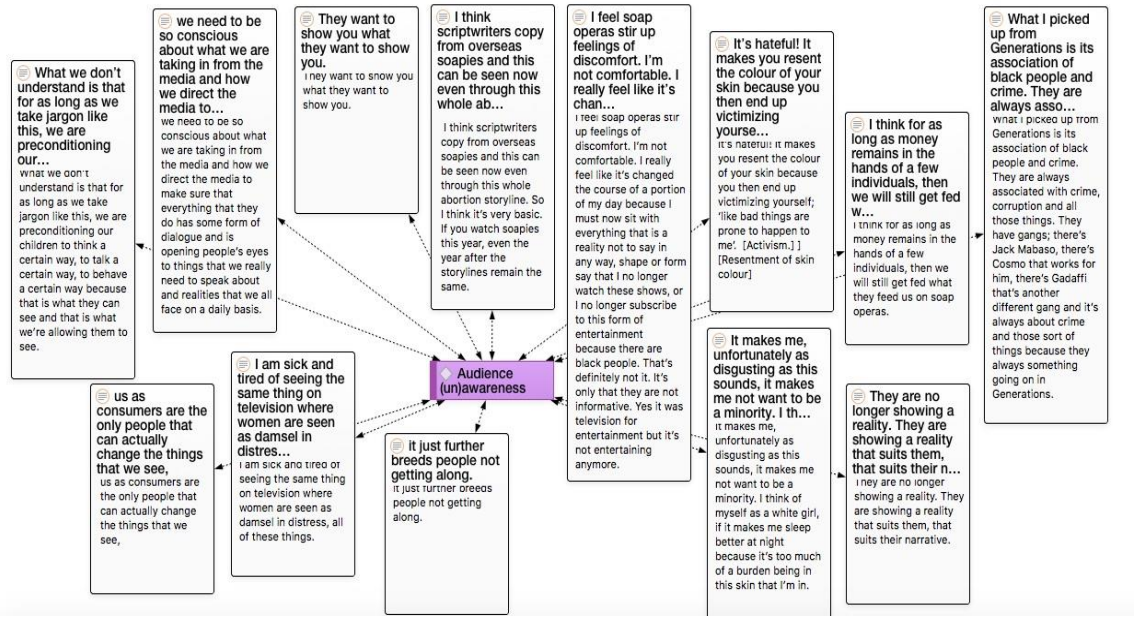


Figure 5.3 Participants' comments on audience awareness

5.3.2 Participants' perceptions of cultural stereotypes in soap operas

Culture in the South African context is embedded in the country's history. Culture is multifaceted (Browne 2006), and is not just how people live and behave, but it forms the

core element of their identity. Television, through its representations and system of ideas, present culture as shared meanings, custom, habits, beliefs and knowledge acceptable regardless of how culture places more value on the male gender over the female gender:

"Like we're showing all these things that are really unbelievable about these people. So we're so much detached from the truth on what we show on our televisions but also we do not understand that maybe it's a historical part that we're really missing the point because we never understood the question of how cultural imperialists have used culture to be able to colonise worlds and countries all over the world but using culture as a weapon, to be able to feed us with their cultural beliefs and everything else and then we start to look like them and then we do all of those things. That's why I'm saying that historically we do not even understand the question of cultural imperialists and how powerful culture is because we haven't identified the use of it as a people you know." [Sibusiso - male]

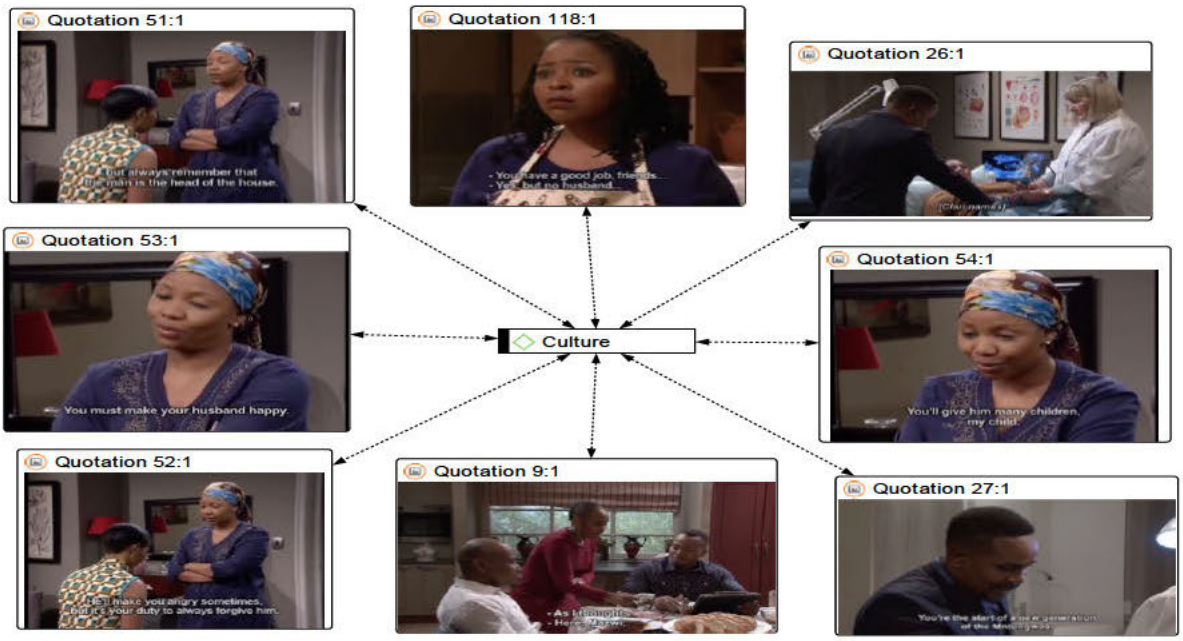


Figure 5.4 Frames portraying cultural stereotypes

Figure 5.4 is an illustration of frames showing some cultural stereotypes. The lady with a head wrap is Simphiwe's mother, who gives her marriage advice. Her mother, being a Zulu wife herself, is wearing a head wrap, which is a sign showing respect for her in-laws. She instructs Simphiwe to ensure the happiness of her husband, and says that, even if he makes her angry sometime, it is her duty to forgive and please him. Simphiwe is told to 'give him many children' because that is her role and duty as his wife.

Traditional gender roles suppress a woman's voice in a relationship or marriage. A woman no longer exists as herself but her identity is stripped off as her husband's needs take precedence. Such cultural stereotypes are embedded in quite a number of storylines in soap operas perpetuating the misconception that a black woman is incomplete without a husband, as seen in Getty's storyline. Among black communities residing in the township, married women are held at a higher stature in comparison to those who are not married, even if the unmarried woman is highly educated and lives an independent life satisfying to her.

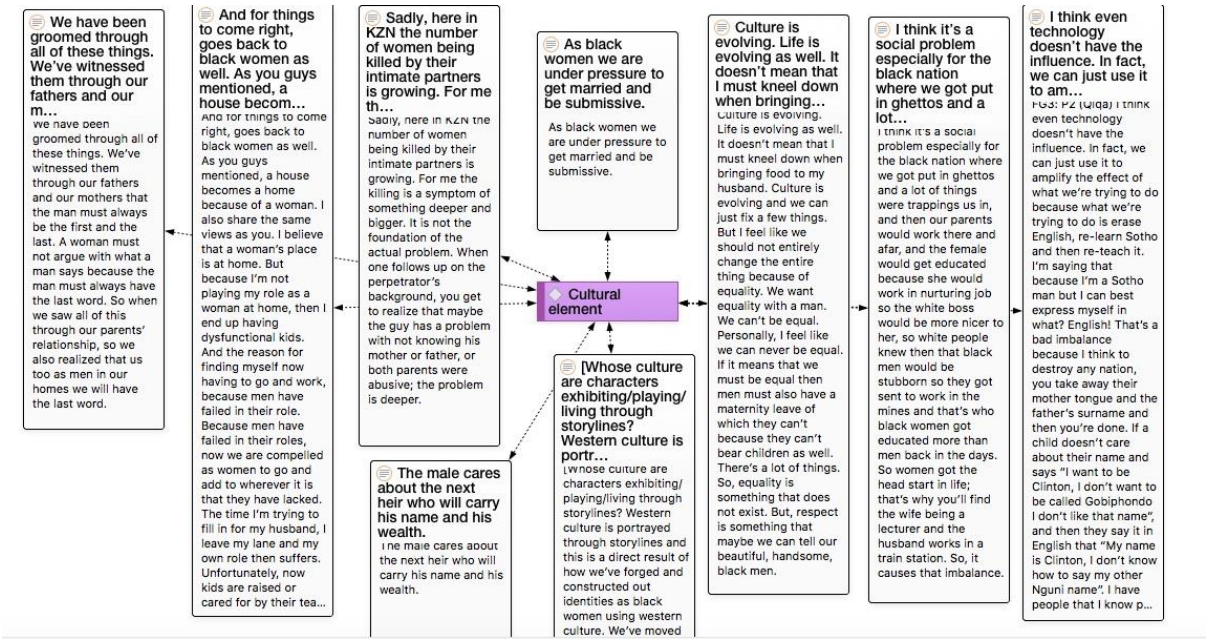


Figure 5.5 Participants' comments on elements of culture

Culture in the context of black people forms a significant part of their lives as it portrays unity, togetherness and community, as seen in comments shown in Figure 5.5. Culture touches on one's behaviour, language, geographical location, clothing, food, music, religion and is a way of life. The production team and viewers of soap operas are diverse in culture and their interpretation of their social world. Representations convey cultural stereotypes through storylines that contribute to how a viewer sees herself/himself and her/his treatment of those around them. It is important that those who produce soap operas are representative of various cultures that form part of the many identities of viewers. Misunderstanding can easily lead to misrepresentation seen through the various cultural stereotypes embedded in storylines and portrayed by characters on screen:

"So, if I watch an actor out of anger hit a table like this [bangs on a table] out of anger, that gesture we don't have as black people. We don't have that gesture. It's a loaned gesture and it's contemporary to what we have learned and seen; it might be an influence of television, it might be an influence of movies, but it's a foreign gesture and we (as black people) have taken it. So, in most of the time you will see what we are watching comfortably a total misrepresentation in terms of simple things in terms of gesture, language, expressions, and all of that comfortably watching ourselves away from ourselves." [Sibusiso - male]

South African townships have community members from various cultures. Others alter their original cultures based on geographical location, their social groups and their social positions within that group. This relates to the social identity theory where individuals construct their identities, change their behaviour and perceptions of their social world based on the social and cultural context of their in-group. Soap operas by default contain culture(s) in their storylines and afford viewers an opportunity to learn about different cultures and their practices. This is seen through represented inclusion of traditional weddings and practices, multilingual characters, and the promotion of intercultural relationships. However, participants expressed their dissatisfaction at how culture is at times misrepresented:

"Whose culture are characters exhibiting/playing/living through storylines? Western culture is portrayed through storylines, and this is a direct result of how we've forged and constructed our identities as black women using western culture. We've moved away from who we are, shun away from our own culture, and adopted that of the west." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

"As s black woman who grows up from a culture and I know they say that culture also contributes, in this system, but for a woman to be in the kitchen cooking and looking after the kids, it has never been a burden. It is who we are. That's our place, the kitchen and it's not oppression. It's our place." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

"But now due to western culture, we're questioning why we are in the kitchen whereas we should be in the boardroom. I'm not saying we should not be in the boardroom but I'm saying it's as though it's oppression if you're in the kitchen, but you can be in both places including the boardroom." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

Active viewers are conscious of the evolvement of culture. For example, the traditional gender role of a woman placed her in the kitchen. But the evolution of culture now sees women portrayed as chief executive officers and chairing boardrooms in corporate spaces. Such representations offer female viewers alternative lifestyles and opportunities available to both men and women in society where at times the wife works in the corporate

industry earning a higher salary than her husband. This, however, does not eliminate the gender gap in salaries of the challenges resulting in gender inequality and tensions caused by power-relations in households.

"I think it's a social problem especially for the black nation where we got put in ghettos and a lot of things were trapping us in, and then our parents would work there and afar, and the female would get educated because she would work in nurturing jobs so the white boss would be more – 'nicer' to her. So white people knew then that black men would be stubborn, so they got sent to work in the mines and that's who black women got educated more than men back in the days. So, women got the head start in life; that's why you'll find the wife being a lecturer and the husband works in a train station. So, it causes that imbalance." [Themba - male]

If the production team behind soap operas consists of majority males, storylines are representative of their views and beliefs and emphasise masculine behaviour portrayed through characters. The danger of this, as we have learnt in the previous sections and chapters, is that soap opera content is a reality of some viewers as they learn from what they see on Generations and Isidingo and eventually, through prosocial relationships, emulate traits and actions of their favourite actors. But not all cultural stereotypes are seen as negative:

"I know it sounds stereotypically, but in a black home a girl fetches the water from the river. It might look like a heavy chore but when a girl fetches a twenty-litre bucket of water from the river to her home, she has learnt a whole lot of things on that trip alone. Firstly, when she bumps into her friends and she's on her way to the river and they call out for her to go and play, she will tell them no because she has to go and fetch water. Already she's learnt to say no to her friends and to stay on the mission. She gets there by the river and puts water in the bucket and fills it. Then she puts it on her head, and she walks a certain distance home. In that distance, she's learning posture, the way you carry yourself as a girl. She learns all of these things on her own. She doesn't slouch because that is unattractive, and she learns this on her own. Imagine a beautiful girl who slouches. This has got nothing to do with her bosom or her breasts. You need to assert yourself because nobody else will. So, those are the kinds of things that she has learnt because you won't be able to carry twenty litres of water with a bad back structure. A princess she carries a pile of books, it's a lighter job." [Themba - male]

Themba's comment is a lived experience for some viewers where an individual conducts a basic chore like fetching water from the river, has the ability to draw life-long lessons from it. Such individuals are usually not exposed to an alternative life other than what they know. But soap operas provide such viewers with possibilities and alternatives. It during this time that viewers draw from lived experiences and lessons learnt (that is,

discipline, focus, posture) while doing chores like fetching water from the river. The portrayal of culture as a progressive tool has the potential of developing viewers as individuals and ultimately changing opinions of society. In a province like KwaZulu-Natal where culture is still the foundation of many people's lives, it is important how viewers particularly from this province are educated on how culture can play a crucial role in the development of the country as a whole without it sacrificing and suppressing the one gender in an effort to uplift the other. Statistics South Africa show growth in the number of domestic violence and femicide cases reported and it is crucial that soap operas show power relations in a positive light within relationships. It is unjust when soap operas mirror society out of context through storylines that have minimal background. Viewers ought to aspire to be strong individuals, have good families, careers and be good role models in society because soap operas show them steps of attaining such possibilities. Mirroring negative stereotypes yields negatives results in society.

5.3.3 Portrayal of gender-based violence in soap operas

Gender-based violence is any form of violence exerted onto a person based on his/her gender whereas femicide is violence exerted by an intimate partner. Both forms of violence can at times result to death, usually of the female partner. South Africa as a country struggles with growing numbers of both forms of violence, amongst others. Some soap opera viewers are victims or survivors of gender-based violence and/or femicide, or they know of a friend or family member who is a victim or survivor of such violence:

"We get into relationships with people not knowing that they are bombs waiting to explode due to their past experiences and emotional hurts. You might do a minor insignificant mistake in a relationship and that person explodes on you. This is why we see a lot of growing reports of femicide and other domestic abuse related incidents." [Sukoluhle - female]

"We see and read reports of women being burnt alive by their partners and you ask yourself where all of that anger came from. I doubt that as the person dating him at that time, you're the course of such anger. He probably has a grudge towards his mother or both parents or he grew up witnessing one parent, usually the mother, being abused by the other who is the father." [Sukoluhle - female]

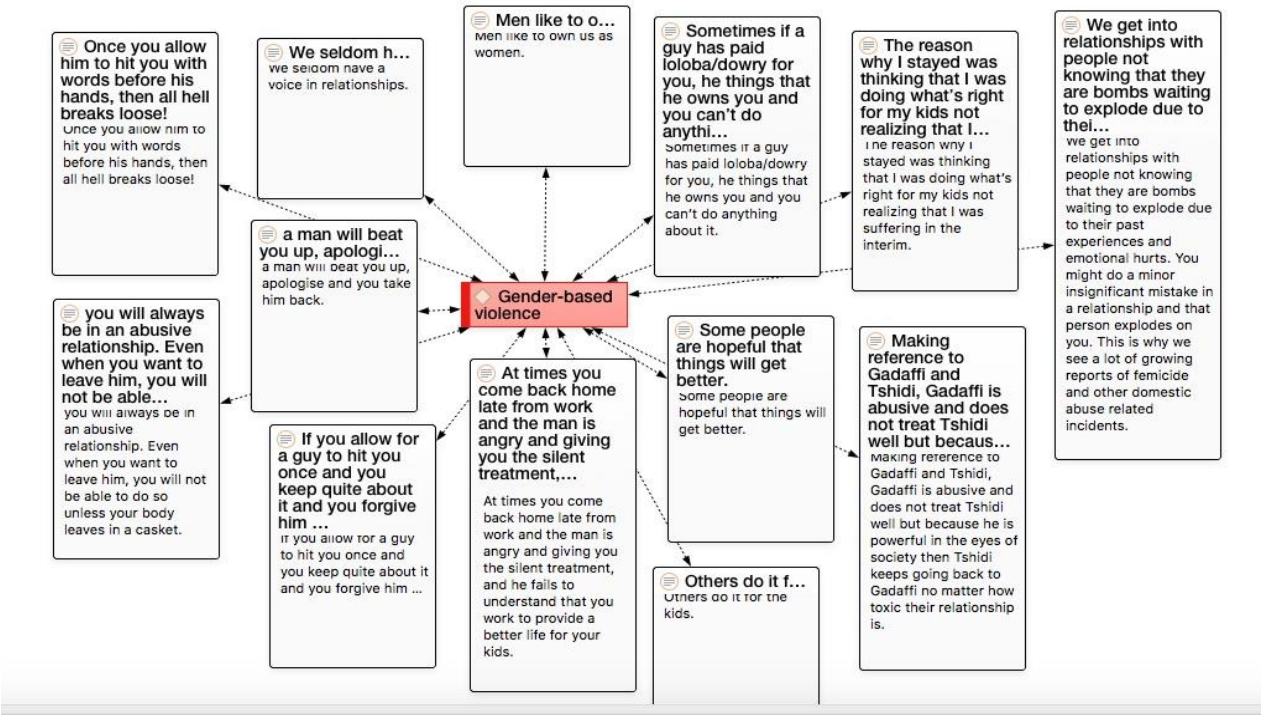


Figure 5.6 Participants' comments on gender-based violence

Stereotypes surrounding gender-based violence impact on the viewers' social and cultural experiences, as shown in Figure 5.6. When gender-based violence is shown through storylines, it ought to empower those currently in abusive relationships to gather enough strength to report the violence and leave the perpetrator. Soap opera storylines ought to inform younger viewers that abuse is unacceptable. It ought to educate perpetrators that their masculinity ought to be used for the betterment of those less physically strong. Only then will Isidingo be valuable to its viewers and Generations leave a legacy to its viewers.

To raise awareness on violence, soap operas include storylines reflective of gender-based violence. One such examples is witnessed in Isidingo where Nikiwe Sibeko, a CEO of a mining company and daughter of a mining mogul, is verbally, emotionally and physically abused by con-artist pastor Gabriel Mothusi, her boyfriend and later fiancé. The storyline showed an insecure black man in a relationship with a career-driven woman. She earned more money than him and that presumably took away from his masculinity. Instead of embracing his fiancé's achievements and supporting her at home, Gabriel was threatened by Nikiwe. He realised Nikiwe's weakness of emotional neglect and how public perceptions mattered to her. Gabriel was emotionally manipulative towards Nikiwe to such an extent that he lowered her self-esteem, made her change her dress code and isolated her social life. Nikiwe nursed Gabriel's insecurities and obliged to his demands.

However, he still abused her physically. Instead of telling her friends the truth and reporting Gabriel to police, Nikiwe pretended that their relationship was good. Eventually, Gabriel became too overbearing and accused her of cheating, an accusation that led to him beating her until she was unconscious. When he realised the depth and consequences of his violent behaviour, Gabriel ran away and hid at his ex-wife's apartment. Even after learning of what he had done, his ex-wife shielded him but eventually he was caught. This storyline graphically portrayed gender-based violence. Viewers who watched the related scenes sympathised with Nikiwe and developed hatred towards the Gabriel character, even outside of the television, as stated by some participants in focus groups. Participants expressed that the acting, sound effect, make-up and emotional impact were on a par and all elements highlighted the gruesomeness of gender-based violence. However, like many storylines, the ending disappointed viewers as Gabriel was not arrested but did manage to get away with the crime. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction to the incomplete ending to a storyline that conveys one of the main social ills which is a lived experience to some viewers, attesting to the injustices women face regarding the legal system.

"I feel like it further on speaks on how there is a lot of things saying that women need to stay strong in bad toxic relationships and things will get better if they just keep trying, when it could be "okay he is not treating me okay so I'm going to leave him." [Nonkanyiso - female]

Women become victims of both a patriarchal and unjust system. This is usually the case for many other related storylines. Continuing with Isidingo, the character of Katlego Sibeko was in an abusive marriage with Lincoln Sibeko. In one of their fights over Katlego's infidelity, she was pushed by Lincoln resulting in her head accidentally hitting the edge of a table. She fell unconscious. Thinking that she was dead, Lincoln panicked, wrapped her in a bedding sheet, drove to one of his unused mines and threw her body into an old mine shaft bringing the end to her storyline. Lincoln later confessed to her murder. However, the justice system favoured Lincoln and failed Katlego. Lincoln goes to jail briefly but later comes of jail and emerges more powerful than before he was imprisoned.

In Generations, the character Tshidi was in a verbally - turned physically - abusive marriage with Kumkani Phakade. Tshidi was determined to see her marriage work and continued to love her husband who also went unpunished for abusing her. Another

storyline on gender-based violence in Isidingo involved the characters of Wendy and Simon. Wendy worked as a waiter at a local restaurant. Simon arrived at Horizon Deep (a make-believe location where Isidingo takes place) to work as a geologist at Sibeko Gold mining. It was love at first sight between himself and Wendy. But Simon suffered from an extreme case of obsessive-compulsive disorder which Wendy was unaware of at first. The storyline ended with Wendy bruised and battered and Simon dead.

Both the Katlego and Wendy storylines expose gender-based violence prevalent in South Africa and although the storylines are fiction, they are a lived-reality to some f the viewers. Participants admitted that these storylines were traumatic on viewers who had previously experienced abuse or know of someone who is or has been a victim of such form of abuse. The representation of such storylines raises awareness on the plight of gender-based violence and create a discourse to be interrogated by society as television programmes "serve as a cultural forum for social discourse about aspects of the represented reality in these programmes" (Pitout 2018: 409). The downside to such storylines, however, is that they can be very graphic at times and explicit visuals have the ability to make some viewers re-live traumatic experiences from their past (and sometimes present) without the availability of immediate counselling services. Even though helpline numbers are shown at the end of some episodes during credits, there is no guarantee that viewers will contact the number. Some of the actors emphasised the importance of realistic storylines that offer solutions and not only portray stereotyped problems that disseminate and exacerbate social ills. Participant also cautioned against the normalisation and trivialisation of gender-based violence as mere entertainment in soap operas, as these represent the viewers' traumatic experiences.

"I think that also in terms of script it's vital to have closure for victims and even perpetrators, that at the end of the day if you're being abused like Sphe as Skhumbuzo is abusing Sphe, what help is available and how do you stand up for yourself and get legal help to distance your Skhumbuzo from you or does she go for counselling, because there are many people that have gone through what Sphe is going through; it automatically goes to people's minds to say 'I've once also encountered such a tragedy'. And then that opens up old wounds and emotions. It's important to say that if you've encountered such, you get counselling, you go to the police station, and these are possible routes of help to follow. So that's our responsibility as storytellers. It's very vital, it's very vital." [Nhlanhla - male]

5.3.4 Soap operas and participants' gain and/or loss of identity

Participants also pointed to how black people are trying to run away from themselves as though running away from their shadows: *"...something which is an impossibility and of stupidity"*. [Sihle - male]

Participants stated that this results in the loss of blackness and identity among black people. They stated that the question is not on whether black characters are black enough, but on how soap operas invite their viewers to make sense of their ethnicity and identity. The hypothesis is that identity is who you are, and culture is what you are. For example, who I am is black and what I am is Zulu. I cannot change the fact that I am 'black' but I can choose whether or not to identify with the Zulu nation. Identity may be socially constructed, as that of a black person, but it is possible that black viewers may not identify with traditional and cultural practices of black people:

"I think we're faking our identity a lot. We fake it until we actually believe it. We will force a situation in such a way that we fake it until we make it." [Londiwe - female]

Mass media provide space for the construction of new identities and negotiation of old identities and culture. An individual's identity is constructed through culture which evolves and is socially constructed. Identity includes but is not limited to race, culture, language, values, beliefs, religion, traditional practices and social norms. Similarly to culture, identity is not static but changes over time depending on one's social and cultural context in life:

"A lot of things are socially constructed. It's as though there are building blocks; you place one on top of the other and then we see the bigger picture. And we all believe that picture to be what it is constructed to be. It's the same thing when it comes to the media and soap operas; all these episodes that we watch these are building blocks. They are painting a particular picture, a picture that other people believe that 'oh so a woman is like this'." [Nonhle - female]

Viewers identify with characters due to shared social and cultural norms; the colour of their skin, how they portray themselves, the language they speak and even the storylines they exhibit. Stereotypes contained in soap operas therefore have a direct impact on how viewers see themselves as who they are. Stereotypes either enhance the viewer's identity, referred to as identity gain, or diminish the viewer's identity, known as identity loss. These are shown in the Figure 5.7 comments as discussed during focus groups.

Figure 5.7 displays participants' views expressed during focus group discussions on the subject around identity gain and identity loss. It can be inferred that viewers' identities are crucial when viewers decode and interpret soap opera messages. Parasocial relationships shared by viewers toward media characters make it easy for stereotypes interwoven into storylines to either enhance or diminish the identities of viewers.

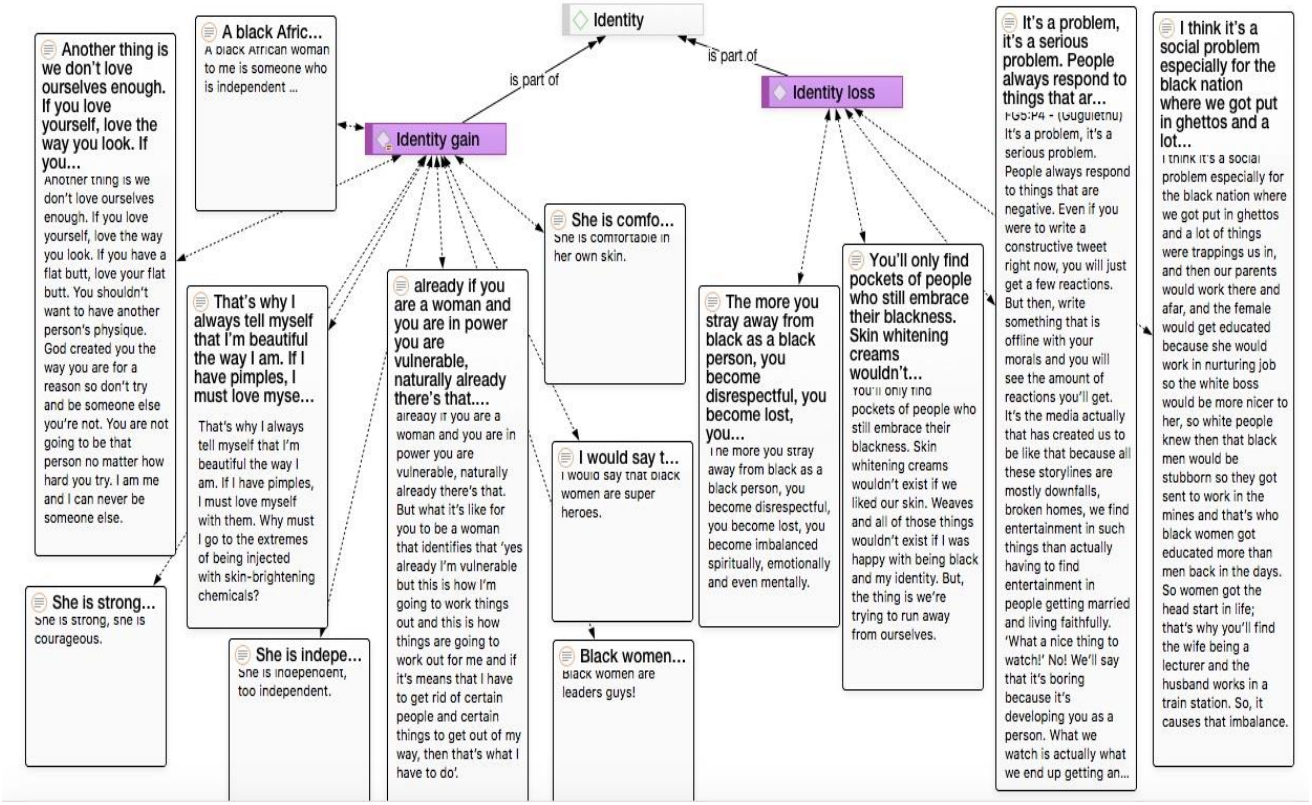


Figure 5.7 Participants' comments on identity loss and/or identity gain

"For me personally, my view is that it makes me love me less." [Londeka - female]

"It's just regressive, it's not progressive. And as a person who can differentiate between something that develops me and that which oppresses me, I just made a personal choice to not watch things that will box me into thinking that I can only exist as one version of a person." [Londeka - female]

"*So, it stirs up a lot of feelings of discomfort because it makes me realise that as 'woke' as I think I am, there's an entire Generation behind and even in front of me that are still struggling with identifying who they are in the evolving South Africa."* [Londeka - female]

"The portrayal of black people in both of the soapies it's very Western. Maybe it's because it's a modern soap opera, but they portray black people in a very white light from my perspective." [Themba - male]

Comments from participants bear testament that active viewers are aware of the negative effects of soap operas towards their identity. Thus, unrealistic characters that have perfect body physiques, flawless skin, fake hair and relationship or marital problems foster feelings of resentment on viewers about their own identity. Such elements instil the notion that they are not valued enough and therefore their identity is slanted.

"It makes me, unfortunately as disgusting as this sounds, it makes me not want to be a minority. I think of myself as a white girl, if it makes me sleep better at night because it's too much of a burden being in this skin that I'm in." [Londeka - female]

Some participants pointed to their struggle to relate with some characters questioning:

"Whose culture are characters exhibiting/playing/living through storylines? Western culture is portrayed through storylines, and this is a direct result of how we've forged and constructed out identities as black women using western culture. We've moved away from who we are, shun away from our own culture, and adopted that of the west." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

Because participants said that at times they struggled to identify with some characters, they alluded to the possibility of the scriptwriters and directors' own identities influencing the creation and celebration of negative stereotypes through storylines.

"Going back to soap operas we need to question and ask ourselves who are the writers? It's mostly white people and it's white men and as a white person who are you to tell me my identity as a black person who lives in the township, and you've never even been there yet you tell me through the storyline that this is how my life ought to be like." [Zakhele - male]

"That's why I question why I watch tv and watch someone else make me through something that does not even empower me? If it does not develop you and how you think and how you become as a person, then why are you investing so much time in it?" [Sinenhlanhla - female]

Participants agreed that it is not only content that matters, but all those responsible in its creation and production also have a responsibility towards the development, empowerment and growth of soap opera viewers. Hence, during some of the focus group

discussions containing younger viewers, they expressed that they are determined to enter into media spaces and have control of their own narratives by writing media content based on their own lived experiences and not experiences perceived by another gender or race:

"We're fixing it, I'm just saying. We're going into content; we're going to write the content; we're going to direct the movies; we're going to shoot it; we're going to write it; shoot it and we're going to create everything from scratch … We need to de-objectify and rebuild." [Themba - male]

Viewers long to see soap opera storylines that portray them in a positive light and give them a reason to aspire to be better individuals. They, especially black women, are aware of characters omitted in soap operas, intentionally or otherwise, which could help them construct positive identities of themselves and contribute to their empowerment in society.

"For me, a black woman is someone who is strong, knows what she wants, is not swayed by any circumstance. Stand your ground as a woman and know what you want and be unique. Being unique means that you do not want to be like another person. You love who you are and what you were born with, like we mentioned. You speak your mind and at times it only dawns on you later what you've said." [Thabile - female]

"To me back in the days, no offense to slim-bodied people, a black woman was also associated with someone voluptuous; full figured, big belly, extra fat, all of those things were black, like a black woman. Do you understand? Even our own hair. You could withstand anything. If somebody said that you had a scar on your face, there's no need to cover it up because it is you. You are confident in who you are and how… as you can see, this is me and I don't have to cover up so that you can validate me or agree with me. To me, that is a black woman. I feel like most of the time when we identify a black woman, I know there's this big English word that talks of a patriarchal society, I'm not saying it's not there but I'm a person who doesn't believe much in it." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

"There's this word submissive and we really misuse it. To me submissive is not oppression. To me submissive means a woman who knows her place. If I refer to her place, I don't mean for the woman to be a doormat but a woman who is respectful." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

5.3.5 Influence of soap opera media images on participants

Constant viewing of media images, in this case soap operas, is influential (West 2018). According to Wood (1994: 231) media are the most pervasive platform which influences how men and women are viewed as they are "woven throughout our daily lives, media insinuate their messages into our consciousness at every turn". When a viewer watches

a soap opera, they involuntarily engage, whether positively or negatively, with its content. They can identify with it (Cohen 2001), are deeply immersed or transported through storylines (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000), or be emotionally invested (Van Monsjou and Mar 2018) into a character or fictional couple through relating his/her own lived experiences with that of what they see. The identification of viewers and their immersion into storylines easily blurs fiction from reality: *"So there are people who have that perception that whatever we do on television it's actually real."* [Zinzi - female]

Viewers are influenced by the semiotic gestures of characters, the effects of the lighting positioning, emotions evoked by certain sounds, visual onscreen colours, camera angles, the setting, wardrobe, makeup, characters portraying certain scenes and the actual storylines. Intentional stereotypes interwoven into storylines play directly into the minds of viewers and how they comprehend and interpret, and at times misinterpret, messages encoded through stereotypes in storylines. Media influence is achieved through stereotypes. Some of the dangers of stereotypes in storylines is that they do not only remain on-screen, but they transcend into the lives of viewers and become part of their reality and lived experiences off screen.

"As the audience we are encouraged to be in relationships that are falling apart, abusive and non-progressive. This is all normalized in the storylines we consume on a daily basis and portrayed by characters that we idolize. In other words, if the character I idolize tolerates a certain type of relationship, why wouldn't I do the same? After all I'm living my life through them, and they are living theirs through mine." [Londiwe - female]

"I don't appreciate shows like these because a lot of people that watch these shows actually portray what's going on in these shows. They don't actually think for themselves. They don't think that this is a show. So, when a Zulu man or a cultural man watches another man on tv acting a certain way who is also a Zulu man, they want to do the same thing in their home (they take on the lives of characters they admire)." [Ntuthuko - male]

Comments shown in Figure 5.8 are views expressed by focus group participants on the influence of soap opera stereotypes embedded within narratives and storylines. The influence is said to be mostly negative as opposed to positive and encouraging individual growth and viewers' self-esteem: *"Generations and Isidingo it's hateful. It speaks and it breeds a culture where we don't like ourselves as black people."* [Londeka - female]

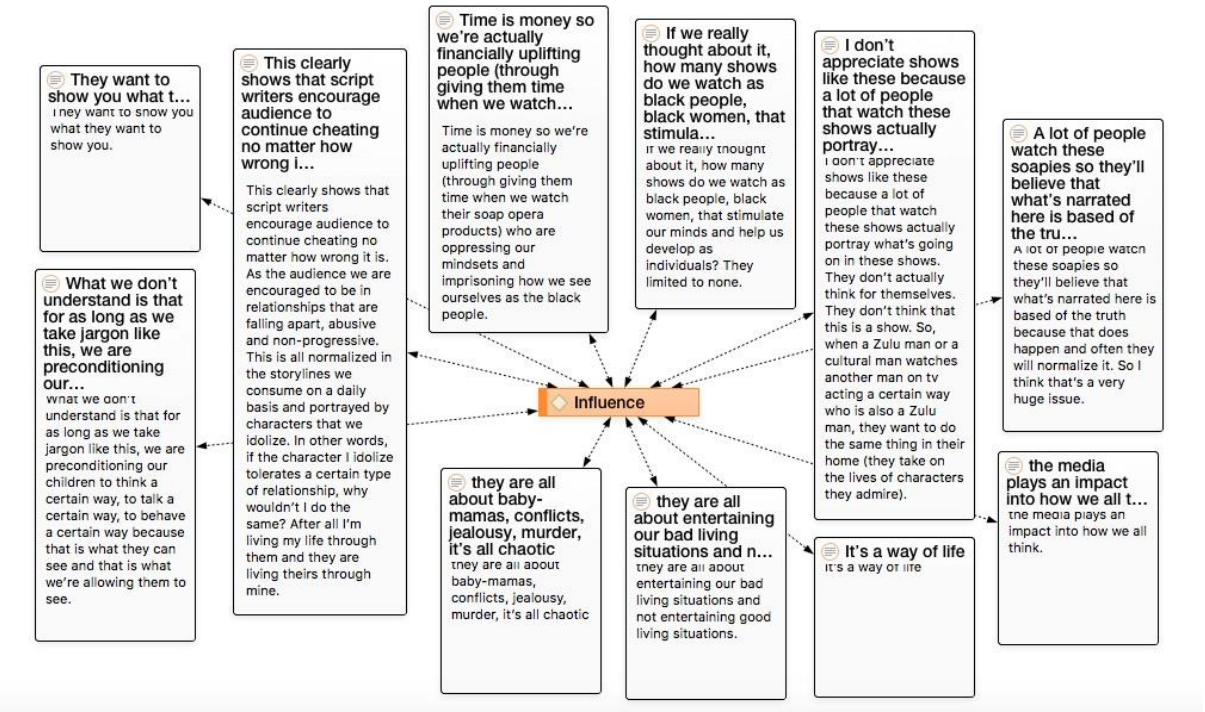


Figure 5.8 Participants' comments on the influence of soap opera texts

Participants admitted that in an individual setting, it can be hard for a viewer to notice stereotypes woven into soap opera storylines. However, in a group setup where viewers understand that they have to speak about the text and interrogate media content, it becomes easier for them to realise and ultimately question what they are consuming, how they consume it, and the amount of time spent consuming that content, as witnessed during focus group discussions:

"There has to be something that we're getting from the thirty minutes of watching these shows. Some people jump from one soap opera to the next and before they realize it, they've spent hours and hours of their time-consuming various soap operas. There has to be something that grows you as a black woman or black person, something that will empower you so you can one day give back to the community. Unfortunately, there's nothing. It's oppression guys! And you're not realizing it. It's O-PPRE-SION!" [Sinenhlanhla - female]

5.3.6 Pressure exerted by soap opera stereotypes on participants

Pressure comes from soap operas, viewer-against-viewer and some is self-inflicted. Pressure from stereotypes in soap opera storylines varies. This may include how black women see themselves, construct their identities through unrealistic characters seen on screen, how black men are always misrepresented as criminals and dead-beat fathers in

soap operas, the normalisation of meaningless sex, and how the family institution is broken and absence of parents is normalised. Stereotypes add to the already existing pressure that black women and men are dealt with in society. Black women, for example, have to work twice as hard to prove themselves, and that they are capable and deserving in society due to the colour of their skin and their gender. Black men are pressured to prove that they are not dangerous beings, are not criminals and do qualify for equal opportunities to their counterparts from other race groups: *"As the audience, if we see black men as people who are full of anger, violence and who have a problem when a female is financially stable than he is, where does it come from?"* [Zakhele - male]

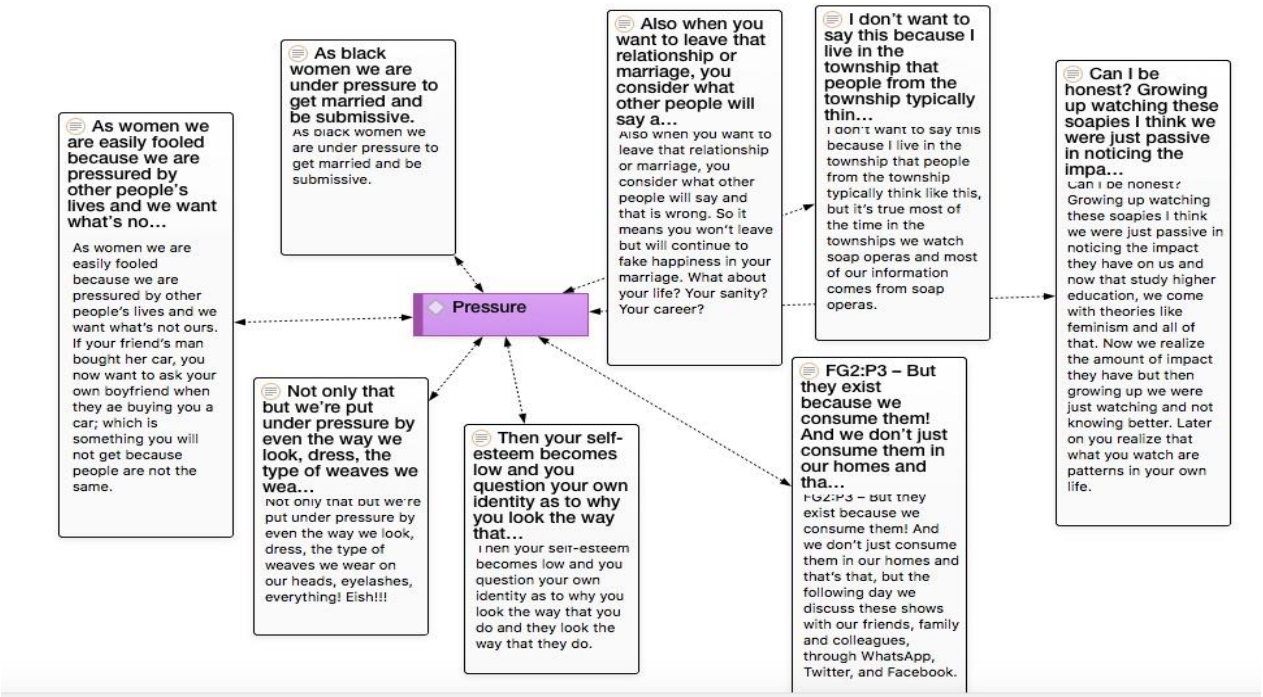


Figure 5.9 Participants' comments on pressure exhibited by stereotypes contained in soap opera storylines

Comments shown in Figure 5.9 suggest that viewers want assurance that their mental and emotional well-being are valued by the soap opera production team, notwithstanding their time spent viewing the soap opera product. Unlike in the corporate world, where marketability is the bottom line, producers of media content have a social responsibility to their viewers and the impact and effects the media text have on them. Through content, viewers feel pressured to live up to their idolised characters. Participants stated that post soap opera viewing, they have to face their reality which is materially different from the lives of characters. Therefore, they feel pressured to keep up to the lives of characters.

The pressure can be both positive and negative. Positive pressure is that which encourages viewers to work harder and develop their lives. Negative pressure on the other hand is that which sees viewers, like soap opera characters, prioritise material gain and would do whatever it takes to have their way.

5.3.7 The (mis)representation of black women and men on soap operas

Focus groups identified more negative stereotypes of women as compared to positive stereotypes of men. Identifying stereotypes by participants was in line with active viewership, comprehension and interpretation of texts. Using an interpretivist approach in framing this study, it was evident that the varying in number of stereotypes of men and women was indicative of the skewed conundrum of unrealistic storylines that seemed to foster gender inequality and disempowerment of women in society. Wood (1994) argues that women are underrepresented (symbolising the misconception of their insignificance in society), portrayed in stereotypical images (justifying the objectification of women), and media depict traditional gender roles which normalise the oppression and suppression of women in society giving prominence to male characters. Through giving prominence to one gender over the other, media misrepresents proportions of men and women in society thereby sustaining socially endorsed views of patriarchy. The representation of black women in the media in general has long been a contested issue. Although the media provides a platform for women across all races to be heard and seen, black women are represented as a minority on and off screen:

"When they actually do use women and try to portray them as powerful, it's never like a good clean powerful black woman. It has to start somewhere where she went wrong or an association with crime. It's unlike white people where you find a white person having started a clean business and now they are powerful and respected." [Gugu - female]

"Black women are portrayed like for them to be successful and you've had a rough background, then you need to be with a man who is powerful in a sense that he must be a well-known thug or whatnot." [Sijabulile - female]

When discussing the representation of black women, participants acknowledged the effects of being misrepresented through fantasy storylines of soap operas which do not promote their uniqueness and individual beauty as black women (see Figure 5.10).

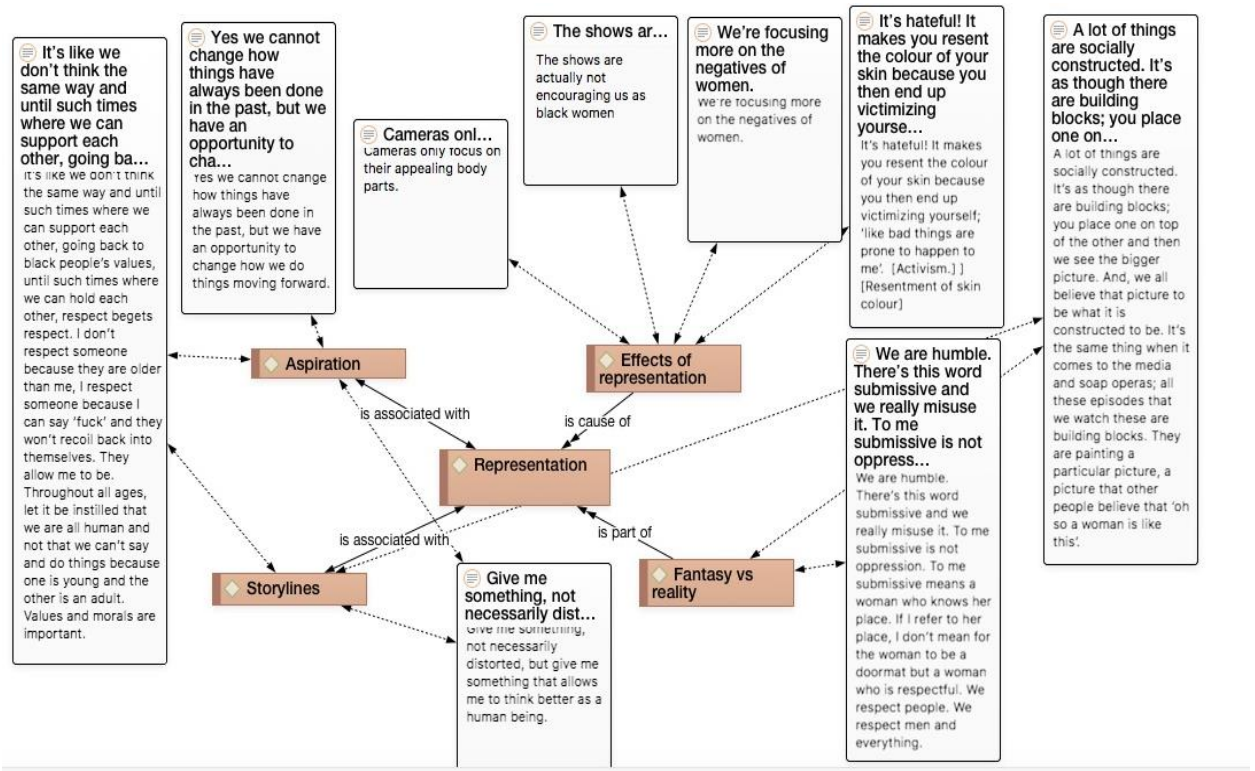


Figure 5.10 Participants' comments the effects of representation

Participants revealed that the media portrays black women as 'white' black women. The subtle yet obvious stereotypes contained in soap opera storylines insinuate the need for black women to be a better version of 'black', the white version of black. For example, black women characters on soap operas seldom have natural hair. Those who have it, hide it beneath straightened long weaves and wigs; these are usually brown, blonde, grey and sometimes black. Ross (2017: 8) views this as "deliberate and rather than accidental devices which contribute to their subordination through privileging 'whiteness' as the ultimate goal". Currently, there is not one black lead soap opera female character who is dark in complexion and embraces her natural curly or kinky black hair:

"The media actually is very cunning in making us the audience question how we look as if we're never too beautiful and highlights all our physical shortfalls." [Senamile - female]

"To tell you the truth there are a selected few characters who don't have perfect legs but what cameraman and directors do is seldom show their legs if they aren't wearing pants. The focus is always on their upper bodies where the body is visually capturing and attractive." [Londiwe - female]

"What we don't understand is that for as long as we take jargon like this, we are preconditioning our children to think a certain way, to talk a certain way, to behave a

certain way because that is what they can see and that is what we're allowing them to see." [Dumisani - male]

"It's now a bad habit that you come back from a place of oppression having to watch oppression again on the screens." [Londeka - female]

What is shown as entertainment is an alternative reality to millions of viewers, an alternative that is encoded using racial stereotypes which translate into a truth to some viewers. As Ross (2017: 12) states, "there is more to life for minority ethnic groups than their engagement with a black-as-victim or black-as problem discourse". Ross encourages a "fair reflection of all their complex diversity, not simply exchanging negative with positive frames but replacing both with a framework of reality". Therefore, it is imperative that media content is regulated and does not misrepresent other people's reality with non-existence characters and fictional reality. Accurate representation on soap opera storylines will ensure viewer empowerment and individual development.

5.3.8 Male, female and racial stereotypes

This study defines a stereotype[31] as a false impression that other people formulate about a particular group based on their own ideas and assumptions of that group. Their treatment of this group is dependent on the stereotype(s) they have on them. One of the dangers of stereotyping is that the encoder presents them as a true reflection which then convinces the receiver to formulate an inaccurate impression and assumption about a particular group or individual. The treatment towards that individual is stereotypically determined. As one of the participants stated in the focus group discussion, stereotypes are like: *"... an invisible line which is so visible!"* [Zakhele - male]. Figure 5.11 shows participants' comments on stereotypes in soap opera storylines. Their overall representation shows men as better than women, contributing to toxic masculinity and gender inequality.

[31] According to the Heinemann English Dictionary, a stereotype is "a person or thing considered to represent a set or conventional type". The Oxford Dictionary describes it as "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing". The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines a stereotype as "something conforming to a fixed or general pattern especially: a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment". And finally, the Collins Dictionary states that "if someone is stereotyped as something, people form a fixed general idea or image of them, so that it is assumed that they will behave in a particular way". It further states that a stereotype in sociology is "a set of inaccurate, simplistic generalizations about a group that allows others to categorize them and treat them accordingly".

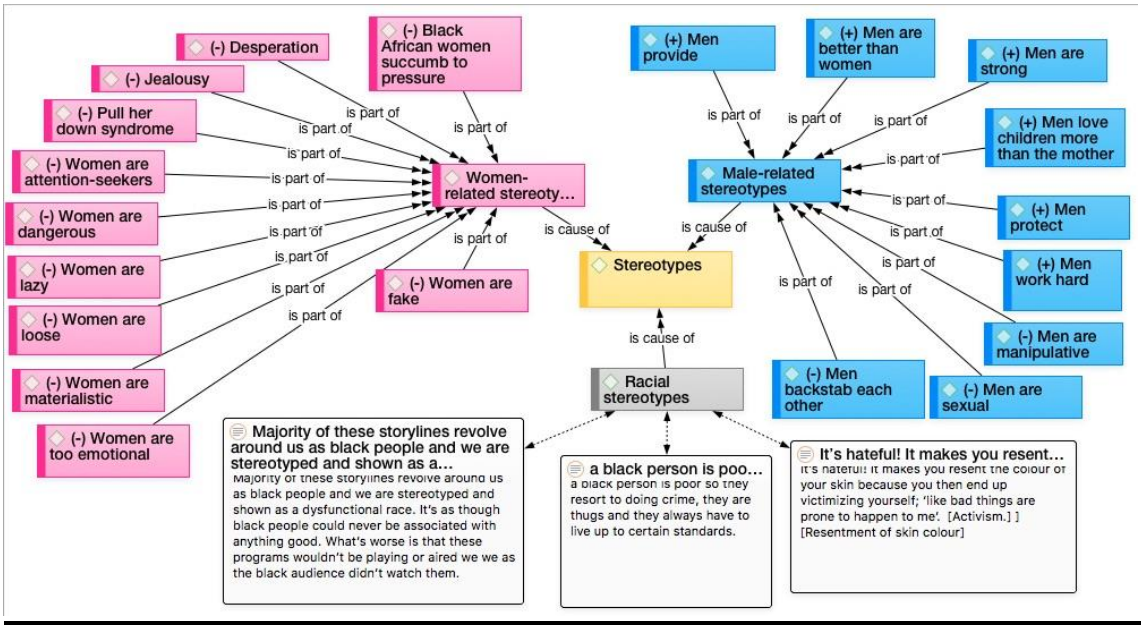


Figure 5.11 Participants' comments on stereotypes in soap opera storylines

Black male characters are seldom family-centered as they are shown to easily get bored in a relationships and will engage in sexual activities with someone they have no feelings for. Such stereotypes consumed by millions of viewers in a dysfunctional society add to socio-economic woes where there are broken family structures, gender inequality, gender-based violence, poverty and increasing crime rates. In a country where a woman is killed or suffers domestic violence every second, stereotypes that aggravate toxic masculinity in the form of entertainment and fantasy are detrimental for society's growth: *"Stereotypes that we watch through soap opera content do cascade into our families."* [Gugu - female]

During the production of soap operas, gender classification is evident in the choice of colours that the wardrobe department, in liaison with directors and scriptwriters, chooses for each character. Female characters are usually dressed in bright colours unless the character is stereotyped as a "shebeen queen" like Lucy Diale on Generations or Nina Zamdela on Isidingo. These two characters seldom wear bright colours unless they engage their femininity for winning the love of a male character, another stereotype because a woman may be feminine and wear dark colours. Lucy and Nina exhibit male characteristics. Dark coloured clothing in soap operas is associated more with male characters to emphasise their masculinity. These characters are generally criminals:

"Black men in soapies are portrayed as violent people in every way even the way they talk." [Sihle - male]

"What I picked up from Generations is its association of black people and crime. They are always associated with crime, corruption and all those things. They have gangs; there's Jack Mabaso, there's Cosmo that works for him, there's Gadaffi that's another different gang and it's always about crime and those sort of things because they always something going on in Generations." [Gugu - female]

But in actual fact, there is quite a distinction that defines black men, particularly black Zulu men, as participants discussed in focus groups:

"I'll tell you what a Zulu man is: a Zulu man is, a real Zulu man, is somebody who goes out there and it hasn't changed even today, who goes out there and hunts for his family, protects his family, he is a warrior, protects where he stays, protects where he comes from, respects his culture, respects the people that are around him, a man, somebody who never ever obviously lays his hands on his woman, somebody who if you have to go to as far as people who are okay with isithembu (polygamy), would come to you as the first wife and say that you have a say in who I take and if you say no I have to respect that. We are the most respectful tribe I believe; not the taxi driver Zulu guy I'm talking about the hard core Zulu guys from deep down there, he speaks and he says 'this is not going to happen in my house' but he is not going to shout, he is not going to hit anybody, he is going to say that is not going to happen and that carries enough weight to say 'the leader of the house has spoken'. But today we have done away with the idea of a leader and yet we pray to a leader, yet we are controlled by a boss at work, but mention a leader as a Zulu person and that person becomes an abusive person and I think we also have fallen for such things to a point where we now believe we are violent. I'm not violent. I say what I don't like and if you're not going to put up with it, sure! And if you're going to fight, I will give you a fight. But if there's no need for a fight, I will say what I feel about it and I'm allowed to have an opinion." [Themba - male]

Soap opera content shows that socio-economic and socio-political oppression is not only towards black women but black men too. Historical effects of past injustices compel black men to be survivors and fight for their space in the country's social and cultural context. Participants revealed that media representations that stereotype black men exacerbate their frustrations in life and jeopardies the safety and security of women in the process. Storylines portray men who have insecurities when they are in a relationship or marriage with a woman who earns a higher salary than they do. Such a stereotype exists in society. Studies also show that in such relationships, men use their masculinity to maintain their position of dominance and tend to be emotionally, verbally and physically abusive towards such a woman at home (Feasey 2008; Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger 2012). As participants remarked:

"I think it's a social problem especially for the black nation where we got put in ghettos and a lot of things were trappings us in, and then our parents would work there and afar, and the female would get educated because she would work in nurturing job so the white boss would be more nicer to her, so white people knew then that black men would be stubborn so they got sent to work in the mines and that's who black women got educated more than men back in the days. So, women got the head start in life; that's why you'll find the wife being a lecturer and the husband works in a train station. So, it causes that imbalance." [Themba - male]

"Soap operas show that men themselves are insecure when their women are successful. So, they try by all means to make them doubt themselves and their capabilities just so that they as men won't feel so insecure with their women's successes. We see this all the time on soap operas and it's true that it happens even in real life." [Londiwe - female]

"You have the sixth sense. You are actually more intelligent than you think you are but we have somehow brainwashed you into believing that we lead you. Whereas if you allow an idiot to lead, you can keep him at the gate guarding your house, but you run the whole house. That's what it should be but it's not so. South African television is still male-dominated." [Nhlakanipho - male]

Storylines portray black men's insecurities being heightened by opportunities given to women hence they revert to exerting their toxic masculinity on their female partners. This is seen in both Generations and Isidingo through relationships such as those of Nikiwe and Gabriel, Tshidi and Kumkani, and Lincoln and Katlego, Karabo and Tau. Through the reception analysis theory, it can be determined that the messages encoded through such storylines can be decoded incorrectly by the viewers depending on the viewer's life experience, his/her viewing space and his/her personal experience as the viewing takes place. In other words, viewers who have a parasocial relationship with characters will comprehend and interpret the encoded message differently than those without. This also relates to the social representation theory where a viewer will decode the encoded message based on the social group in which they categorised themselves. Such storylines leave lasting impressions and effects on the viewer's identity and how they choose to construct their identity based on the media content consumed through soap opera storylines.

b. Stereotypes relating to black females as identified by participants

Both men and women acknowledge negative stereotypes of their gender which disempower them and limit their potential.

"My issue with these shows is being a young man who has grown up in a female-oriented household is that there are one of two ways to depict black women; it's either the angry black woman, or the damsel in distress." [Sibongile - female]

Participants stated that the issue is not on whether Generations and Isidingo have an equal number of gender representation between men and women, however, they questioned the prominence of leading roles being given to men compared to women who get supporting roles. One-on-one interviews revealed that seasonal male characters have punchier storylines compared to women who are represented as fillers (that is, a seasonal female character of lesser prominence who is in the show to support the storyline of a male character).

"Stereotypes haven't changed. I mean look at all the soapies all the villains are men. And I don't know if it's because women are scared, but also one thing I've picked up is that it's not just South African TV. Most women try too hard to be a man when given a hard-core role and I believe that as an artist you don't have to. The more feminine you are the more powerful you are because that's who you are." [Nhlakanipho - male]

Additionally, storylines in Generations and Isidingo imply that business fails in the hands of women as portrayed in storylines of Karabo Moroka in Generations and Nikiwe Sibeko in Isidingo, an indirect encouragement of a patriarchal system in the workplace. This is aligned with Ndayi and du Plooy's (2019: 111) statement that "although the (soap opera) programme realistically depicts the differentiated gendered roles of men and women in business and economic contexts … it fails to successfully challenge patriarchal perceptions of women's rights and their roles in business and economic dealings". Viewers are aware that female characters dominate the role of extras. Leading male actors tend to have a female who supports their endeavours even at the sacrifice of her own happiness and goals (for example, Zitha Langa towards Jack Mabaso). Viewers interpret this as the dominance of males in life in general where females are seen as their supporters. Another stereotype portrayed about women is the emphasis on their physical beauty which is defined as women who are light-skinned, slim-bodied, flawless skin and wig/weave-wearing. Beauty that enhances a woman's natural features is seldom highlighted. Participants states that black women are represented through characters that subtly encourage women to be less black and more artificial. They said they understand

that actors and actresses must have a specific look to fit a specific character. They pointed at how both soap operas are gradually changing their representation of black women. Isidingo does have a few examples of female characters who embrace their natural hair, like Cebisa, Mrs Sibiya and Lungi. However, all these are supporting or seasonal characters. Generations has Sphe, Lesedi, Tshidi and Nonhle who embrace their natural hair, but they too are supporting actors. Lead roles are given to mostly men and at times women with a certain look. Characters closest to playing leading roles have specific body types, skin colour and are dressed in a particular way. Although participants argued that specifications are done to fit a character's storyline, however, such limitations categorise and box viewers and exclude those who fall outside the specifics, making some characters not relatable. Such exclusions point to how viewers consume their information and construct their identities through soap operas storylines that contain artificial and fictional characters.

"Women don't have a choice but to be beautiful because their looks outweigh their brains." [Senamile - female]

Meanwhile:

"The stereotype is that it's okay for a man to be ugly so long as he has money." [Senamile - female]

Soap operas show black female characters financially dependent on men who base their beauty on their physique. Exceptions include characters like Ma-Agnes on Isidingo who came from rural areas of Thabantshu. She worked in Horizon Deep as a waiter and later elevated into a hotel manager. Storylines similar to that of Ma-Agnes are far and few; however, viewers said it is these storylines that are relatable and are closer to reality for them. Although the character of Ma-Agnes is does not exist in real life, participants said it encouraged them that if they worked hard enough in life, they could change from a poverty state to being financially secured in life. The storyline of Ma-Agnes had a beginning, a climax and an ending. What participants disliked about the storyline is that the more the character progressed at work, the more challenges she faced in her marriage. In other words, the progression of Ma-Agnes's career caused a regression in her marriage, and this negatively affected her entire family. Her husband, Bra-Zeb, was insecure of having a working wife who earned a higher salary than he did. His insecurities lead to his

infidelity. The stereotype insinuated there was that Ma-Agnes neglected her family and paid more attention to herself and her job. Her marriage suffered when her husband cheated and that affected their children:

"It's as if as a woman you need to choose whether you want to have a successful career or have a family." [Thozama - female]

"The stereotype is that their marriages are falling apart because their husbands cheat on them since the woman spends too much time on her work or she just has dysfunctional children." [Sukoluhle - female]

"Sometimes as a career woman you come back home tired from work, and that is used as an excuse for your man to cheat on you because you are failing to give him enough attention." [Senamile - female]

"All of this is made as though it is woman's fault for being career-driven because if that was not the case, then her marriage and children would be fine. This feeds into the stereotype that a man cheats because his woman is at fault by not being enough for him." [Sukoluhle - female]

These comments are excerpts from participants who felt strongly against women-related stereotypes that insinuate women must choose between a successful career and family. The cultural belief is that women should be barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen is an everyday reality for some, especially in the Zulu tribe within a cultural province like KwaZulu-Natal. According to participants, such stereotypes add to the already existing battle that women face where society forces them to choose between a family and career. Participants also raised points on how female characters with 'ideal jobs' do not have families of their own but 'jump' from one relationship to another. At times, they are portrayed to dating friends, enemies and even brothers. According to participants, this portrays women as weak, dependent and immoral. Such storylines perpetuate the oppression of women in the workplace (Lorber 2001; Khachaturyan and Peterson 2014; Adams and Mahomed 2018).

Participants discussed how women have opportunities to get educated nowadays and be executive members in the workplace. However, stereotypes on television soap operas add to the misconception that women cannot have a successful marriage, nuclear families and be successful in their careers. Such representations contribute to gender inequality in society. As a reflector of society, soap operas also have a responsibility to not only reflect

and mirror what is happening in society, but they ought to also educate society of its issues and offer viewers optimistic alternatives and not only mirror pessimistic reflections, as expressed by participants. Through the elimination of stereotypes and better presentations of media images, participants agreed that soap operas have the ability to empower its viewers to construct powerful and positive identities that contribute to global change.

"You have the sixth sense. You are actually more intelligent than you think you are, but we have somehow brainwashed you into believing that we lead you. Whereas if you allow an idiot to lead, you can keep him at the gate guarding your house, but you run the whole house. That's what it should be but it's not so South African television is still male-dominated." [Nhlakanipho - male]

Negative stereotypes of black women misrepresent the identity of black women, as opposed to showing her as someone who is:

> *"... principled, knows herself, strong, thinks for herself, lives life according to her rules, hustler, uyibamba ishisa [she can handle any situation regardless of how difficult it is], curvaceous, confident in herself, her place is in the kitchen and this is not oppression because she is managing her family and everything that's got to do with it, black women are giving men a run for their money, she is respected because she is respectful, she is my mother and grandmother, strong beyond it all, she is nurturing, selfless, knows her worth, a woman of God, she speaks her mind, she turns a house into a home, her foundation is in God, she is someone who foresees trouble before it even happens, she always consults God for solutions to her challenges."* [Hlelo - female]

Overall, the focus groups agreed that soap operas portray black women as people who:

"... lack self-confidence and need men to tell them what to do; women not having their own brains, they must be told what to do, they need someone to control them; women are desperate and act desperate when it comes to relationships; women are easily manipulated especially through words from men; women ought to be married and financially responsible by a certain age; women are encouraged to "hang in there" even in unhappy situations and they are the ones who end up being hurt in the long run because of "hanging in there"; women are desperate and dangerous; women are impulsive; women are influenced by western culture." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

Such stereotypes, one participant said: *"...added to the already existing daily struggles that we face as women because of our gender."* [Thabile - female]

Participants stated that soap opera stereotypes disguised as educational information and entertainment add to the already existing gender divide in society and widen the gap of gender inequality. They said that it is important that soap operas viewers are active viewers who not only consume content for leisure and entertainment but question content that suppresses their minds and contributes to gender inequality.

c. Racial stereotypes identified by participants on soap operas

In addition to gender stereotypes, soap operas also contain racial stereotypes that portray one race to be superior to others. Such stereotypes are subtle yet evidently seen through insinuations portrayed by characters including but not limited to language, career, family type, relationship status, finance, and behaviour. For example, characters who are viewed as successful seldom speak their mother tongue but often speak English. The superiority of the English language prioritises English first-language speakers. Participants interpreted this as the loss of the identity of black people as it gave prominence to races who are English first-language speakers:

"Generations and Isidingo it's hateful. It speaks and it breeds a culture where we don't like ourselves as black people." [Londeka - female]

"It makes me, unfortunately as disgusting as this sounds, it makes me not want to be a minority. I think of myself as a white girl, if it makes me sleep better at night because it's too much of a burden being in this skin that I'm in." [Londeka - female]

"Going back to the skin colour, your light skinned people like the Smanga character will be the main guys and heroes and the villains have to be dark. Characters like Cosmo have to be dark. Even that has a subtle stereotype that we generally do not pay attention to that anything black is scary, it's bad and it's evil." [Zakhele - male]

"You see? These shows were meant to show black people in a certain light. After years of doing that, they've kind of lost that way of thinking, of showing black people in a better light. Instead, their storylines have become something tabloid like, watered down, instead we're seeing your Lucy's the Shebeen queens, that whole stereotype that okay if you are a woman from a certain area this is how they are supposed to be treated." [Sibongile - female]

Demographics show that soap operas are watched by predominantly black African viewers, majority of whom are females. When one analyses stereotypes on soap operas through an interpretivist lens, it can be concluded that stereotypes do not enhance and

celebrate black consciousness instead they make black people resent who they are. The characters portraying black business people insinuate the achievement of this status through crime:

"Who owns the media? The person that's owning the media is obviously trying to push one kind of narrative." [Zakhele - male]

"People made an assumption that this is the only space that even before 1994, was already decolonised in a way because there would have been joint programs where you would have seen blacks and whites performing together or singing together or doing whatever, but in actual fact is the most racist, colonised space of note." [Mthobisi - male]

History attests to the existence of racial stereotypes in society and on South African television long before Generations and Isidingo were created. Although the transition from the apartheid era into a democratic state saw more inclusion of black actors and content on screens, racial stereotypes in the media existed. One example was a comedy series called S'gudi S'nayi lead by the late Joe Mafela who played an unemployed lodger. It had predominantly three female characters and the lead character, S'dumo, was a male. A closer look reveals racial stereotypes embedded in the series. Mr Mafela later played in another comedy series called Going Up. Although it was interpreted as an improvement of S'gudi S'naysi due to its inclusion of different race groups and representation of gender, however in that series Mr Mafela played the character Jabulani who was an office cleaner in a white-owned law firm. Mr Mafela later joined the cast of Generations as uncle Tebogo Moroka in the powerful Morokoa family:

"If uzokhumbula (remember) iS'gudi S'naysi, women dominated but the lead was ubaba (Mr) uJoe Mafela. So, I wouldn't really say there was that much difference, accept we were not taken seriously; accept he was never going to go into an office and lead. If he did, there was always going to be "Baas-So-and-So" ... He himself was a clown. He wasn't taken seriously. It wasn't a matter of who you are and what you did, it was a matter of 'now you're on tv be grateful'. You've been given an opportunity and job to be a star, so take that and be grateful, whether you're paid cents or whatever, you have to be appreciative of the fact that you have a job. It still happens today, however the talent today is a bit more 'raw'." [Nhlakanipho - male]

During focus group interviews, viewers alluded to Generations having mainly white scriptwriters and directors and Isidingo having mainly black scriptwriters and directors. They based their assumptions on how Generations is *"not in touch with black lives"* and

how *"black characters portrayed in Generations are superficial and unrealistic".* They further elaborated that *"Generations provides black people a fantasy of how they should be and a black person surely knows that representation is not a true reflection of how black people live".* Participants said Isidingo has a concept of black lives and black culture and is 'more updated' compared to Generations. However, a closer analysis of content revealed that Isidingo represented elevated lives of black people:

"Writers and producers have perpetrated it because if a certain tribe is known for being violent and we write more on violence and we cast that certain tribe only being violent, and people think that yes actually, so they are right. So, it then doesn't help the stereotype. It just seals it to say to people that yeah there's a signature; they kill each other, they shoot each other. We know it's happening but it's happening everywhere in the country. But if you're a certain tribe it's just being … not even targeted to be portrayed that way. That means we are taking from the cherry on top and we're leaving the gist behind or underneath. There are deeper things about every tribe you know. So that's the goal." [Nhlakanipho - male]

It was established through focus group discussions that both soap operas need to do thorough ethnographic research ahead of production so as to present realistic storylines grounded on South African cultural foundations. Additionally, participants said that scriptwriters and directors ought to range in age and race groups so that storylines are inclusive and accurately present viewers' reality in an entertaining yet informative manner. Those who work behind the production scene agree.

"It's about supply and demand. You know this is what people find entertaining, this is what people want, this is what people like, and you know you kind of vacillate towards that even though you try by all means that as you do that you know you try by all means to teach, you know to give people information that is positive, that is about growth, that is about development. So that's what happens. Writers write because they are informed by a whole lot of factors not necessarily by what inspires them as individuals. So that's what it is. Personally, I think you know there's more that can be done more especially now because we are going through a … I don't know it's sort of like a revolution of the human spirit, more especially in South Africa where we kind of are looking towards ourselves and investigating the things that we do and thought were right and you know have been happening." [Christopher - male]

Figure 5.12 demonstrates how production of soap operas is not solely dependent on scriptwriters and directors but there is a value pyramid; from the channel itself, that is the SABC, all the way to the support staff who maintains the studio.

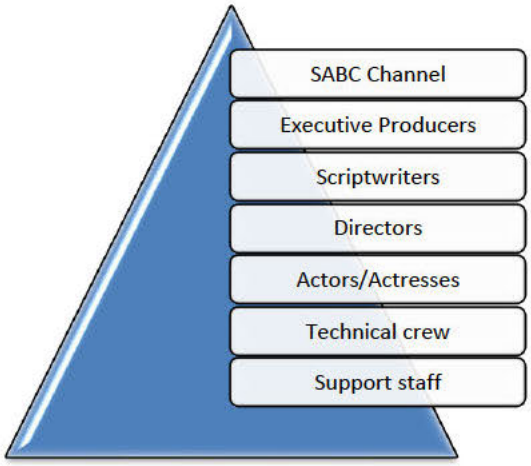


Figure 5.12 The basic power hierarchy in SABC television production

As a public broadcaster, the SABC is mandated to provide content that is fair, accurate, non-discriminatory and does not promote gratuitous violence. Production companies produce content according to the mandate of the channel. Therefore, the ultimate power to transform soap opera content rests with the channel, that is, the SABC. However, produced content has to capture viewers' attention and sell advertising. Ultimately, increased viewership counts because it translates to profit brought in by advertising.

5.3.9 Soap opera stereotypes and the development of society

Participants raised concerns on how gender inequality witnessed in soap operas is a result of segregation and family divisions created in the apartheid era where black families were divided and disadvantaged by locations of their workplaces, racial discrimination and crippling economic woes. Participants added that producers need to discern between what viewers want versus what they need, without prioritising numbers in ratings. Participants also expressed concerns around how technology, in the form of television, is also used to dilute black relationships and for black people to no get along with each other or wish each other any good. Almost all participants agreed that both encoders (creators of soap opera content) and decoders (viewers) of soap opera content ought to hold each other accountable. With reference to the invisible push-and-pull effect which takes place between encoders and decoders of soap operas, producers/encoders push storylines and viewers/decoders pull content by absorbing it. Viewers make a choice to consume content and raise viewership ratings, or discontinue watching it thereby causing a decline in viewership ratings. Viewers in turn influence storylines by providing feedback on

content and engaging on social media platforms and other channels to provide viewer feedback. Participants hypothesised that as entertaining as stereotypes might be during viewing, they should not only highlight negatives but also positives, and educate viewers to unite in their differences so as to work towards individual and societal development.

"Uhm I normally hear some writers and producers say their show entertains and they leave it there. And I say that then they've failed the mandate of being responsible citizens of this country or of any other country. Because if a show does not educate, it must entertain but the end must educate. So, my responsibility as an actor is limited because you're on script. Now the bigger responsibility lies with the writers, the producers, the whole production team you know to say 'where do we take this character in terms of educating now? We see he has entertained; he is a good actor. We see he has done one, two, three, four, five. But what should the society learn from this you know?" [Sibusiso - male]

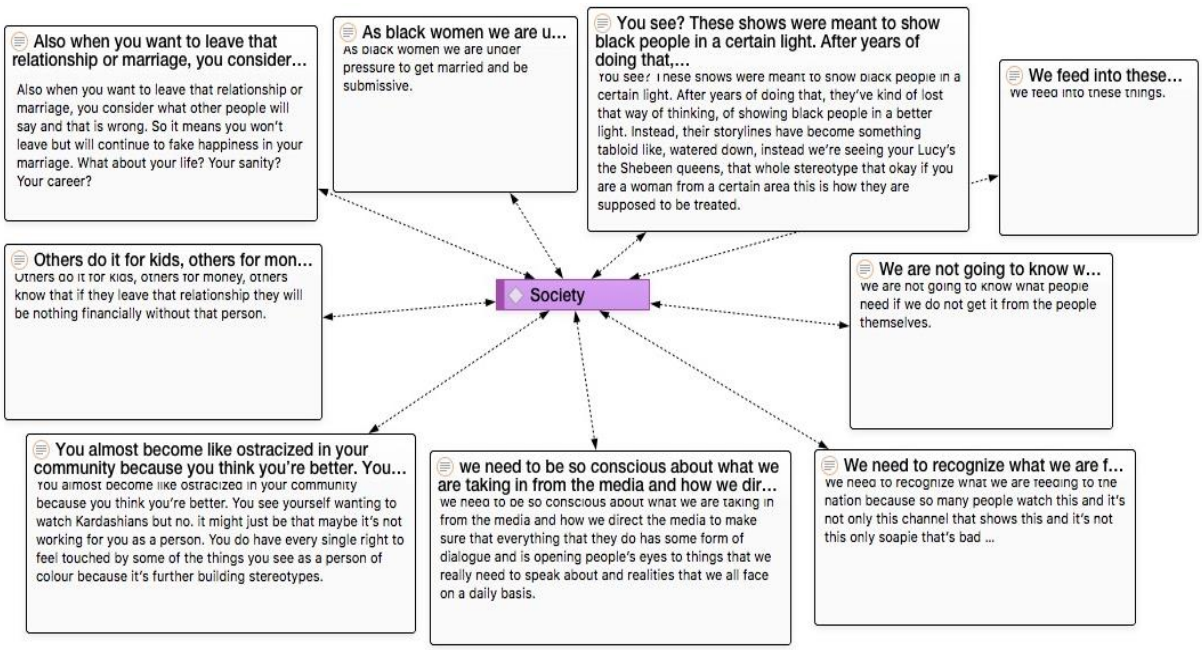


Figure 5.13 Participants' comments on society and soap opera content

Comments in Figure 5.13 display how stereotypes portrayed on screen transcend beyond people's living rooms and viewing spaces thereby resulting in a ripple effect on how society conducts itself and interprets life events around them:

"We need to be so conscious about what we are taking in from the media and how we direct the media to make sure that everything that they do has some form of dialogue and is opening people's eyes to things that we really need to speak about and realities that we all face on a daily basis." [Nkosinathi - male]

"We are not going to know what people need if we do not get it from the people themselves." [Senzo - male]

Technology has shrunk the world into a global village and affords society various platforms to consume information. Media representations create an illusion of the removal of country borders and create socially constructed meaning to life:

"A lot of things are socially constructed. It's as though there are building blocks; you place one on top of the other and then we see the bigger picture. And we all believe that picture to be what it is constructed to be. It's the same thing when it comes to the media and soap operas; all these episodes that we watch these are building blocks. They are painting a particular picture, a picture that other people believe that 'oh so a woman is like this'." [Nonhle - female]

Stereotypes affect society. Effects are as a result of parasocial interaction, parasocial relationships and identification that viewers experience in their engagement with soap opera media texts. What is presented as innocent entertainment for leisure, has long-lasting effects on individual viewers across the globe.

5.4 Summing up of results on effects on viewers

Although some may argue that soap opera content is harmless and ought to be consumed for entertainment and pleasure, the social identity theory and social representations theory hypothesizes that each viewer identifies with what they watch on screen, comprehends and interprets it, and engages with the text on a personal level. The viewer thereafter contextualises his/her interpretation of the text within a social group and other social groups, and soon the viewer applies his/her own reality, what they have watched and eventually emulates content in his/her real life. Viewers may relate to soap opera content personally in the form of parasocial relationships. Viewers exhibit emotions when consuming content due to their own social and cultural experiences, and experiences of other people around them. Some scenes aggravate emotions which at times are reminiscent of trauma experienced by the viewer in his/her past. This can be emotionally challenging to the viewer if the soap opera does not provide information on screen where viewers may choose to seek help or not. Storylines are generally said to have a beginning, a middle and an end. Television soap opera crew are mindful of competing with other soap operas, genres and other channels for the viewers' attention thus soap opera

storylines are edited for immediate gratification. Producers of soap operas are under pressure to produce storylines that keep the audience ratings high. Therefore, it is important that storylines do not drag over a lengthy period but provide instant gratification to its viewers within a specified period.

Rapoport (1969) in his study about a system-oriented view of content analysis, used a metaphor which suggests that humans live in an ocean of words that is man-made. This means that words secreted are part of their existence and are just as important as the physical environment. These words do not just reflect the complex social, political and economic realities but they interact with and can be polluted by these realities. Soap opera storylines are not objective but subjective. The production team's life experiences play a role in the content they produce and how it's being produced. When scriptwriters produce soap opera texts, they unknowingly take into account their social context and what they produce is text that has been transformed within parameters of their own social and cultural frameworks. So, there is a social and cultural embeddedness in a text.

"We have been groomed through all of these things. We've witnessed them through our fathers and our mothers that the man must always be the first and the last. A woman must not argue with what a man says because the man must always have the last word. So when we saw all of this through our parents' relationship, so we also realized that us too as men in our homes we will have the last word." [Sifiso - male]

To contribute to a progressive society, soap operas ought to reflect accurate representations of society and provide potential solutions for each viewer leading to individual and communal empowerment. Both producers and consumers of soap operas have a responsibility and role to play in ensuring a better society. As a transforming society, South Africans are in a continuous process of understanding and constructing their identities. The media plays a crucial role in such a process. The media should mend social, economic, and political gaps between people because negative soap opera stereotypes yield a negative effect.

5.5 Analysis of programme setting

Programme setting refers to the different set designs and resources and how they were organised. During field observation at Henley Studios, I observed that set designs were specific to specific scenes. Set designers were mainly males who had the ability to carry

around furniture items and other props. Sets for scenes were designed beforehand and included in the technical team's schedule so that designers could determine the best positions for cameras and effects of lighting. Set designers worked on a tight schedule at the beginning of every scene as items of furniture had to be moved around creating the required effect per scene, as seen in Figure 5.14.

Necessary technical resources were made available on site and organised accordingly to establish scenes that were as closely linked to reality as possible. There was a shortage of personnel as there were not enough black female directors. According to Ross (2017: 9), the lack of ethnicity of personnel behind production of soap operas is problematic and shows in the representation of minorities on screen because "productions will be shaped and informed by the cultural baggage of a colonial history". One-on-one interviews revealed that a shortage of female directors translates into a negative effect on some of the scenes where actresses would be more comfortable being directed by another female.

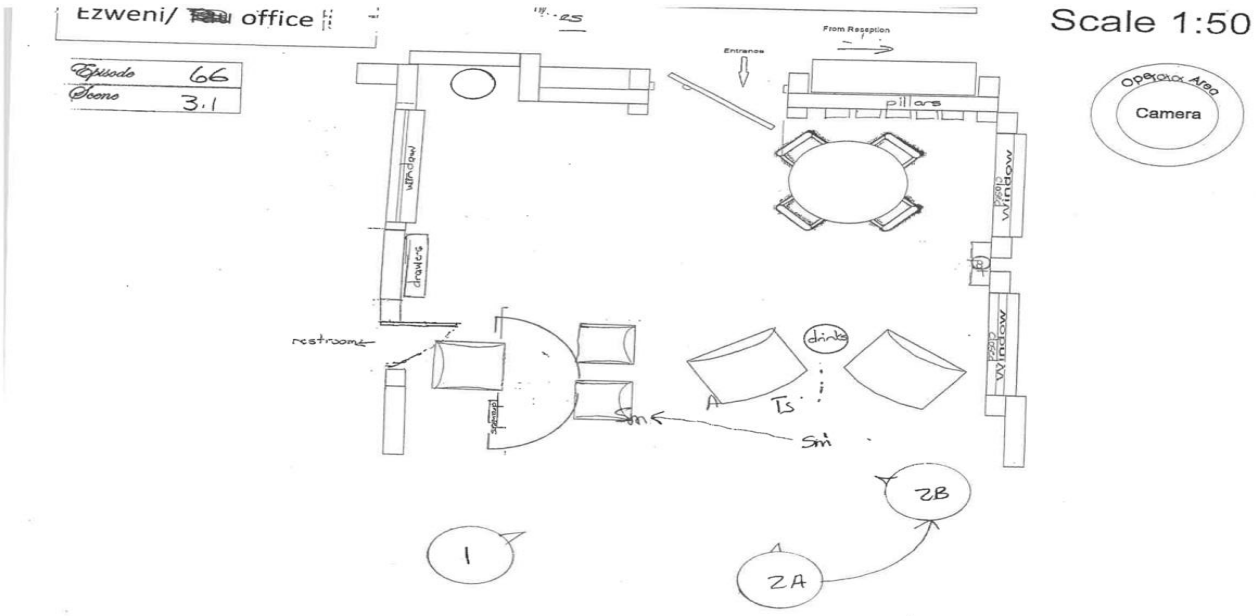


Figure 5.14 Example of a set design, courtesy of Generations, which describes the layout of a scene

Figure 5.14 shows an example of one of the set designs portraying the advertising agency, Ezweni, in Generations. Sets are designed using heavy furniture items which require physical strength associated with masculinity, hence those found in the set design department are mostly males. The figure above consists of big cameras mounted on heavy

tripod stands (see 1, 2A, and 2B), couches, chairs, tables, moveable walls, and other décor. The designing of sets forms one of the important steps of production. The production chain of soap operas sees scriptwriters coming up with ideas to transform into storylines. Ideas are discussed in a weekly meeting with producers, directors, scriptwriters, heads of technical teams, makeup and wardrobe. Production team respondents said that ideas that scriptwriters come up with are localised into the South African context and the success of storylines is measured through audience ratings, feedback and engagement on social media platforms. According to one of the soap opera scriptwriters, viewer engagement and feedback is received by producers with a critical eye:

"Now you've got all of these things that people can communicate and say things. So it does impact in your storytelling in certain ways. For the first, if viewers are turned off with a particular story and they despise it, you will get you know what I mean a sort of trending thing that will happen across social media platforms. The people are complaining. But you've got to recognise when it is just and when it is unjust because it goes deeper to the thinking or the psyche of people. What I mean by that is this: sometimes somebody can just put an opinion online and that opinion may not necessarily be true but people may pick up on it and then it becomes almost truth. And that's the world we live in now you know what I mean." [Nkosinathi - male]

One-on-one interviews with scriptwriters revealed that in the past they conducted focus groups to get feedback and ideas of storylines from viewers, but later found that method to be limiting. At the time of conducting interviews, Generations had a shortage of scriptwriters. At the time of the fieldwork observation, the soap opera had seven writers but would prefer to have nine writers which include black female writers. In a study focusing on the problem of pigeonholing of female scriptwriters and how genre and gender translate in television screenwriting, Johnson and Peirse (2020) hypothesise that the television industry is a challenging one for female writers and pigeonholes them into writing jobs pertaining to children's content and other 'soft' genres. The success of Generations is attributed to its continuity and incorporation of anticipated issues into storylines. Storylines that do not obtain much viewer engagement are dropped. The canning of storylines attests to the power of viewers in shaping and directing soap opera narratives. Scriptwriters also take some directives from viewers' comments appearing below episodes uploaded on the YouTube channel, Facebook page and other platforms. This, however, would not necessarily be a true reflection of how all viewers feel since not all viewers have access to or even engage on social media platforms. Generations' largest

audience demographic are viewers aged fifty years and older, their second largest are those between thirty-four and forty-nine, the third largest are those aged sixteen to twenty-four. Although soap operas still appeal to the older generation as opposed to younger people, it is the younger people, however, who engage more and provide immediate feedback on their social media platforms. A disjuncture thus exists because younger people providing feedback on storylines mostly consumed by and appealing to older viewers. Aligned to the mandate of the SABC, discussed later, soap operas within this channel have to produce content relatable to various age groups that not only entertains but also educates viewers.

Soap operas do influence millions of people in society and it is important that messages infused within storylines are educational and informative and shape public perception. Such is the power and influence of the media. The power and influence of soap operas are not confined within the walls of the production building, the television set, inside households, or even within in-groups or out-groups. Its power and influence create a ripple effect witnessed in the lives of viewers individually and collectively across various geographical locations and cultures. Nowadays this power and influence can also be found in the virtual world where viewers engage with media texts and express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Feedback from viewers has the potential to shape and direct storylines, as illustrated in Figure 5.3, which illustrates a basic participation framework of television discourse. The framework demonstrates processes of engagement between producers of soap operas, the soap opera product and viewer engagement. Different teams are required to engage constantly during the pre-production and planning phase, the production phase where sets are designed and actors shoot their scenes, and post-production, where editing and mixing takes place. This process is done ahead of the final product being aired on television screens. Television storytelling is an all-inclusive art that relies on the participation of all crew and cast members, notwithstanding viewers. Figure 5.15 illustrates a continuous process of soap opera media production and consumption. The arrows indicate that the process is not completely linear as one part of the production chain feeds into the other:

"They (scriptwriters) come up with the script. They work entirely on their own there and we work entirely on our own and then we come once a week after they've written the scripts in what is deemed as the HoDs meeting and we sit and we discuss if there are any problems, or if there's anything that could be better. If there's something that we as

directors feel it will be better if we do it this way, or maybe if this is not even possible.". [Nkosinathi - male]

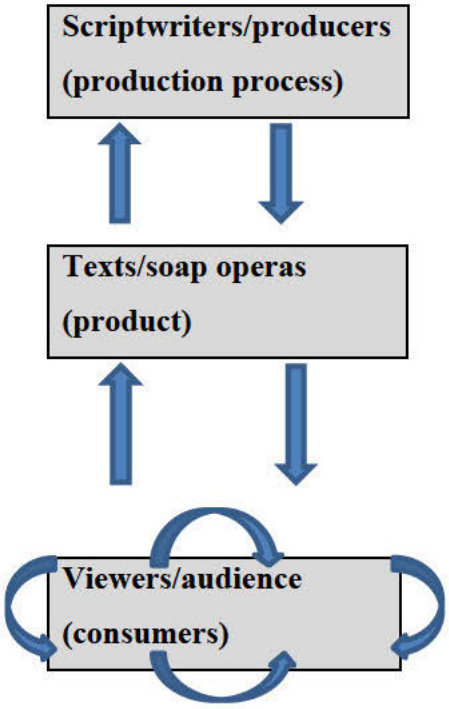
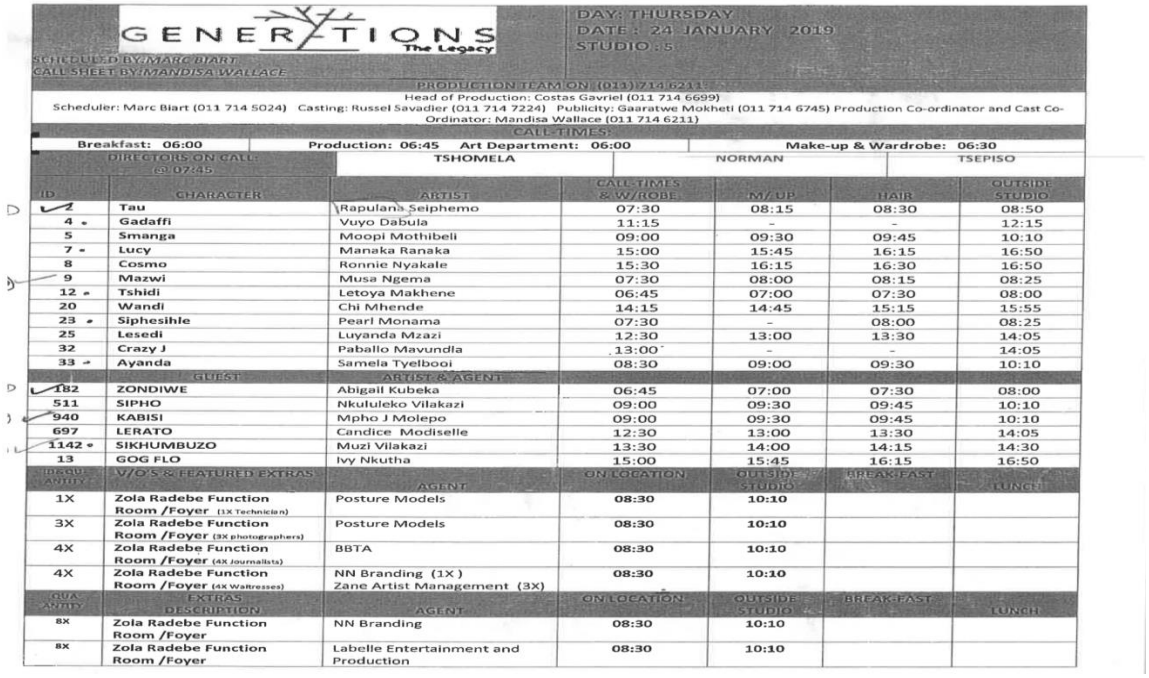


Figure 5.15 Basic participation framework of television discourse[32]

Scriptwriters come up with ideas of storylines and then conduct research on them by visiting real locations where the said idea potentially takes place. They observe the location and the interaction of subjects and objects at the location. Once research has been conducted, script ideas are drafted and presented at weekly meetings between heads of departments. This is where ideas are discussed and interrogated. Scriptwriters get the go-ahead to write storylines, and these are then shared with actors to rehearse and directors to read and direct sets. During this process, wardrobe and makeup artists also plan their tasks in accordance to specific scenes and what characters should look like as they deliver their lines on camera. Storyliners schedule different scenes according to their order, and actors are given a schedule of when they will shoot their scenes, as shown in Figure 5.16.

[32] According to O'Keeffe (2006:449), a media discourse refers to "interactions that take place through some broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, in which the discourse is oriented to a non-present reader, listener or viewer". Although viewers cannot make rapid responses to content producers, the discourse is mediated by viewers.



GENERATIONS The Legacy

DAY: THURSDAY
DATE : 24 JANUARY 2019
STUDIO : 5

SCHEDULED BY: MARC BIART
CALL SHEET BY: MANDISA WALLACE

PRODUCTION TEAM ON (011) 714 6211

Head of Production: Costas Gavriel (011 714 6699)
Scheduler: Marc Biart (011 714 5024) Casting: Russel Savadier (011 714 7224) Publicity: Gaaratwe Mokheti (011 714 6745) Production Co-ordinator and Cast Co-Ordinator: Mandisa Wallace (011 714 6211)

CALL TIMES

Breakfast: 06:00 Production: 06:45 Art Department: 06:00 Make-up & Wardrobe: 06:30

DIRECTORS ON CALL @ 07:45: TSHOMELA | NORMAN | TSEPISO

ID	CHARACTER	ARTIST	CALL TIMES & W/ROBE	M/ UP	HAIR	OUTSIDE STUDIO
1	Tau	Rapulana Seiphemo	07:30	08:15	08:30	08:50
4	Gadaffi	Vuyo Dabula	11:15	-	-	12:15
5	Smanga	Moopi Mothibeli	09:00	09:30	09:45	10:10
7	Lucy	Manaka Ranaka	15:00	15:45	16:15	16:50
8	Cosmo	Ronnie Nyakale	15:30	16:15	16:30	16:50
9	Mazwi	Musa Ngema	07:30	08:00	08:15	08:25
12	Tshidi	Letoya Makhene	06:45	07:00	07:30	08:00
20	Wandi	Chi Mhende	14:15	14:45	15:15	15:55
23	Siphesihle	Pearl Monama	07:30	-	08:00	08:25
25	Lesedi	Luyanda Mzazi	12:30	13:00	13:30	14:05
32	Crazy J	Paballo Mavundla	13:00	-	-	14:05
33	Ayanda	Samela Tyelbooi	08:30	09:00	09:30	10:10
	GUEST	ARTIST & AGENT				
182	ZONDIWE	Abigail Kubeka	06:45	07:00	07:30	08:00
511	SIPHO	Nkululeko Vilakazi	09:00	09:30	09:45	10:10
940	KABISI	Mpho J Molepo	09:00	09:30	09:45	10:10
697	LERATO	Candice Modiselle	12:30	13:00	13:30	14:05
1142	SIKHUMBUZO	Muzi Vilakazi	13:30	14:00	14:15	14:30
13	GOG FLO	Ivy Nkutha	15:00	15:45	16:15	16:50

QUANTITY	V/O'S & FEATURED EXTRAS	AGENT	ON LOCATION	OUTSIDE STUDIO	BREAK-FAST	LUNCH
1X	Zola Radebe Function Room /Foyer (1X Technician)	Posture Models	08:30	10:10		
3X	Zola Radebe Function Room /Foyer (3X photographers)	Posture Models	08:30	10:10		
4X	Zola Radebe Function Room /Foyer (4X Journalists)	BBTA	08:30	10:10		
4X	Zola Radebe Function Room /Foyer (4X Waitresses)	NN Branding (1X) Zane Artist Management (3X)	08:30	10:10		
QUANTITY	EXTRAS DESCRIPTION	AGENT	ON LOCATION	OUTSIDE STUDIO	BREAK-FAST	LUNCH
8X	Zola Radebe Function Room /Foyer	NN Branding	08:30	10:10		
8X	Zola Radebe Function Room /Foyer	Labelle Entertainment and Production	08:30	10:10		

Figure 5.16 Copy of a schedule from Generations given to each team member on production for the day (Source – Generations The Legacy)

The schedule, as shown in Figure 5.16, also assists set designers to know what sets are needed for what scenes and when they must be ready. The schedule is printed for all crew members, including camera operators, so they know which shot types to shoot and camera movements to make.

"Here long before you even walk on set, your script has already been plotted because it's going to everybody else who is part of your team so they know what to do. From the person who is going to visually edit it, from your cameraman who knows where to stop it, so everything is technical. There is no winging it. You know there is no walking in and say okay I feel this way or maybe that way turn it. No. It's already plotted. You've already plotted where your camera is going to move, where actors are going to move. It's very, very you know it's strict in its technique." [Nkosinathi -male]

Directors form an integral part of the production of soap operas. In fact, all production crew, including actors, form an important part of the production team. This is one of the reasons why it is important that all departments are representative of various gender, races and cultures so inclusion is evident on screen during the screening of the final product. There is an uneven representation of gender and race when it comes to directors for both

Generations and Isidingo. Those who are present do not prioritise women-related issues. Additionally, there is a shortage of black female directors:

"I always say that we have not done enough if we still don't have a female director because we have to have one." [Senzo - male]

"I don't think they are not capable. I think it's because they are not given enough chance or actually a fair chance because we have had them in the past and I don't know if it's not giving them enough time or not understanding them enough that we don't have them now. But I think they are capable of doing anything that any of us are currently doing now. Because there are certain things that for me if I was a manager I would have given them to be directed by a female director not because they are just female because we have to do everything since an actor is exposed to everything but there are certain things that can be conveyed better by a female colleague to another female colleague. So that I don't find myself in a difficult spot where I have to say something like a male to someone who is a female whereas a female could have conveyed it better." [Senzo - male]

The television industry is a cut-throat male-dominated industry (Johnson 2020). Although more opportunities are opening up for females than in the past, decision-making roles in production are given to males (McCabe et al. 2020). This off-screen patriarchal representation is witnessed on-screen through storylines. During fieldwork observation at Henley studios, it was evident by the gender demographics that there are mostly male directors, and the technical team is made up of mostly males, as witnessed in the research findings from both Generations and Isidingo. Females are tasked with the makeup and wardrobe departments, and women in the technical team are far and few. In a country that is trying to challenge gender inequality, especially in the workplace, television production spaces breed imaginary content that perpetuate gender inequality. Inequality is not only seen on screen, but it also remains the status quo off screen thus challenges caused by gender inequality exist both on and off screen.

Table 5.1 is testament of the gap for gender balance and equality which exists in artistic spaces like the television industry. There is still room for dialogues that will educate, inform and challenge perceptions of society about race, gender and class. Participants expressed that producers of television content have a responsibility to their viewers to produce realistic content that mobilises, engages, informs and educates viewers. Female participants said that for transformation to take place, black African women need to own their narratives so that genres like soap operas are reflective of a transformative society and also provide mechanisms for both individual and collective development.

Table 5.1 A breakdown of the crew in the Generations production. Courtesy of Generations The Legacy.

DEPARTMENT	TOTAL FEMALES	TOTAL MALES
PRODUCERS	1	1
DIRECTORS	1	6
SCRIPT DEPARTMENT	5	2
DITTON OFFICE	6	1
PRODUCTION	7	5
FLOOR MANAGERS		2
ART DEPARTMENT	4	15
WARDROBE	9	2
MAKE UP/HAIR	4	1
CAMERA DEPARTMENT		4
LIGHTING DEPARTMENT		3
VISION MIXER	1	
SOUND DEPARTMENT		4
VISION CONTROLLER		1
POST PRODUCTION	4	
IT SUPPORT	2	
CAST	10	10

Focus groups discussed how production can still maintain the role of entertaining the public while being informative. Since fictional storylines mislead viewers to aspire towards unrealistic goals, soap opera storylines ought to provide context of plots and be reflective of various characters' journeys so as to positively encourage and influence viewers towards achievable goals. Participants stated that fantasy, escapism and entertainment should not take precedence.

5.5.1 Analysis of interviews with crew members

Themes that emerged from interview data included interviewees' acknowledgement of soap operas being educational, providing escapism from reality and transporting viewers to a fantasy world. Crew members stated that soap operas enable a 'breather' for the viewer from his/her own reality. They also pointed out that soap operas provide topics, through storylines, that would not ordinarily be discussed in households. For example, Generations ran a storyline featuring the transgender character of Wandi played by Chi Mhende. Such topics are taboo in traditional Zulu households of KwaZulu-Natal. These type of gender-related storylines produced over thorough research become informative to both viewers and those involved in the production team.

"We were talking about those transgender people in Generations. Now most of us, including some of us as directors, we didn't know the process of going through gender issues of a transgender person. You meet somebody and you don't know that person was a transgender person or is a transgender person because how should that person look like, how does he behave and all of those things. So, for me it's an everybody or an everyday person who watches television who wants to learn in real life or in future so that we can know many things. It teaches about many things." [Senzo - male]

The main plot of Generations and Isidingo soap operas revolves around the business world. Through such plots, viewers have access to the corporate world environment, characteristics of business people, suitable or acceptable behaviour at work, and job challenges faced by employees on their families. There are, however, a few instances where soap operas fail to educate viewers, particularly when storylines conflict with traditional cultural practices. An example can be seen in the interaction between young and senior characters on screen. If we take the Zulu culture as an example, Mkhize (2015: 29) suggests that "the Zulu culture of ancient times was an antediluvian culture, but it was a traditionalist culture not tainted by Western education, thinking and other influences". However, the modern Zulu culture has "adopted modern ways of thinking and influence" (Mkhize 2015: 29). One of such modern ways is a result of television exposure. In the Zulu culture, for example, it is disrespectful for a young person to look at their elders in the eyes. Soap opera characters portrayed by young people do look elders in the eyes and talk back at them disrespectfully, contrary to acceptable traditional cultural behaviour and practices. In this instance, soap operas are still educational for young people to express their opinions, but are invariably seen to promote disrespect and ill-discipline towards the elderly:

"Like for instance you'll say Bab' So-and-so, but other people just call you by name and there's nothing wrong with it you know. But then it depends; this product who is your target market? Who do you want to watch it? And what do you want them to learn from it? So those elements if they are not part of the message that you want to put across, it's a problem right there." [Sibusiso - male]

Traditional Zulu practice forbids young people to call their elder by their first names. For example, an elder must be addressed as 'Mr Shinga,' or 'Bab'Shinga', and not as 'Sihle'.

Even though soap operas provide escapism and transport viewers away from their realities through the creation of an imaginary world portrayed by imaginary characters, the

production crew did acknowledge that some of the storylines were far-fetched, but they broadcast them anyway to see the viewers reactions (see Figure 5.17).

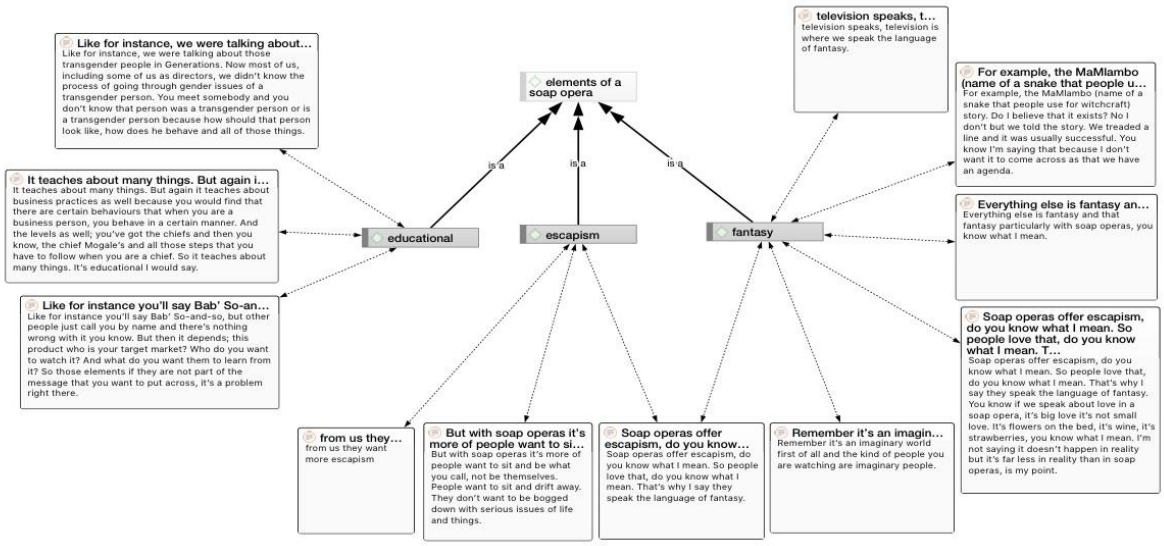


Figure 5.17 Educational, escapist and fantasy elements contained in a soap opera

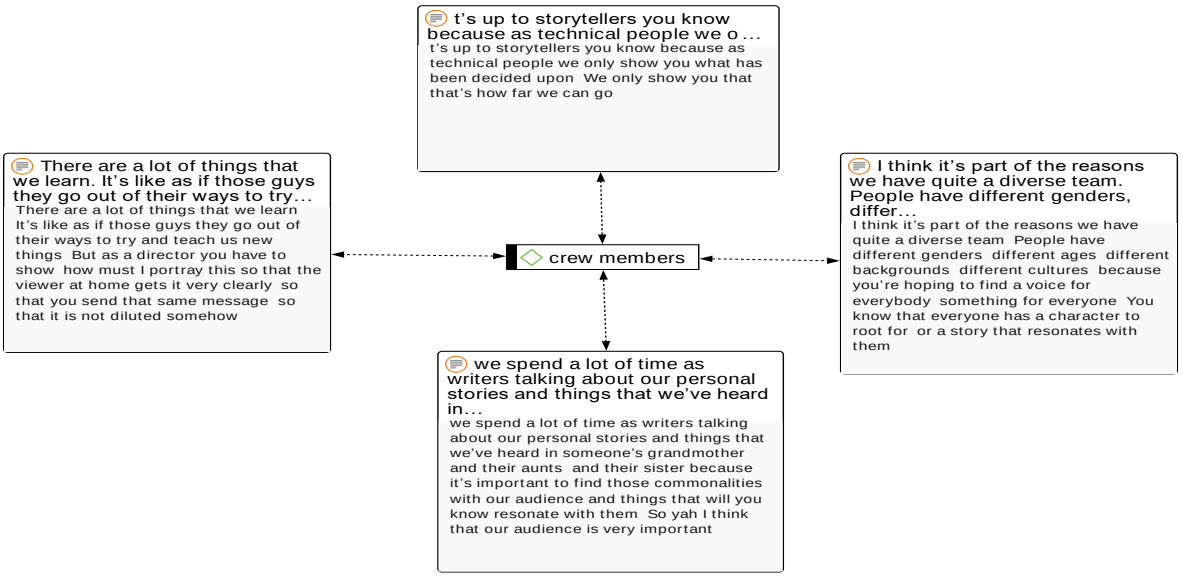


Figure 5.18 Elements involved in the storytelling of soap operas

Ironically, viewers tend to gravitate towards make-believe storylines because such storylines shift the viewers' focus from their own daily struggles and offer them an alternative world which they experience through storylines in the form of characters. However, soap opera's reflection of reality is exaggerated as it tends to highlight specific nuggets of life which highlight certain stereotypes. The effects which viewers experience

from consuming a distorted reality are not considered by those who produce soap operas. The focus is on storylines that increase viewership because they bring in the money through advertising (see Figure 5.18). Some interviewees, however, defended the product, despite its effects on viewers, stating:

"... as a director you have to show, how must I portray this so that the viewer at home gets it very clearly, so that you send that same message, so that it is not diluted somehow." [Senzo - male]

According to Generations crew members, every member plays a crucial role in the production process. Their diversity in race and culture translates into diversity in their storytelling on screen. Script writers and directors, for example, admitted to drawing from their own extratextual resources when producing soap opera narratives. Additionally, they each have to be observant of their surroundings wherever they are and the conversations that take place to ascertain popular topics in society. As crew members make reference to their own experiences, they position themselves and others bringing about elements of intertextuality.

Interviews with crew members revealed that the production of soap operas is not immune to workplace challenges. Figure 5.19 illustrates some of the workplace challenges experienced by the production team.

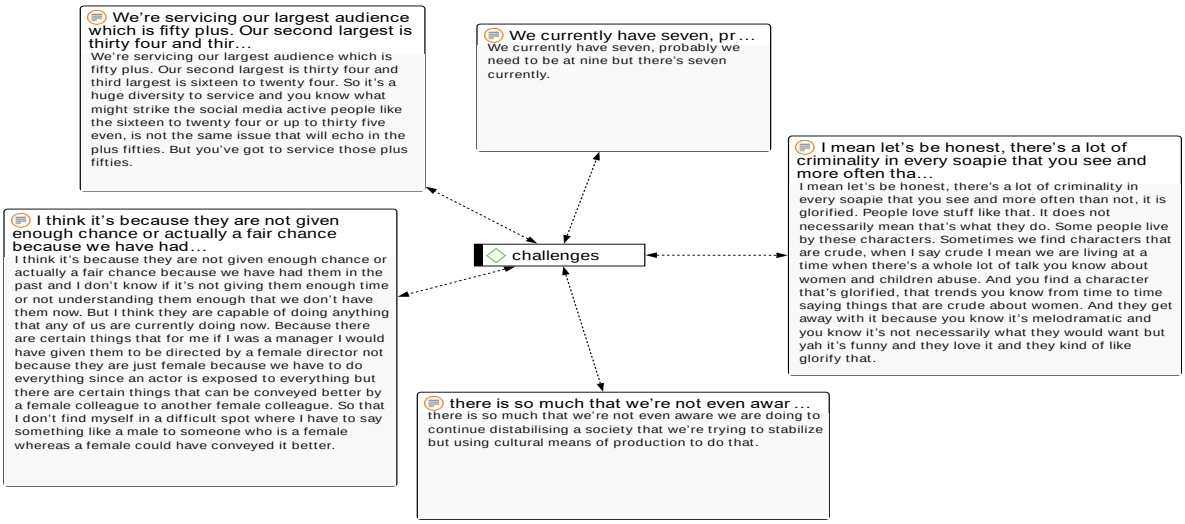


Figure 5.19 Challenges experienced in the production of soap operas

For example, interviews with directors revealed that Generations was experiencing a shortage of script writers. There were seven writers and the interviewee preferred that there were at least nine writers which would be sufficient for the soap. The interviewee stated that when there are more writers, the workload is shared and there are more creative minds for bouncing off various ideas. An increased number of writers would also help the soap in meeting gratification needs of viewers across various age groups and cultures. Another challenge includes writing narratives that equally capture both the younger and older audiences. Data from the interview also revealed age, gender, race and culture which are found behind the scenes translate into the type of product witnessed on screen. Some of the interviewees cautioned against the glorification of crime and stereotypes packaged as entertainment to capture and grow the audience ratings as soap operas influence society and shape individual behaviour.

5.5.2 Analysis of interviews with actors

Interviews with actors from Generations revealed that they too are prone to being affected and influenced by soap opera texts. Although they are aware that their job is to bring scripts to life through their characters, but to do that they sometimes have to draw on dark emotions when portraying certain scenes. Since the main focus of this research project was to explore gender identities of black females as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by both Generations and Isidingo, it was important that I include interviews with black female actresses as part of my data collection and that I witness during fieldwork observation how they bring their characters to life. Additionally, they too were behind the scenes as viewers of soap operas but now draw on their own extratextual resources to bring their characters to life.

As I was shadowing one of the assistant directors, she requested that I go witness one of the murder scenes in Studio-4. I watched a murder scene between Skhumbuzo (played by Muzi Vilakazi) and Wandi (played by Chi Mhende). In the scene, Wandi reluctantly knocked on Skhumbuzo's door. She was wearing a light brown knee-length coat over her lingerie, net stockings and stiletto heels. Skhumbuzo opened the door with a pleasant look on his face. He directed Wandi to sit on his bed so that she paid off her debt. Wandi walked in and sat on the bed whilst slowly removing her coat. Skhumbuzo then took out his phone, placed it on the right bedside table and pressed the record button without

Wandi noticing. He made his way towards Wandi, shoving her legs opened with his knees and pushed her on her back. He thereafter forced himself onto to her. At that point of the storyline, Wandi had already undergone a sex-change transitioning from a man to a woman. As the scene played out, one of the crew members made a remark on how "some of the scenes are tough to act out". As I chat briefly with her, she informed me that fight scenes generally took some time to act and perfect because "they are very technical". I noticed that Wandi and Skhumbuzo's scene had been shot for over ten takes. As a researcher, I was amazed at Wandi's ability to tap into her dark emotions and expressions on being a rape victim. My thoughts wandered to the emotional effects of such scenes on actors, how they coped before and after such scenes, and how they were able to switch back to their original selves. Although the characters of Skhumbuzo and Wandi were fictional, corrective rape and emotions associated with such an act are real and are lived experiences to some viewers.

Some of the challenges that actors and actresses face when it comes to storylines and representation of socio-economic and socio-political issues is that they know better than to question or judge the character they portray because ultimately, they are not the character (see comments in Figure 5.20). They acknowledged that acting is a craft, and it is a job that puts food on their table, thus they have limited room (if any) to question stereotypes portrayed through the characters they play, even though they are aware of those stereotypes. Time spent at performing schools has taught them that they are tools who bring the character into existence.

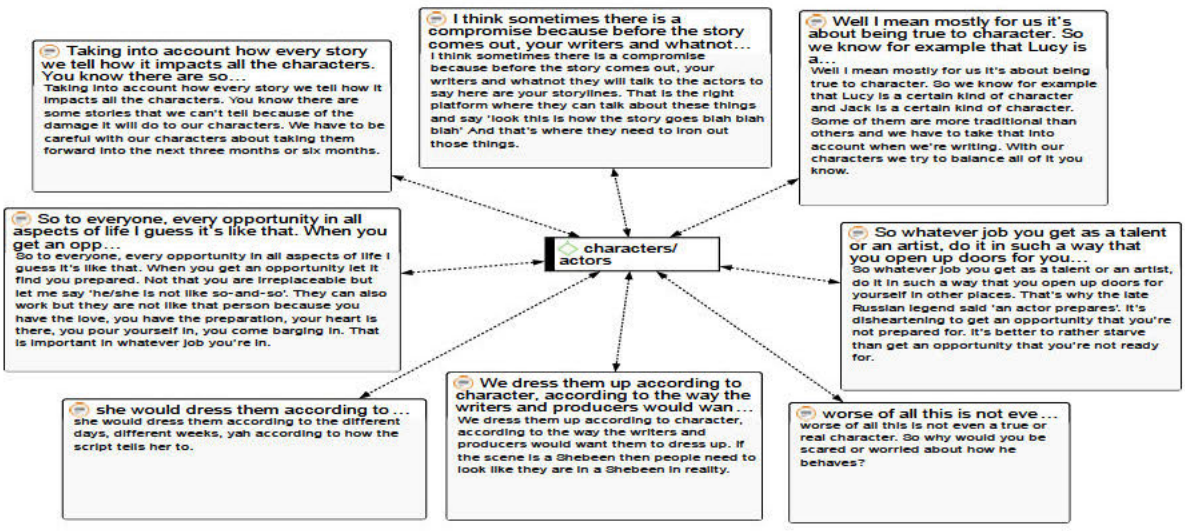


Figure 5.20 Actors vs. characters in soap operas

However, viewers hold a different perception as they struggle to differentiate between the character and the actual person who creates the character. Identification leading to parasocial interaction and relationships with characters hinders viewers from differentiating between fiction and reality. Focus group discussions revealed that viewers invest time and emotions into soap operas and thus develop a close relationship with characters. These characters exist in their world, and share intimate moments and emotions with them in the comfort of the viewers' homes. One of the actor's recounted an incident where he was physically attacked in public by a viewer whose beliefs were against what he portrayed in his character:

"I was beaten in malls just twice ... because I was harassing Sphe. Skhumbuzo harasses Sphe a lot. So, I've had to explain to people that is Skhumbuzo the character and I am Muzi. One woman did not understand. She even said 'you are despicable my boy! You are harassing the poor child!' And I said: 'No Ma, it's not me'. And she insisted that it's me. I even told her that we're just playing it's not real. And she said how could you play like that with another person's child?' So, I realized that she was deep into what she was saying but I then had to remind myself that it must be her aging. So, I told her: 'Do remember times of folktales Ma?' And she said, 'folktales for what?' So, I said 'what we are doing is like folktales.' We are telling folktales. She asked me 'Is your name not Skhumbuzo?' And I said, 'No my real name is not Skhumbuzo'. So, they told her that no granny, he is not Skhumbuzo. So, she believes that I am Skhumbuzo ... She is re-living her life through the soapie." [Nhlanhla - male]

This is an example of an occurrence where an actor had been physically attacked in a public space due to media influence and the viewer's inability to differentiate between fantasy and reality: *"So there are people who have that perception that whatever we do on television it's actually real." [Nhlanhla - male]*

Actors and actresses said they are not immune to the effects of the characters they play. Their awareness of media influence influences them to not watch television, as suggested by their comments in Figure 5.21. It is ironic that those involved in the production process of soap operas do not consume the very product they produce when in the comfort of their own homes. Asked if he watched the television medium, one of the actors' response stated: *"I sometimes browse through, I don't watch tv because of the fear of being influenced."* [Nhlakanipho - male]

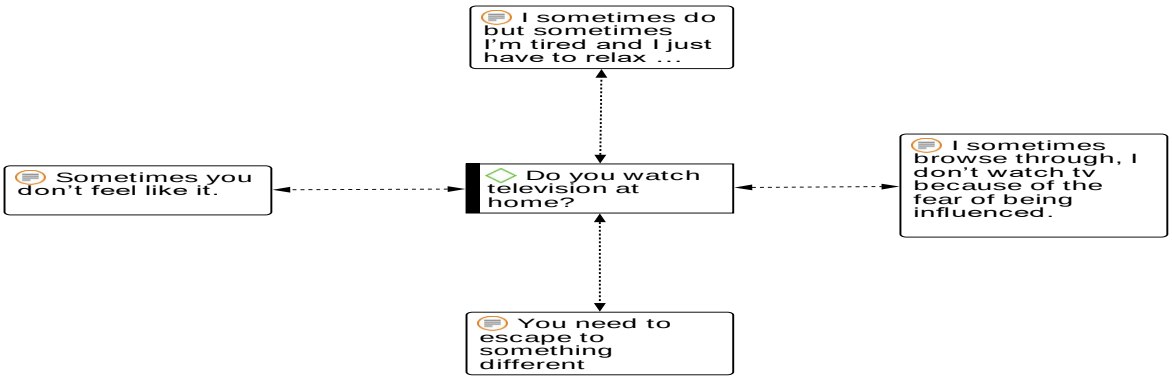


Figure 5.21 The consumption of the television medium by actors

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides the results obtained from the three approaches used in analysing data from focus groups, one-on-one interviews and soap opera video episodes. Content analysis was used to examine interviews so as to identify key words, paragraphs and themes. Discourse analysis was used not only to identify main themes, but to also examine the way they were expressed, and to examine the actual words used during the interviews. Atlas.ti enabled the visual presentation of the interviews, focus group discussion and visual text data. All methods were useful tools in providing direct quotations to support conclusions that were drawn from data. Another reason why I used these approaches was to bring the reader of the report into the reality of the situation that was studied, that is, the viewers' perspective on the effects of soap opera stereotypes in how viewers construct their gender identities. From the focus group discussions, it can be deduced that soap opera content at times devalues its viewers by insinuating that they are not enough; they are not light-skinned enough, beautiful enough, tall enough, skinny enough, straight-hair enough, and just not loved because they are overall not enough. Black men are portrayed as weak and not masculine enough, not wealthy enough, and overall, not enough. There is a danger on internalising such audio-visual text over a period of time as it results in various forms of outbursts in a viewer's life, as seen through gender-based violence, hatred and crime.

In her study looking at the representations, effects and social commentary of black women in contemporary media, Cox (2020) argues that "black people, as a group, are more aware of the realities of black women and therefore may reject the media's stereotypes about black women". Results from focus group discussions confirm this notion as participants

displayed, through their response, their abilities of being active viewers as they identified and rejected stereotypes portrayed in South African soap operas Generations and Isidingo. Participants were cognisant of the effects of extended viewing of misrepresentation, re-presentations and stereotypes towards their identity construction. It emerged from focus group discussions that although black women viewers consume soap operas for entertainment, they negotiate meanings from texts thereby repositioning their self in the social and cultural context by creating their new identities. It also emerged from the focus groups that black female viewers are adamant for their views to not only be heard but actively listened to by those who produce soap opera texts.

Focus group discussions revealed that demographics of television soap opera viewers indicate that they are ritualised media users and therefore "are more inclined to be affected by the media than instrumental media users" (Pitout 2018: 397). The identity of black African women as seen in society is a reflection of how this group is stereotypically represented in soap opera texts. Black women consume soap opera content and interpret the content as demonstrated in their own social behaviour. The power of soap opera texts impacts on each viewer's psychological and emotional psyche. This impact is exacerbated through identification developed through parasocial interaction and relationships between the viewer and texts. Chapter 6 provides a conclusion to the study and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a reflective summary of the research project, general conclusions on the research topic and demonstrates how the research questions have been answered. It further touches on the implications of the study, possible suggestions for future research, and discusses how the study contributed to my understanding and professional grasp of the issues involved.

Some of the key issues that emerged from the focus group discussions and my conducting of the fieldwork (data collection) is that focus group discussions highlighted the television viewers' awareness of stereotypes contained in soap opera storylines. Focus group participants admitted to not having the necessary media literacy skills to enable them to interrogate the media text being consumed during viewing sessions in their own homes. Although black African women are active viewers during soap opera viewing, they internalise what they have consumed and discuss it only in the comfort of those close to them, that is, their in-group. It can be concluded that social relations do impact on viewers' awareness. Shimpach (2011) describes viewing as the intersection of the media, text, viewers, reception and subject. It "implies a subject's encounter with a visual medium: an encounter that in turn implicates the subject, the medium, and the conditions of that encounter" (Shimpach 2011: 62). Shimpach's distinct moments that define viewing are:

1. When content is exhibited, received, theorised, interpreted and needs are gratified. *[The experience]*
2. Although content is watched by a large audience, it is localised according to the individual's choice. *[Preferred viewing location]*
3. Lastly, viewing is concerned with the actual content being viewed, by whom and the located environment at which the viewing takes place. *[What you watch, who the viewer is, and in which social environment]*

The lack of awareness of stereotypes by television viewers during their viewing makes us reflect on Shimpach's distinct moments that define viewing. The subject's encounter

with the visual medium is not a straightforward viewing experience, as factors like viewing location/environment, and viewers' life experiences. What the viewers watch may trigger past or current experiences and this directly impacts the viewer's viewing experience and their ability to identify stereotypes and decipher reality from fiction and/or entertainment. Such factors determine the viewing experience and subtly contribute to their identity formation, and their ability to interrogate the media texts consumed. Additionally, parasocial relationships that the viewers have with soap opera characters cloud their judgment when distinguishing between reality and fiction. Just like other relationships in reality, when one is in it, it could be a challenge to formulate an objective decision or opinion on its status.

Another key issue that arose from focus group interview data is that the preferred viewing experience location, the viewer's experience and the viewer's identity are factors that affect how a viewer interprets media text. In a comfortable and safe environment participants were able to share their opinions about media texts and also made reference to their own personal lives and experiences. Participants were able to make reference to their own experiences once they learnt that other focus group participants had been through similar or worse experiences. This contradicts the stereotype that black women do not like each other and harbour ill-wishes to one another. Such stereotypes are not a reflection of society but fuel and influence negative societal behavioural patterns. Soap opera stereotypes misrepresent black women's experiences and perpetuate a hostile environment that leads to their defensive nature in society.

6.2 Discussion of results

The analysis of all data showed that participants, as soap opera viewers, were aware of gender stereotypes contained in South African soap operas. However, their awareness did not take place in their immediate encounter with soap opera texts. Soap operas had become such a part of their lives that discourse depicted through storylines was normalised. This could be through various stereotypes including but not limited to culture, gender, race and class. It can be established that soap opera viewers share a social group and derive their sense of the self from perceived membership of that group. This is aligned to the social identity theory. The self is valued at group level. The viewer's worth is defined by that of his/her social group against other groups. The viewer's identity is preconceived by his/her social situations and the viewer conforms to the

group's norms and stereotypes. The group's identity affects individual behaviour. stereotypes categorise viewers according to the groups they supposedly belong to and viewers' value of the self at group level.

Stereotypes label viewers according to their race, gender, class, culture, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic and socio-political classifications. This speaks to the power and dangers of stereotypes in soap operas, which have the ability to dictate subtly to the viewer who they are. Stereotypes in soap opera storylines determine viewers' social practices and what is acceptable behaviour within their social group(s). As social representations theory suggests, one defines one's sense of self by constructs of social representations in which one is subsumed. Viewers subsumed in the television soap operas, Generations and Isidingo, define their sense of self by constructs of social representations portrayed in these soap operas. In other words, viewers draw on soap opera stereotypes to construct their identities. Tainted social representations through stereotypes on soap opera storylines potentially results in black women constructing misrepresented identities which are in opposition to their authentic self. This disempowers them as seen in gender, race and class issues in society.

The findings of this study show that black women's identities are constructed through obscure soap opera texts which epitomises the values, social norms and cultures of the West (hence the expression that there are soap operas in South Africa but not South African soap operas). There are many alternative portrayals of women which are absent in soap operas, and which might contribute to their empowerment. This includes, but is not limited to, black women who are survivors in life; women who are hard workers who provide an honest living for their families; women who are happy living lives not dictated by traditional gender roles; women who are ambitious and assist other women to succeed; women who are guided by their values and morals and are role models to both women and men; and women who are overall genuinely happy in life.

Television soap operas influence viewers to measure up to artificial standards. It has been suggested in this research that television contributes to the social reality of the viewer. Soap opera content parallels the world of the viewer. The genre has open texts and continuous storylines which makes it more attractive to the female viewer although some male viewers watch it. The genre's attraction for both genders is attributed to its inclusion

of both male and female characters in storylines. Viewers watch soap operas for different reasons, and themes emanating from media messages make viewers organise their understanding of the world around them, making soap opera texts effective and influential to the viewer. Parasocial relationships with media characters, through texts, are systematically and strategically created (that is, with regard to features such as height, weight, race, gender, class) by producers of soap operas to fit into the objectives of storylines making them more relatable with and influential to viewers. Literature and data in this study have shown that viewers also construct their own interpretations around soap opera themes, and this is "the locus for any attitude/viewing correlations" (Livingstone 2007: 10).

Although viewers are influenced by television (Packard 2007), media content is not a reflection of society but a stereotyped version of people's lives (Ross 2017). This influences and manipulates a viewer's understanding of his/her social and cultural context resulting in the "daily habits and perversities" of society in general (Packard 2007). Such effects of persuasion through stereotypes are embedded in storylines and usually take place beneath the viewer's level of awareness. The systematically engineered probing used by the media taps into the weaknesses and frailties of society, something that Packard (2007: 34) cautions may result in "anti-humanizing implications". According to Packard, humans are easily influenced due to their impulsive and compulsive nature. Producers of soap operas study their viewers' habitual patterns and create content packaged in stereotypes beneath their level of awareness. Unaware viewers gravitate towards such content because it momentarily relieves them of their own lives. The millions of people who are heavy television viewers are most likely to see the televised world closely mirroring reality (Gerbner and Gross 1976). As data has shown, viewing of repeated images influences a viewer's behaviour and how they construct their identity, because viewers live their lives through media characters, and also take on the life of media characters after the viewing.

"If we really thought about it, how many shows do we watch as black people, black women, that stimulate our minds and help us develop as individuals? They are limited to none." [Senamile - female]

"They are all about baby-mamas, conflicts, jealousy, murder, it's all chaotic." [Londiwe - female]

"They are all about entertaining our bad living situations and not entertaining good living situations." [Londiwe - female]

"My grief is with the fact that all of this is shown our television screens of hundreds of thousands of people to consume and think that it is right." [Senamile - female]

The results of the study also point to a much-needed regulatory system or structure that will ensure that soap opera content adheres to the objectives listed in the SABC's mandate. The analysis of the data and objectives of the mandate speak to the responsibility producers have to viewers in producing content that is uplifting, reflective of their socio-economic status, and that encourages and also empowers viewers with the necessary tools for individual and collective development. Although some content is informative, as results have shown, there is still room for more educational content that will counter the inaccuracy and misrepresentations of race, gender and culture found in soap opera content. Focus group participants admitted to watching soap operas for entertainment that did not stimulate their minds into interrogating the text and fostering their development as individual and collective members of society.

Although media content is regulated through organisations like the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) established in the year 2000, viewers continue to consume content that is not of the public interest, content which contains stereotypes that portray black men and women negatively. The effects of negative stereotypes can be detrimental as they misinform viewers about different races and genders. They result in black people, as the in-group, fighting each other and other races against power relations, gender inequality, dominance, masculinity, patriarchy, femininity, classism, and social inclusion. Effects of storylines perceived as harmless fantasy cascade into viewers' lives as viewers simulate characters through parasocial interaction and relationships with media characters:

"We are a messed-up society that gets gravitated towards nonsensical content that does not stimulate or empower the mind." [Nonhle - female]

"Stereotypes that we watch through soap opera content do cascade into our families." [Gugu - female]

Soap operas have a wide reach and potential, through storylines, to impact positively on society. Negative stereotypes breed unhappy, ill-informed, toxic and self-destructive viewers. Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need, being among the first soap operas in post-apartheid South Africa, were seen as necessary to show the progression of the country where its people live in unity, engage in intercultural relationships and leave a lasting legacy of the notion of a rainbow nation. It is in this ideology of unity that neighbourhood is encouraged on screen and ought to be practised off screen.

Soap operas should include a variety of characters who portray an accurate reflection of people found in society, especially black people who reside in the townships. Female viewers identify with black women who are voluptuous, have natural hair, are strong, family-oriented and respectful. Such women when portrayed in soap operas are stereotypically represented as docile, submissive and dependent. Storylines ought not enforce disunity but ought to provide reasons for healthy debates in families that will lead to progressive citizens. It is important also that storylines have a beginning, a middle/climax, and an end. All these phases should be given equal attention and importance when scripting and filming. Viewers should see the context of a storyline, lessons to be learned from it, how that storyline relates to them and their surroundings, and how they can develop themselves and those around them. Storylines ought to contain information with substance which adds to the viewer's life and not create self-hate, low self-esteem and outright unhappiness.

6.3 Contemporary women and empowerment

Exploring gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas Generations and Isidingo lends itself to the empowerment of viewers. Themes emanating from data attest to how viewers seldom see women represented as assets in the development of society (Ahmed and Khalid 2012). Data from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that negative stereotypes of black women limit their potential as individuals and provide them with unrealistic content to construct their identities. As a medium, television is an ideal platform to communicate positive media messages to millions in society, messages that will see women (and men) as agents of change who not only empower themselves, but their families and society at large.

Data revealed how empowerment is closely linked to self-actualisation. In a social representation context where an individual integrates with other members within a social group, the realisation of one's identity is a stepping-stone to empowerment. Empowerment is linked to personal control, power and legal rights (Fawcett *et al*. 1984; Rappaport 1987; Ahmed and Khalid 2012). Scriptwriters and producers will continue to churn out stereotypical content that promotes traditional gender roles and racial stereotypes if viewers do not actively interrogate content and participate in its production. Participants expressed their need for storylines that represent images of empowered women who do not promote gender bias, racism, tribalism, and classism. Failure by the media to address challenges of empowerment makes any attempt to societal development and transformation ineffectual. Shifting and changing mindsets of viewers are crucial to the transformation and empowerment processes (Ahmed and Khalid 2012: 1).

Empowered women have the ability to influence society. Given correct recognition, women can positively influence their families, communities and society. Although more women are participating in media production, the numbers do not necessarily translate to power or empowerment for women. We have seen that mere access of black African women to the television medium in the form of cast, crew members and even viewers does not translate to empowerment. The value systems, attitudes and beliefs surrounding power relations both on and off screen are signified by gender and racial stereotypes still evident in soap opera storylines resulting in negative public opinion among viewers about their own identity, self-actualisation, and those around them. Yet, according to Ahmed and Khalid (2012: 2), "the media are very effective, powerful and influential in disseminating new knowledge, useful for behaviour change among women, thus influencing women's empowerment variables as well".

The power of moving images and sound contained in the television medium is insurmountable in changing social representation issues. Participation of women in mass media and the positive portrayal of women are not enough. Women need to be in positions of power, making decisions alongside men, to actively participate in content creation and challenge the perpetuation of traditional gender roles disguised as entertainment while crippling society. Women in positions of power will enable equal representation of issues pertaining specifically to both women and men; issues that will encourage public discourse and potentially shift the mindsets of those who perpetuate

gender-based violence in any form. Such engagement results also in women owning their narratives, and engaging in family decisions and role-negotiations at home for the achievement of a better quality of life. Progression ultimately calls for the involvement of all gender and races in actively participating in content creation that portrays realistic representation of different races, gender and class.

The mandate of soap operas on a public broadcaster like the SABC is not only to educate but also to inform the public on social issues like gender-based violence, providing information of possible avenues to solicit help and highlight consequences of the actions of perpetrators. For some viewers, soap operas are their only source of information, and at times, the only person who can get through that viewer is the character(s) s/he has developed a parasocial relationship with. The representation of women as always engaged in cat fights and unhealthy friendships add to women's lack of support towards each other:

"Soap operas show us female characters who are competing and not healthy competition but toxic competitions and that's stereotyping us as women." [Londiwe - female]

"If we don't cut each other, we're bewitching one another. If we aren't bewitching each other, then we can't stand one another. If we can't stand each other, we take each other to shady abortion clinics to have abortions. We don't get along, we can't even stand seeing each other, we can't even converse in taxis because you stole my man." [Londeka - female]

"It's always that cattiness between women more than camaraderie between people who understand what another woman is going through." [Hlelo - female]

6.4 Summary outline of study

Television soap operas originated from the First World countries and gained popularity in numerous Third World countries owing to the genre's ability to use relatable storytelling techniques which touch on viewers' social and cultural contexts. Although soap operas in South Africa were first introduced on the radio medium, their inclusivity and demand led to their presence on the television medium attracting millions of viewers. Soap opera storylines are fiction, yet storylines are attractive as they parallel the real-life events of viewers. The growth in the number of soap operas has resulted in them competing for viewers. Data shows that content quantity now supersedes its quality. Competing for viewership has resulted in soap operas which entertain viewers through

negative stereotypes as opposed to being informative. Data and literature framed within reception analysis theory, social representations theory, and social identity theory attests to the influence of soap operas on the identity construction of viewers. When soap operas prioritise negative stereotypes for the sake of high viewership numbers, they negatively affect identity construction among views. The methodology best suited for extracting the 'how' of this research was that of qualitative research as the study was concerned with the viewers as opposed to viewership numbers. The methodology highlighted how humans give labels and meaning to objects contained in the world according to their knowledge. Situating the study within the interpretive paradigm approach afforded me to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of individual viewers, notwithstanding their interaction with each other as individuals, and also an understanding of the historical and cultural context of viewers. Data were collected using focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews and content analysis of video episodes, and the analysis was presented using visual graphics from the Atlas.ti software called networks and snapshots to illustrate semiotics and other findings.

The research problem was to establish the extent of viewers' awareness of gender stereotypes in soap operas, and how they might negotiate these dominant representations in the construction of their personal and social identities. This study revealed that black women from townships are a combination of both ritualised and instrumental media users as they select the consumption of soap operas, among other genres, for both pleasure and information. Although soap operas contain stereotypes that re-present and misrepresent their images, black African women use information from soap operas to construct their identities and negotiate their position in the social world. As Kidd (2016) suggests, viewers are more likely to identify positively with positive media images and relate better with characters compared to negative stereotypes which beat them down. Such biased representation affects the behaviour and treatment of individuals towards each other (Murray, Schwartz and Lichter 2001). Although stereotypes and racial prejudice do exist in society, their reproduction packaged as soap opera texts places emphasis on gender inequality. Stereotypes thrive on power imbalance, and the social, cultural and economic gaps that exist in society. In fact, stereotypes promote imbalance of power between members of society, as one group sees themselves as the superior in-group in comparison to the inferior out-group.

Black African women viewers from townships acknowledged that it will take some time before they can fully penetrate the media landscape and take ownership of their own narratives. Therefore, as active viewers, they define the self outside of soap operas so as to interpret texts drawing on their extratextual resources[33]. Each viewer is individualistic in beliefs and values, thinking habits, perspectives of the world around them, socio-cultural and socio-political positioning, and overall identity. Each viewer connects, comprehends and interprets texts differently to the next viewer. This means that although black women may share similar physical identity attributes (how they are), their identities as individuals (that is, who they are) differs.

6.5 General conclusions about the topic

This study aimed to explore representations of gender in soap operas and its contribution to viewers' identities. As an exploratory study, it aimed to address the 'what' question, in this case what gender identities are constructed by black females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas: Generations The Legacy and Isidingo The Need. These two soap operas were observed over a duration of two years where varied and extensive qualitative data were collected and analysed. At the beginning of the study, Generations and Isidingo were two of South Africa's most watched soap operas and this is why I chose them as my case studies. But at the end of the study Generations moved to being the second most watched soap opera after Uzalo, a Durban-produced soap opera which uses the IsiZulu indigenous language, which began airing in 2015. Isidingo went off air on the 12 March 2020 citing financial challenges. The results of the data analysis suggest that gender awareness does resonate with active viewers who question and address gender inequality in mass media, especially in television soap operas. It can be assumed that among the millions of viewers who consume soap operas daily, only a small percentage interrogate content while the rest consume it for entertainment.

Participants raised concerns about the effects of South Africa's historical atrocities experienced during the apartheid era and how media images, especially of black African women, continue to widen the gap of gender and racial inequality. During their encounter with the media text, viewers temporarily lose their own reality by 'living' through their

[33] Extra-textual resources like gender, class, age, race, and ethnicity affect how viewers interpret media texts, as suggested by Pitout (2018).

idolized soap opera character(s). This happens through viewers' parasocial interaction and relationships with media characters, identification, imitation and transportation processes. Focus group discussion data demonstrated viewers lack of knowledge in their ability to decipher between fantasy and reality as they easily emulate, either consciously or unconsciously, characteristics and scenes of soap operas. Although actors are mindful of the influence of media characters, they raised a concern that some viewers think media characters are real. Viewers' identities are influenced by characters who are negatively stereotyped and portray the characteristics of the Mammy, Sapphire, Angry Black Women, Strong Black Women, and Jezebel stereotypes. Owing to the power and influence of the media, these characteristics can be witnessed in society through the behaviour and attitudes of and about black women.

This study also aimed to raise awareness to those who produce soap operas to understand the role and contribution of their representations of black females, and the role these play in the public agenda and how gender parity can be attained in South Africa. Soap opera producers admit to their responsibility towards their viewers:

"The story doesn't only happen with what's on the screen, it happens in the taxis, it happens at the water-cooling; it happens you know while you're cooking and getting ready to watch the show. That's a lot of where the story actually happens and so you know hopefully and that's our intentions that it's not only to present the story, but it's to engage the audience in these life decisions that our characters take that hopefully reflect their own lives." [Christopher - male]

Soap opera characters portraying negative stereotypes towards black women such as that of the Mammy, Sapphire, Angry Black Women, Strong Black Women, and Jezebel, make participants question how they are valued by those who produce soap operas as images contained in this genre misrepresent and negatively re-presented them within storylines. Participants, as viewers of soap operas, blamed media re-presentations and misrepresentations for their social behaviour, misconceptions, identity loss and their overall treatment from other gender and race groups.

"It's the media actually that has created us to be like that because all these storylines are mostly downfalls, broken homes, we find entertainment in such things than actually having to find entertainment in people getting married and living faithfully. 'What a nice thing to watch!' What we watch is actually what we end up getting and giving in our real

lives. We're contributing also into the broken families and whatnot. We are careless and this is subtle and sadly it's how things actually play out." [Sinenhlanhla - female]

Gender inequality is rife in South Africa across all spectrums and, during focus group discussions, participants acknowledged that soap opera content, through stereotypes, does contribute to gender misrepresentation and inequality in both the social and cultural contexts. They also acknowledged that soap opera content has clouded who they are and their role in society:

"I just feel that as black women we have so, so much potential. The reason why society is so messed up is because of us as black women, including other races but with a particular focus on black women. And for things to come right, goes back to black women as well. As you guys mentioned, a house becomes a home because of a woman. I also share the same views as you. I believe that a woman's place is at home. But because I'm not playing my role as a woman at home, then I end up having dysfunctional kids. And the reason for finding myself now having to go and work, because men have failed in their role. Because men have failed in their roles, now we are compelled as women to go and add to wherever it is that they have lacked. The time I'm trying to fill in for my husband, I leave my lane and my own role then suffers. Unfortunately, now kids are raised or cared for by their teachers. We see learners stabbing and killing their teachers nowadays in schools. If a child grew up not knowing or respecting their parent, then who are you as the teacher to be given respect by that child? All I'm saying is that we are supposed to be CEOs and managers of our homes. The love we're meant to give to our kids will not come from the salary we earn at the end of the month. Money does not equate to love. The mother must ensure to give her time, love and nurture to her kids. A man is supposed to be a provider. They are supposed to work. The bible says they must work for the rest of their lives. But because now we're faced with men that are lazy, we are now forced to go and work and do what we weren't supposed to do. And now who suffers at the end? It's our kids. And when these kids grow up, they become exactly like us. And the same thing goes for them, and the cycle goes on and on and on. Storylines are not objective but subjective. The production team's life experiences play a role in the content they produce and how it's being produced." [Nonhle - female]

Data showed that stereotypes limit the potential of black female viewers and frame them negatively in society. Although viewers said that at times they struggle to identify with some characters who portray an exaggerated and limited view of black women, black African women with positive identities do exist and are role models in society:

"I would say that a black woman is my mother because of the way that she was, the way she lived and the way she was raised and the way that she carried herself. I see her as my definition of a black woman. She was strong. She had all the powers to say that because I am alone and won't be able to care for my kids, let me leave them like this and go and live my own life. But she chose that in whatever happened, she will always be there for us and protect us under her wings and there's nothing I can do. Their father took the

decision that he did, but due to the fact that these are my kids I will do all that I can to protect them through whatever. So, for me, a black woman is someone who is strong, knows what she wants, is not swayed by any circumstance. Stand your ground as a woman and know what you want and be unique. Being unique means that you do not want to be like another person. You love who you are and what you were born with, like we mentioned. You speak your mind and at times it only dawns on you later what you've said." [Thabile - female]

"For me I define a black woman as a woman of God. If you're a woman you always face difficulties but if you walk with God, like I used to preach at church, I realized that I faced difficulties when I was in relationships. Most men are taken aback by a woman that preaches and they would ask themselves 'so who would I be with her, the pastor?' I have encountered such challenges but at the same time, the word of God says a house becomes a home because of a woman." [Hlelo - female]

"She kneels down to God instead of going to discuss her business with other woman because that doesn't end well." [Thabile - female]

Data substantiated that stereotypes portrayed in soap operas contribute to the suppression of black women, especially those who reside in townships, as they continue to struggle to construct positive identities from negative media images. Acting is an accumulation of life experiences and it is the recognition of those experience that attract viewers. The parasocial relationship between the viewer and character is so emotionally engrained that it becomes their reality. Therefore, if an idolised character's storyline shows her/him in an abusive relationship that leads to gender-based violence and they tolerate being ill-treated by their partner, the viewer relates to such treatment and interprets the outcome of a storyline as their truth. The theories used in this study speak to the importance of viewers' comprehension of the self in order to be able to read the media texts because, as readers, they draw on their extratextual resources when interpreting media texts. Through the process of identification, ritualised and instrumental viewers have the ability to read media texts, develop parasocial relationships with media characters, and negotiate identity representations which affect women's empowerment as individuals. Soap operas play a pivotal role in a developing country like South Africa in informing and educating society about socio-economic and socio-political issues.

Participants raised concerns about the limited roles acted out by black women in soap operas Generations and Isidingo. Additionally, active participants rejected some of the media messages, stating that they do not relate to the characters and their storylines. This shows that there is still room for alternative portrayal of black women in soap operas; that

is, of black women who live stable lives and are role models in their society. Storylines lack context when showing black women, as participants stated that they wanted to see more storylines of women who had moved from an impoverished state to being survivors in life. Participants used an example of a woman who wakes up in the early morning and engages in various trading opportunities like selling fruits or somehow making ends meet. That woman has the ability to use her minimal income and provide an education for her child. The child then graduates from university and becomes an executive member of a prestigious company. Participants said that they yearned to watch such storylines which would make a positive contribution to their identities and encourage them to be empowered.

Analysis of data also revealed that female participants are unable to negotiate dominant gender representations in soap operas if they are not involved in the scriptwriting and directing departments. Thus, it is imperative that gender and racial representations are first realised off screen to translate to equal representation on screen. Gender inequality and misrepresentation in soap opera content is a result of the translation of individuals in positions of power. Until women, especially black women, are found in positions of power in the production process of soap operas, storylines will continue to embed gender, racial and cultural stereotypes which limit the potential of its viewers, in this case black women. Findings from this study show a need for both Generations and Isidingo content to be regulated. Content transmitted through a public service broadcaster like the SABC has to inform, educate and entertain as stipulated in the channel's mandate. Productions have to be responsive to the needs of the viewers putting them first before advertising and profit. The representation of stereotypes is a societal problem that calls on both producers and consumers of soap operas to make an effort to contribute positively to social issues.

6.6 Researcher's reflection

Embarking on this study, I had my own preconceived perceptions about the soap opera genre and its viewers, as I was curious as to the genre's ability to attract millions of viewers daily and the effects of its content on viewers. My interest in this study was sparked by the fact that, as a young black woman living in the township, this genre enhanced my abilities to question who I am, gave me the ability to learn and speak the English language, and transported me through its storylines to alternative worlds that

were not attainable in my reality. Soap operas introduced me to a variety of women-identities through its characters and these contributed to how I continue to negotiate and construct my own identity as a black woman in the social and cultural contexts. Decades later, this genre still attracts millions of black female viewers who are directly and indirectly influenced by its storylines. However, there seems to be a disconnect between the transformation of society and that of soap opera images. Focus group discussions revealed that society is no longer just in need of entertainment, but that socio-economic development calls for informative and educational media messages which contribute to the country's development in meeting individual viewer's goals and ultimately the millennium development goals.

This study provided me with an understanding of how I as a black African woman residing in a township comprehend and interpret soap opera texts, and how stereotypes embedded in storylines contribute to how I construct my own identity as a black African woman. As an instrumental viewer who selectively watches media content with a purpose, I have the ability to discern between content that will either positively or negatively influence my identity. When decoding media messages, my culture, gender, race and social experiences determine how I interpret media messages and what meanings I derive from soap opera texts. Catering to cognitive, affective and social interactive needs of viewers means that soap operas' influence extends to larger parts of society. The soap opera genre has the ability to inflict positive change in society and challenge both encoders and decoders of texts towards positive media images that not only re-present reality but present images of a society full of possibilities and opportunities for both individual and communal growth. However, the literature did occasionally raise feelings of discomfort, as I was forced to reflect on and confront both my past and present experiences as a black woman and how I have had to navigate certain spaces and places in society, and re-adjust my behaviour and attitude when faced with social and cultural circumstances/challenges which might annihilate my sense of worth and self-esteem.

6.7 Implications of the study

Television creates, moulds and represents cultures and this medium portrays multicultural narratives on storylines. It is implied that as the world shrinks into a global village, and so do various culture, thus creating a space for merged and new cultures and identities. Identity and culture are evolving. In a global village where we study each other's cultures

and social contexts through a genre like soap operas, our social behaviour and how we perceive others are influenced.

6.8 Contribution of the study

This study is considered to have made the following contributions to the field:

(1) It adds to the growing literature on black women's identity and has established that negative stereotypes in soap opera storylines have a negative impact on how black women construct their identities. Negative stereotypes should not just be replaced with positive images of black women, but representations should contain a fair reflection of black women's diverse identities and frame their reality. Although tensions and difficulties remain in the realistic representation of gender identities which are positive and aspirational whilst catering to traditional and conservative audiences, the key is in the diversity of the audiences who vary in their media literacy levels. A diverse media audience calls for a diverse production team that will produce soap operas that are reflective of society both behind the camera and in front of the camera. Producers, scriptwriters and directors must consider views of the audience on their social media platforms if they want to be inclusive and realistically represent black women's identities.

(2) It has stablished the fact that black women viewers are a vulnerable group who comprehend and interpret texts, taking into account their ideological, cultural and social context. Their choice of media content is directly correlated to their positioning in the social spaces they occupy.

(3) Through this study, it can be seen that positioning black women in soap opera texts founded on the premise of African feminism could potentially lead to their empowerment. Themes emanating from data attest to how viewers seldom see women represented as assets in the development of society. Data from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that negative stereotypes of black women limit their potential as individuals and provide them with unrealistic content with which to construct their identities. African feminism concerns itself with cultural, socio-political, economic, racial, and religious issues pertaining to African women and women in the continental diaspora. Therefore, African feminism becomes

relevant as a guiding framework. The findings of this study show that black women's identities are constructed through obscure soap opera texts which epitomise the values, social norms and cultures of the West. This leads to the conclusion that 'there are soap operas in South Africa but no South African soap operas'. It must be emphasised that there are many alternative portrayals of women which are absent in soap operas and which might contribute to their empowerment.

(4) Soap opera viewers have moved from being passive, to active, to interactive. Therefore, they must be involved and/or engaged in the encoding process of media messages to move from being mere reactive viewers into proactive and interactive viewers. Focus group data revealed that participants make up soap opera viewers and do not possess the necessary media literacy skills to enable them to interrogate the media text being consumed during viewing sessions in their own homes. Social media interaction has grown the sizes of the in-groups and shaped viewers from being passive to interactive. Media users are either ritualised or instrumental. Ritualised users are more passive and consume media content for relaxation or to pass time. The introduction of social media through digitisation has enabled media users to be more instrumental and interactive as they comprehend media texts. They are more concerned with the texts addressing their personal integrative needs and social integrative needs, rather than their cognitive and affective needs

(5) Soap opera viewers have moved from being passive, to active, to interactive. Therefore, they must be involved and/or engaged in the encoding process of media messages to move from being mere reactive viewers into proactive ones.

(6) This study concludes that there are soap operas in South Africa but not South African soap operas.

6.9 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Video episodes for content analysis were limited to those available as full episodes on YouTube at the time of the study. There is no scholarly explanation as to why only those

specific episodes were available. Their availability could still be based on the biasness of the material available on public platforms like YouTube.

There was an imbalance in the data collected between Isidingo and Generations. After countless attempts sent to Isidingo executive producers for permission to conduct fieldwork observation and interview cast and crew at their production studios, all requests were declined and the response was that the Isidingo soap opera "cannot accommodate such requests". This short-changed the research study of primary data from Isidingo leaving more data available from Generations. Accessibility to the production of the Generations soap opera enabled me to have data from one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, and texts. Whereas for Isidingo, I could only collect data using focus group discussions and texts. Isidingo was taken off air in the duration of the research project on 12 March 2020. It can be assumed that their declining to accommodate fieldwork observation and one-on-one interviews with cast and crew was due to internal changes and challenges happening at the time of the request and leading to the soap opera being taken off air. According to David Makubyane, SABC Acting Group Executive for Television, in a media statement, said that:

> …the decision to decommission Isidingo was informed by a number of factors which includes poor audience ratings during the time slot, decline in revenue and poor return on investment. The organisation was faced with no option but to review the performance of all programmes on the channel that are not performing and to ensure that the channel's content is competitive and commercially viable… SABC 3, through its strategic plans, will continue to commission and intensify its investment in local productions and content which will allow creative to come up with new, gripping and commercially viable content for the channel.

Although there are other soap operas in South Africa, the study looked only at Generations and Isidingo as its case studies as these were two of the oldest soapies produced since the democratic year of 1994. The two soap operas provided a wide scope but the inclusion of other soap operas, although it would have meant a larger body of data on which to conduct research, would have diluted the focus of this research. Additionally, I reached saturation while looking only at Generations and Isidingo.

Future research focusing on the influence of soap opera content and stereotypes on black males would be interesting to explore, as this group also forms part of soap opera

viewership and is also stereotypically represented through media messages. Another recommendation for future research would be to conduct a narrative study that focuses on black female executive producers and their preferred themes around female identity on their productions. There is also room for future research focusing on the representation of black women in different genres like reality shows, crime dramas and other serials. Another suggestion for future research is a study that looks at the representation of women from other races to ascertain images used to represent them and whether or not stereotypes are only prone to black women.

6.10 Conclusion

If used correctly, this genre has the potential to educate societies about socio-economic, socio-political and other developmental issues. Although not a regular occurrence, informative storylines have proven to be a success in the past, especially when told in a manner to which viewers can relate. Producers as senders of text ought to encode messages that viewers will receive, understand and interpret without the loss of meaning. This study suggests that soap opera viewers are active viewers who comprehend and interpret texts, taking into account their ideological, cultural and social context. Therefore, there needs to be a closer relationship in the chain of communication between those who produce soap operas and those who consume them. Such a relationship will minimise the loss and rejection of intended meaning.

Soap opera producers as encoders of texts ought to have constant viewer-engagement to determine if the messages encoded as storylines are decoded with the intended meaning by viewers. Constant engagement with viewers, perhaps in the form of research, is important to gauge their understanding and interpretation of media messages. Viewership numbers are not a good indication of a soap opera's success as they aid in the commercialisation of productions through advertising. South Africa is evolving and socio-economic and socio-political environments give evidence of the country's need of developmental tools. Soap operas as a means of visual communication are answerable to their viewers to communicate realistic messages portraying tangible tools useful for individual and collective development and upliftment.

The soap opera genre has grown exponentially over the years and this storytelling format has given birth to numerous other genres and techniques of storytelling. However, even though soap operas in different parts of the world are presented in various languages and nationalities, storylines and narratives share some similarities. These similarities transcend cultural differences, as mass media have eroded barriers of language, geographical location, and cultural differences. Almost every community in South Africa has a communication medium to enable the exchange of messages and ideas that could reach far and wide. Through the use of technology like television, people are now multicultural, multilingual and able to negotiate their identities. Globalisation through the growth of technology has created a new citizenship and differently negotiated identities. Viewers of soap operas are international, intercontinental, multicultural and intercultural. It is important, therefore, that scriptwriters study their viewers in order to fashion media images that empower viewers and challenge the current status quo. Young people of today have a better ability to adapt to global changes, whereas the older generation still exhibits some resistance. It is the responsibility of scriptwriters and storytellers to ensure to merge the growing gap between the two, and tell 'infotaining'[34] stories which accommodate different generations. In conclusion, this study has revealed that we have soap operas in South Africa but not South African soap operas: perhaps this omission needs to be rectified by developing a genre which reflects our unique national identity.

[34] "Infotainment can be defined simply as a hybridization of information and entertainment" (Baym 2015; Thussu 2010, in Pelzer and Raemy 2020: 3), involving four elements: a dramatic writing style, heightened visual effects, incident-focused and personalised sensationalism, and a marketing or advisory element.

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APPENDIX A: GATEKEEPERS LETTERS (GENERATIONS LETTER AND ISIDINGO EMAIL)

GENERATIONS
The Legacy

14 November 2018

To the Department: Media, Language and Communication

This letter serves as an invitation to Maud Blose, student number 216072891 to visit the Generations production studio at Henley Television facilities, Henley ave Auckland park, Johannesburg.

Permission is granted to conduct interviews during the recording times of the production with the script department, technical departments including camera and sound, makeup/wardrobe and actors on call during the period 21 January 2019 to 25 January 2019. The data collected during this period will inform her PhD research project titled: "*Exploring gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas: Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need.*" The project aims to address the relationship between media culture, social identity and representation, and to explore how these can contribute to the empowerment or disempowerment of women.

Please contact the Generations Production department should you require any further assistance.

Regards
Costas Gavriel
[redacted]
15/11/18

MMSV Productions CC Reg.No. 1993/013383/23
Henley Studios, SABC, Auckland Park, JHB
P.O. Box 35288, Northcliff 2115

LH

Lulu Hela <LuluH@p-media.co.za>
Fri 2018/09/28 12:50
To: Maud Blose

Good Day,

Thank you for your email.

Unfortunately we are not in a position to accommodate this request.

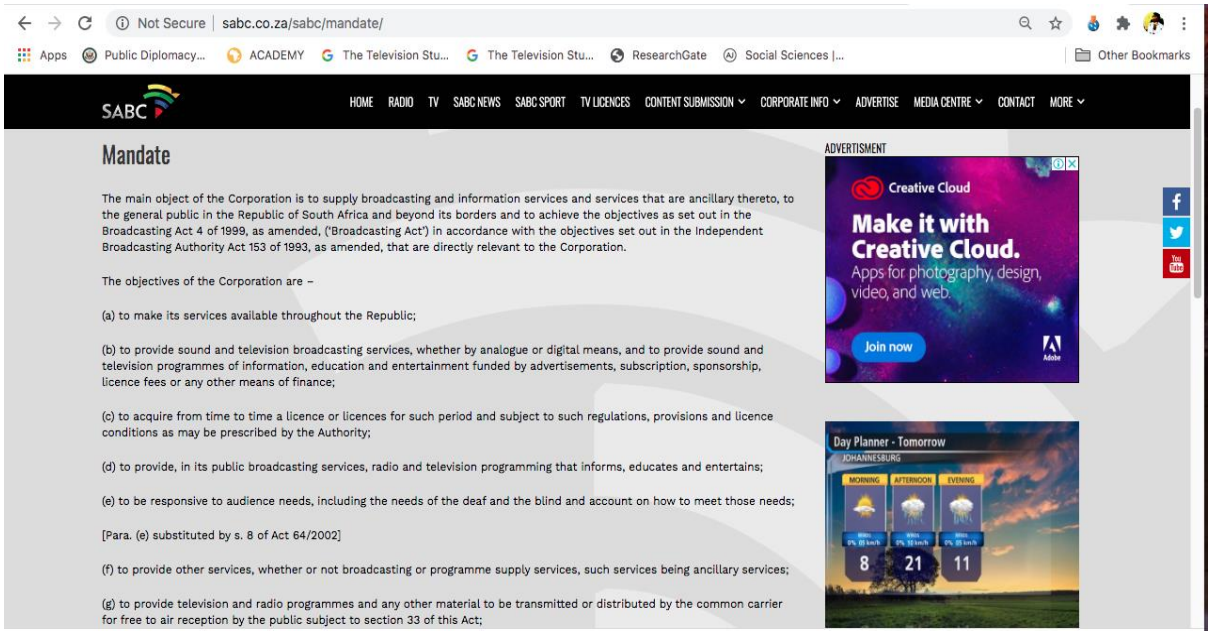
Kind regards,

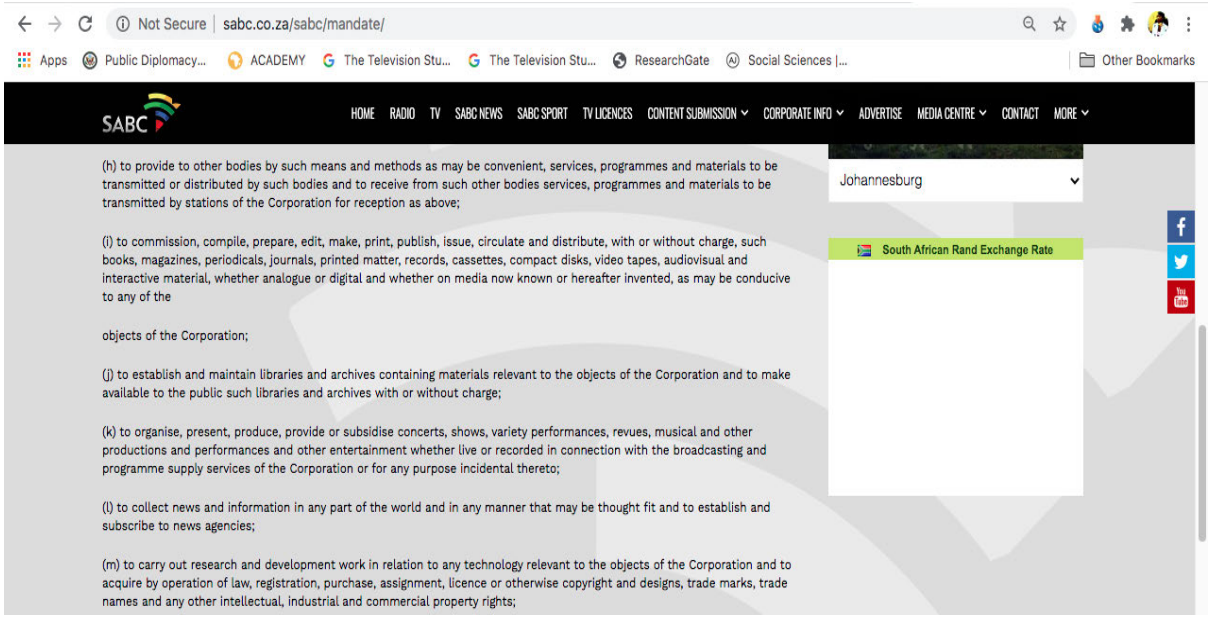
Lulu Hela
Line Producer

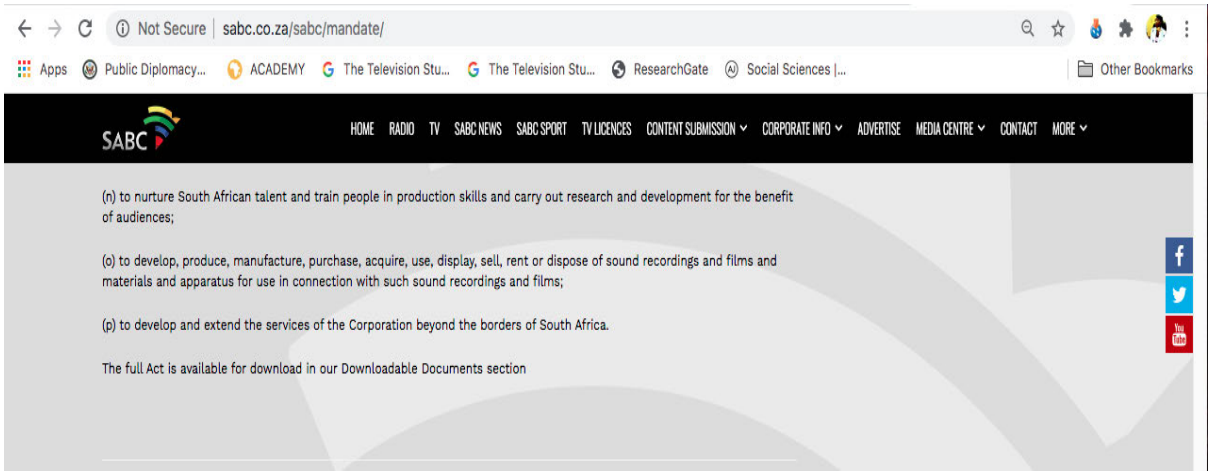
pomegranate media / ISIDINGO

Switchboard: +27 11 719-4001
Email: [redacted]
Address: Sasani Studios, 2 Johannesburg Road, Highlands North, 2192
www.p-media.co.za

APPENDIX B: SABC MANDATE AND EDITORIAL CODE OF CONDUCT







APPENDIX C: RESEARCH ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER FROM UKZN

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

18 June 2018

Ms Maud Blose (216072891)
Scool of Arts
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Blose,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0374/018D
Project Title: Exploring gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas: *Generations: The Legacy* and *Isidingo: The Need*

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 26 April 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]
.....
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Jean-Philippe Wade
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr Nicola Jones
Cc School Administrator: Mr Christopher Eeley

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 **Facsimile:** +27 (0) 31 260 4609 **Email:** ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX D: ENGLISH CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

My name is Maud Blose (216072891). I am a PhD candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College. The title of my research is: *Exploring gender identities of females from townships in Durban as represented and negotiated through stereotypes by South African soap operas: Generations: The Legacy and Isidingo: The Need.* The aim of this study is to address the relationship between media culture, social identity and representation, and to explore how these can contribute to the disempowerment or empowerment of women. I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The interview will take about (*90 minutes*) long.
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet is provided for signatures).

I can be contacted at:
Email: maudb@dut.ac.za
Cell: 0798421366
Tel: 0313736621

My supervisor is Professor Jean-Phillipe Wade who is located at the Media & Cultural Studies Department, Howard Campus, University of KwaZulu Natal.
Contact details:
Email: wade@ukzn.ac.za
Tel: 0312601284

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APPENDIX E: ISIZULU CONSENT FORM

Appendix II: IsiZulu Informed consent form to participate in the study.

INCAZELO NGOCWANINGO LWENDIMA EDLALWA IMIDLALO KAMABONAKUDE EMPILWENI YABESIMAME

Igama lami ngingu-Maud Blose. Ngifundela iziqu zemfundo ephakeme eNyuvesi yakwa-Zulu Natali. Ngenza ucwaningo kubantu besimame abathanda ukubukela imidlalo kamabonakude ebizwa ngokuthi i-*Generations: The Legacy* kanye *ne-Isidingo: The Need* nokuthi lemidlalo inamthelela muni ezimpilweni zabo, ikakhulukazi ngendlela abazibona ngayo, ukuziphatha emphakathini nokuthi ibakhulisa kanjani kumbi ibehlisa kanjani. Ngizokunika incazelo bese ngikucela ukuthi ubambe iqhaza kulolucwaningo. Ngokuzibandakanya nalolucwaningo, ngiyathemba ukuthi ngizofunda lukhulu kuwena njengomunye wabantu besifazane kuleli. Ulwazi lwakho lungaba usizo olukhulu kulolucwaningo.

Uma kwenzeka kube khona ongakuzwisisi kahle kulokho engikushoyo ngamalungelo akho kulolucwaningo kumbe ngemibuzo uqobo lwayo, ngicela ungitshele ngikuchazele ukuze uzwe kahle.

Inqubo okuzosetshenzwa ngayo.

Ucwaningo luzoba nemibuzo ozoyifundelwa bese uyayiphendula. Umcwaningi yena uzobhala konke okushoyo. Uma kukhona imibuzo ongathandi ukuyiphendula ungayeqa ungayiphenduli. Konke okushilo kwabhalwa phansi kuyohlala kuyimfihlo yakho nomcwaningi.

Okungase kube nobungozi kulolucwaningo.

Eminye yemibuzo kulolucwaningo ibucayi futhi ithinta wena uqobo lwakho. Ngizokucela ukuthi ukhulume ngezinto ezikuthinta kakhulu okungase kwenze ungakhululeki kahle ukukhuluma ngazo. Awuphoqiwe ukuphendula imibuzo ekuphatha kabi futhi awuphoqiwe ukubamba iqhaza kulolucwaningo uyacelwa nje.

Ukubaluleka kokugcina lolucwaningo luyimfihlo

1

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT FORM

LETTER OF CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Project:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Maud Blose, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this project - Research Ethics Clearance Number: [Pending],
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the project.
- I am aware that the results of the project, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a project report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this project can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the project.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the project.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may be related to my participation will be made available to me.
- If I have concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher, then I may contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration, and have been provided with the contact details.
- I hereby consent ☐ / do not consent ☐ to have all interviews audio-recorded (tick **one** box to show which option you choose.)

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Participant	**Date**	**Signature / Right Thumbprint**

I, _____ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above project.

Maud Blose	06 June 2019	_____
Full Name of Researcher	**Date**	**Signature**

APPENDIX G: SEASON 20 – EPISODE 52 (INTERACTION BETWEEN MATLALA AND HENDRIK)

Matlala: I beg your pardon, my lady Kgothalo. Forgive my trespasses, for I have digressed from the righteous path of respect.
Hendrik: What's got you so focused?

Matlala: Eish, man. I’m writing a letter to that lady I told you about. I just want to say I’m sorry.
Hendrik: Oh, I thought that apology would be made on one knee, and verbally.
Matlala: No, Hendrik, I’m scared of the lady. She’s like fire. I’m just going to write this letter and put it under her door.
Hendrik: In that case, a letter’s the right way to go, bro. Okay, so let’s hear it.
Matlala: Uh-uh.
Hendrik: Come on, man.
Matlala: Uh-uh, Hendrik.
Hendrik: How else would you know how the lady will react? You have to read it to someone. Right?
Matlala: Okay, sharp.
Hendrik: Okay, go for it.
Matlala: [reads letter out loud] I am pregnant with shame and shyness as I write this. I beg your pardon, my lady. Forgive me my trespasses for I have digressed from the righteous path of respect.
Hendrik: There are a lot of big words there.
Matlala: Yes, but she’s a classy lady.
Hendrik: Why not just make it simpler? Like … just saying I’m sorry. Or, what I said was wrong, instead of this Oh my lady, and I am pregnant with shame. What does it even mean? Pregnant with shame?
Matlala: Eish! I made a flop. This is a flop.
Hendrik: Okay, then why not write it in the lady’s language, or your own language?
Matlala: Sesotho? That is a classy lady.
Hendrik: But it will make it much more genuine.
Matlala: Uh-uh. No Sesotho.
Hendrik: Come on, man.
Matlala: Uh-uh Hendrik.
Hendrik: Okay.