

**THE VIEWERS' PERCEPTION ON THE PORTRAYAL OF GAYS AND LESBIANS
IN SELECTED TELEVISION PROGRAMMES**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Mabokela Sedibu Evelyn, declare that the dissertation entitled *The viewers' perception on the portrayal of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes* hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of MA Media Studies, is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted before by me for a degree at this or any other university. That all the sources that I used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference.

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ABSTRACT

The visibility of gays and lesbians has predominantly improved in recent years, and the media have been a fundamental tool when measuring the homosexual communities' social status. This study investigates whether current mainstream television accurately depicts and represents gays and lesbians, and whether gay and lesbian individuals are impacted by these television portrayals. Through in- depth interviews, focus groups and observations, the research findings reveal that gay and lesbian television depictions are not completely accurate and have varying effects on audiences. However, this evidence is significant to the entertainment industry when creating fair gay and lesbian character portrayals that could be positively receptive by the homosexual community.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Introduction

Homosexuality stands within a social area which is largely still unknown to many people. Society has two views of homosexuality. The traditional view holds that homosexuality is abnormal that the orientation is a disorder, and the behaviour is pathological. The opposing view is that homosexuality is a normal variant in the human condition which is determined before birth, and that homosexual behaviour is natural for those oriented. Gays and lesbians are minority group and as a result, the way homosexual community is portrayed is affected.

Homosexuality is still at a point where a number of people seem to be uncomfortable with the style of living that homosexuals have chosen. This has a great impact on how they are viewed by the society, with much of what goes on in the media. All it takes is an idea of one greater body, in this case the media, to affect ideas of others. If media portrays homosexuality as some kind of disease that people need to be cured from, then society will see it in the same light because they believe that what is depicted in the media is true. A lot of people rely on the media to give them information on topics such as homosexuality that they cannot discuss with others, because they somehow seem sensitive to society. So they take information as it is from the media without questioning it since they do not have any other source of information about homosexuality.

Noted stereotypes have been created in our media around the idea of what is thought about the homosexual community. The way homosexuals are portrayed at times is in fact very realistic. There is still much that has not been done which creates false ideas and only strengthens the stereotypes that exist today. In most cases the media influence the way that people think. If society perceives a certain group negatively or positively, the media would have influenced their attitudes in one way or the other. The media's portrayal of gays and lesbians has an impact on the way people view the homosexual community.

It is significant that gays and lesbians be portrayed accurately. There are gays who possess masculine characteristics but are not given the same coverage as gays who possess feminine characteristics. Lesbians with masculine features appear more in the media than lesbians with feminine features. It is still believed that gays are womanly and lesbians are manly. This is a stereotype that will take time to correct but with the help of the media it will gradually change.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a sudden and continuing "visibility" of fictional gay characters in American commercial television programmes. This has led to a dramatic increase of openly gay characters within the context of both social change and economic change to commercial television. The representation of gays and lesbians on American broadcast television is directly tied to the need of terrestrial broadcasting networks to hang on to "quality" audience of affluent, sophisticated, and highly educated adult consumers. Gay characters are assimilable within fictional social world that appeals to up- scale straight audiences (Allen & Hill, 2004:371).

Furthermore, Allen and Hill (2004:200) state that the actual number of heterosexual and homosexual characters and personalities in American television is wildly disproportionate. Heterosexuality becomes natural simply by functioning as an overwhelmingly present type of sexual identity in popular television texts. Historically, Hollywood has used homosexuality as a marker for deviance or criminality. Older films often link homosexuality to abnormal or antisocial behaviour, in the process affirming heterosexuality as normal.

It took South African television years to finally include homosexuals in the programme text. The majority of people in society are not educated about the lifestyle and sexual orientation of homosexuals. Four years ago the popular soapie *Generations* introduced the characters of *Jason* and *Senzo* as a gay couple. The majority of viewers said that they were not comfortable with watching gay characters kissing and showing affection. Some viewers even threatened to stop watching the soapie. The broadcasters had to come with a solution that benefited majority of viewers (heterosexuals), because they did not want their Television Audiences Measurement Survey (TAMS) to drop in this particular soapie. Although they continued to play as a gay couple, kissing was omitted.

Ott and Mack (2009:56) note that while few television shows cast gays and lesbians, gay men are portrayed as possessing feminine characteristics whereas lesbian women are portrayed as possessing male dominant characteristics. In television shows, the main focus is almost always their sexual orientation and what people think of them. It is rare to see masculine gay characters and feminine lesbian characters in the television text; if feminine lesbians are represented they appear as bisexuals or victims of homosexuality.

A country like Zimbabwe, which is authoritarian, does not allow the broadcasting of homosexual programmes. It is illegal in Zimbabwe to be homosexual. Homosexuality is seen as a threat to many people, especially to heterosexuals (Ott & Mack, 2009:82). A man should be involved with a woman, that is how stereotypes put it, and they believe that things should be left as such. When a man has an intimate relationship with another man or a woman with another woman, it is portrayed as abnormal and against nature.

1.1.1 Homosexuality and religion

Religions have different views about love and sexual relations between people of the same sex. Presently, a large proportion of the Abrahamic sects view sexual relationships outside a heterosexual marriage, including sex between same-sex partners, negatively. There are groups within each faith that disagree with traditional positions and challenge their doctrinal authority. Oppositions to homosexual behaviour ranges from quietly discouraging displays and activities; those who explicitly forbid same-sex sexual practices among adherents and actively oppose social acceptance of homosexual relationships. The Support of homosexual behaviour is reflected in acceptance of sexually deviating individuals in all functions of the church, and sanctification of same-sex unions.

The relationship between religion and homosexuality can vary greatly across time and place. It also differs within and between different religions and denominations, with various forms of homosexuality and bisexuality. Present day doctrines of the world's major religions generally vary vastly by denomination on attitudes towards these sexual orientations.

Among those denominations that are generally negative towards these orientations, there are many different types of actions they may take: such as quietly discouraging homosexual activity, explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual practices among adherents, and actively opposing social acceptance of homosexuality, to execution. Many argue that it is homosexual actions which are sinful, rather than the state of being homosexual itself. Several organizations exist that assert that conversion therapy can help diminish same-sex attraction.

However, within many religions there are also people who view the two sexual orientations positively. Many religious denominations may bless same-sex marriages and support Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders (LGBT) rights and the amount of those that do are continuously increasing around the world as much of the developed world enacts laws supporting LGBT rights.

Historically, some cultures and religions accommodated, institutionalized, or revered, same-sex love and sexuality. Such mythologies and traditions can be found around the world. For example, some denominations of Hinduism do not view homosexuality as a religious sin. In 2009, The United Kingdom Hindu Council became one of the first major religious organizations to support LGBT rights when they issued a statement "Hinduism does not condemn homosexuality".

Regardless of their position on homosexuality, many people of faith look to both sacred texts and tradition for guidance on this issue. However, the authority of various traditions or scriptural passages and the correctness of translations and interpretations are continually disputed. Some Christians state that homosexual desires and

temptations may feel natural to some people but are not what God intends for human beings. Any sexual encounter outside heterosexual marriage is immoral.

1.1.2 Homosexuality and relationships

There are numerous myths and misconceptions about homosexuality. Even with the increasing prominence of homosexuals in society, these myths continue to be propagated in the media. Two Percent (2%) of men have engaged in homosexual sex but only 1% of the men consider themselves to be exclusively gay. Homosexuals say that their sexual preference is natural. Often they say that their feelings are God-given. Kuefler, (2005:18) states that some studies suggest that people are not born homosexual that it is a choice. Homosexuals do make choices about their sexual behaviour, but that does not mean that a man or woman can wake up and decide at that moment to be gay or lesbian. When Christians talk about homosexuality as merely a choice, they deny complexity of human nature and human sexuality. Kuefler, (2005:18) sexuality and sexual identity are not chosen the same way as one chooses clothes in the morning. Sexual attraction is something that a person cannot choose. It is hard if not impossible to choose who people want to be attracted to. Sexuality, natural attractions, and who people wish to spend their life with are not just a simple choice. Homosexuals do not decide just from nowhere to become attracted to the same sex. It would make no sense because human beings do not control their urges or their attractions. Kuefler (2005:18), every human being's sexual arousal happens completely outside the control of their conscious minds. Consciously people do not choose to be aroused by one sex or another. Gay men and lesbians never chose to be aroused by people of the same sex. Few would choose to receive the isolation and hatred of others

that often come with not being heterosexual. So, to say that homosexuality is merely a choice is to invalidate and insult people who are dealing with real emotions and temptations in their lives (Kuefler, 2005:18).

Human sexuality is complex and there is no explanation that accounts for all human behaviours and attractions. It is not black and white. Some influences begin before a child is old enough to walk and talk. That may explain why certain people believe that they were born with their sexuality, since they cannot remember a time during which they were any different. Positive influences can lead to a negative sexual identity, but human beings also have free will. Parents should not blame themselves over what a child might do even when raised in the best home environment (Kuefler, 2005:21).

There is not much difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. To understand this, we need to have a better understanding of the nature of homosexual relationships. Kuefler (2005:21) the basic reflecting difference between men and women is that sex and sexual attractions are not necessarily key points in some relationships. For female homosexuals “emotional attraction” plays a more critical role than sexual attraction. It is believed that there are higher levels of promiscuity among homosexuals especially gay men than in the general population. Sometimes the amount of sexual activity among homosexuals is exaggerated, even gay activists have admitted to that.

1.2 Research problem

Television has a huge effect on how the society reacts. As a result, it contributes to the stereotypical ideology that the society holds of homosexuals. Fourie (2008:332-333), the representation of gays and lesbians on television leads to the stigma and prejudice

surrounding homosexuality. Most people have kept their sexual orientation secret, despite the recent increased visibility of gays and lesbians on television. This happens because most portrayals of gays and lesbians are as victims of homophobic attacks; treated as outcasts and not as 'normal' people who form part of the society.

Homosexuals are always portrayed as subordinates to heterosexuals. Television programmes with gay and lesbian characters depict them as subordinates to heterosexuals. In a business set up, heterosexuals are people who homosexuals must report to, they are rarely given leading roles; they best suit them as followers even when they have the capability to lead. Most teenagers who are still in the closet depend on television to give them information about sexuality. It becomes problematic when one sexual orientation is portrayed as better than the other. This leads to viewers being confused and hiding their sexuality because they are scared of being alienated by their families and friends.

Most teenage viewers imitate what they see on television and reproduce it in reality. If homosexuals are portrayed as an unusual group of society then they will be treated as outcasts. Positive portrayals of gays and lesbians shown on television can influence how homosexuals are treated in society. Television should show families as people who support one another and the decisions they make about their individual sexuality.

1.3 Research questions

- Does the selected television programmes have an influence on society in the way it portrays gays and lesbians?

- Does the portrayal of gays and lesbians on television programmes contribute to stereotypes?
- Does television portray gays and lesbians, positively or negatively?

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study

1.4.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to examine the portrayal of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes and the influence it has on viewers' perceptions.

1.4.2 Objectives

Objectives of this study are:

- To investigate whether or not television's portrayal of gays and lesbians has an effect on perceptions.
- To examine programmes and roles that gays and lesbians play in the texts.
- To examine and analyse strategies used to portray gayism and lesbianism.

1.5 Sexual orientation on television

Sexual orientation refers to gender, that is, male or female gender to which a person is attracted to. It also includes the feeling of sexual and emotional attraction to another person and includes the practices of a sexual nature. It is normal to have sexual feelings, as people pass from childhood to adulthood, their sexual feeling develop and change (www.wikipedia.org). Every person has a sexual orientation which may change over the course of one's life, and not everyone feels comfortable in disclosing their own sexual orientation. Most people do not discover their sexual orientation until they reach the adolescence stage. The experience can be a very confusing period given that

attractions to both sexes are part of normal adolescence and part of the discovery pattern of one's own sexuality.

Individuals who may be confused about their sexual orientation may have one or more of the following thoughts (Kuefler, 2005:41):

- Confusion about being attracted to certain people.
- Sometimes wondering if there is something wrong with them.
- Feeling uncomfortable about being attracted to people of the same sex.
- Worry about other people's reactions to him/her.
- Censoring one's behaviour around people who do not know his/her sexual orientation.
- Worry about disappointing one's parents if he/she is different from what they expect him/her to be.
- Afraid of parents' reaction if they find out that he/she is not heterosexual.
- Feeling safe only when surrounded by others who are of the same sexual orientation.
- Sometimes feeling alone because no one will understand and accept him/her.
- Feeling relieved after acknowledging his/her own sexual orientation to oneself.

During the adolescent stage, sexual feelings are awakened in new ways because of the hormonal and physical changes of puberty. These changes involve both the body and the mind. Teenagers tend to wonder about new and often intense sexual feelings. It takes time for many people to understand and accept their sexual orientation. Part of

understanding one's sexual orientation includes a person's sexual feelings and attractions.

There are several types of sexual orientation namely: heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals. Most medical professionals believe that sexual orientation involves a complex mixture of biology, psychology and environmental factors. Claussen (2002:98) in most cases sexual orientation especially in the adolescent years is fluid and changeable. There are lots of opinions and stereotypes about sexual orientation. For example, having a more "feminine" appearance does not mean that a male is gay; and having a more "masculine" appearance does not mean that a female is lesbian. Assumptions made just based on looks can lead to the wrong conclusion. It is likely that all factors that result in someone's sexual orientation are not yet completely understood. It is certain that no matter their sexual orientation people want to feel understood, respected and accepted.

1.5.1 Heterosexual

Claussen (2002:98) defines heterosexuals as people who are romantically and physically attracted to people of the opposite sex. Heterosexual males are attracted to heterosexual females, and heterosexual females are attracted to Heterosexual males. Heterosexuals are sometimes called "straight".

1.5.2 Homosexual

People who are homosexual are romantically and physically attracted to people of the same sex. Females who are attracted to other females are "lesbians", males who are

attracted to other males are known as “gays”. The term gay is sometimes used to describe homosexuals of either gender (Claussen, 2002:98).

1.5.3 Bisexual

People who are bisexual are romantically and physically attracted to members of both sexes. Claussen (2002:98) sexually thinking about both the same sex and the opposite sex is quite common as teenagers sort through their emerging sexual feelings. This type of imagining about people of the same or opposite sex does not necessarily mean that a person fits into a particular type of sexual orientation.

1.6 Gays and lesbians on television

Television is central to the lives of most viewers. Through television many people receive information about sexuality, some positive and accurate; some negative and incorrect. Television shows cannot continue this trend of trying to “normalize” homosexuality. Homosexual relationships are different, and every gay and lesbian relationship is unique. Grouping all of them together does little to improve awareness and acceptance of homosexuality on screen. As new shows try to explore such relationships, they should keep in mind that grouping relationships based on sexual identity is regressive.

The ABC network recently received an “outstanding rating” from the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) during its latest report because more than half of its programming includes homosexual characters or discussions about homosexuality. The network has the highest percentage of hours that includes gays and lesbians or reference to them. Programmes with gay characters include *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Will &*

Grace. Currently almost every network on television broadcast programmes that contain homosexual content.

Research during the past fifty years has questioned the extent to which the media are an accurate reflection of both the proportion of men and women in society, as well as the extent to which the activities and values portrayed are diverse.

Calvert and Wilson (2011:98) point out:

The underlying concern is that the media's worldview is a distortion of reality and rarely depicts the wide variety of roles and attributes of women and men in the real world. This narrow reflection of reality may limit the aspirations and expectations of girls and boys who are looking to see what is expected of people of their gender.

Recently, there has been increased representation of gays and lesbians in the media, after years of being virtually invisible or only subject of ridicule. As advertisers sought to expand their commercial markets, they showed more gay and lesbian characters on television. Andersen and Taylor (2009:46) note that this make gays and lesbians more visible, although critics point out that they are still cast in narrow and stereotypical terms, showing little or nothing about real life for gays and lesbians.

Richardson and Seidman (2002:85) argue that homosexuality is still rarely portrayed on television, and is even less likely in media targeted to children and adolescents. Although more frequent portrayals of gays and lesbians appear in adult television programming, such as *Will & Grace* and *Queer as folk*, such characters are rarely included in children's or adolescents' television programming. In situation comedies in the year 2000, fewer than two percent of the characters were homosexual. All of the homosexual characters were between twenty and thirty-five years of age. When gay

youth have been included on such popular teen shows as *Dawson's Creek*, they have been typically shown solely in interactions with their heterosexual peers, allowing the audience to “safely” see homosexuality outside a context of sexual desire.

Furthermore, Calvert and Wilson (2011:106) state that the complicated image of gays and lesbians is the media's connection of homosexual sexual behaviour to AIDS. The example hereof is *the Real World's Pablo*, which may have increased awareness about the transmission of the disease. The entertainment media's depiction of white, gay males with AIDS may leave viewers with an inaccurate perception that AIDS is primarily a homosexual disease. Viewing audiences typically do not endorse the portrayal of homosexuality in programming targeted towards children or adolescents.

In 2005, an episode of the children's public television show *Postcard from Buster* featured the title character, an animated bunny named *Buster*, on a trip to Vermont to visit maple sugar farms run by a lesbian couple. The episode was not aired after the US Secretary of Education said many parents would not want their children to be exposed to such “lifestyles”. Scholars concerned about the few portrayals of homosexuals in the media suggest that such lack of representation can result in further stigmatisation as well as young people's reluctance to acknowledge their own sexual orientations (Merskin, 2011:92).

Mooney, Knox, and Schacht (2009:108) state that there was a time when gays and lesbians were not present in mainstream media at all, but in today's times it is much different. It is not that difficult to find a television show where a gay character is not present in some way. In many ways television shows contributes greatly to the

emerging homosexual culture in mainstream media. Networks today have less reservation in presenting gay characters. In some instances, networks now specifically focus on being gay friendly. With popular television shows such as *Will & Grace*, gay culture has been put in the spotlight. Although this has influenced the presence of homosexuals in the media, it can be said that it has only strengthened the general assumptions that society has of gay culture.

Without proper representation in the media, stereotypes are formed and presumptions are made about homosexuals by how they are depicted in the media. Metzke (2009:22) defines “Symbolic Annihilation” as a term used to explain the absence of representation in the media. In most cases, the media do more presenting than representing. Metzke (2009:22) argues that the media may think that they are representing the homosexual community in an accurate way while this may not be the case. This is where stereotypes are formed and enforced. A show like *Will & Grace* opens doors to the public to catch a glimpse into the homosexual world. The show indeed brought a positive light in gay culture, but failed to represent the lives of gays and lesbians adequately. The two main characters that were gay never had relationships that were qualitatively gay, and there were no scenes revolving around the idea that there were gay characters. *Will* is the gay character who is best friends with *Grace*, a heterosexual. The nature of their friendship revolves around *Grace*’s failed relationships with heterosexual men, and how *Will* is always there for his friend whenever she needs him (Metzke, 2009:22).

This type of shows demonstrate the idea that media do not mind including homosexual characters in their storylines, as long as the show draws high ratings and generates

profits for advertisers. The show has tremendous success with viewers who actively watch it every week. The question has, however, been how many of the viewers actually gained more knowledge about how gays live their lives? With the media in the market for making money, sometimes lines are blurred in order to do so. This is where more presentation is done than proper representation (Calvert & Wilson, 2011:105).

Shanahan and Morgan (1999:94) state that homosexuals are still targets of prejudice. It is manifested in a wide range of behaviours ranging from verbal expressions of dislike to violent attacks. Negative attitudes toward homosexuals have been documented as pervasive among adolescents and the general adult population in the U.S. Attitudes toward homosexuals are slowly changing, and it seems reasonable to explore what role television has in influencing sexual prejudice.

In the first decades of television, homosexuals were mostly absent or portrayed negatively as deviants in mainstream shows. Lesbian representations have fared better than gay men, and both have fared better in film than on television. Content analysis suggests that, at least through the early 1990s, positive representations of gay men and lesbians on mainstream television were few and far between. By 1995 homosexual characters accounted for 0.6 percent of the televisions' population, significantly less than estimated rates of homosexuality in the U.S population. In the 1990s, a number of gay characters on television increased extensively, though the beneficence of increased visibility is a matter of some dispute (Walters, 2001:56).

Gay and lesbian characters in the mainstream media are not only important to raising awareness to the issues that affect the gay and lesbian community. Their stories offer

something for people, particularly youth, who may be going through similar struggles. As gay storylines continue to become increasingly common in prime-time, the once held stigma of an actor playing a gay character has faded. Many people in the entertainment industry would still argue that an actor takes a calculated risk in accepting a 'gay' role. These actors are applauded for not only embracing their roles with pride, but for also using the platform they have been given to advocate for equal rights (Singhal, 1999: 92).

Although homosexual characters continue to proliferate, one of the biggest obstacle on shows geared toward adults is showing them kiss on the television screen as their heterosexual counterparts would. Teen shows do not seem to have the same problem. Gay youth on television have been kissing since the days of "*Dawson's Creek*". Gay and lesbian characters have made their way into mainstream television and film in large numbers in the last decade. However, until recently such characters were hardly depicted. For example, the Production Code of 1934 formalized the voluntary exclusion of all gay and lesbian characters from Hollywood films, and such exclusion was adhered to when television merged 15 years later (Russo, 1981:117).

Not until the 1960's and 1970's did television shows occasionally deal with gay and lesbian themes. Networks were still reluctant to introduce a regularly appearing homosexual character. Television and studio films have also struggled with depicting homosexual characters. At times actors have been hesitant to accept gay roles, fearing that such roles would make it difficult to obtain straight roles later. In spite of attempts to exclude gay and lesbian characters and difficulties with casting homosexual characters, gay and lesbian characters have continued to emerge in television (Harris, 1999:88). As

we now see gays and lesbians portrayed in the mass media with greater frequency than ever before, yet we know little about the effect these portrayals have on the general public with largely negative attitudes towards homosexuals. Research studies investigating the influence of television on attitudes toward homosexuals are important because gays and lesbians are the target of considerable prejudice manifested in a wide range of behaviours from verbal attacks to violent physical attacks.

Television in its own way teaches tolerance. Some of the most popular shows today feature gay or lesbian couples. These are just moderately popular shows. A few of these shows are discussed below:

1.6.1 Desperate Housewives (www.yahoo.com) is a gossip kind of show that follows the lives of five housewives living on *Wisteria Lane*. It had several gay couples on the show, starting with *Bree Van De Kamp's* son, *Andrew* and his partner *Justin*. Other partners included *Alex* and *Tad*. *Bob* and *Lee* become the first gay couple to live in *Wisteria Lane*. Unlike *Andrew*, their issues do not primarily focus on their homosexuality but on issues any couple (homosexual or heterosexual) might encounter. The inclusion of these and other characters on the show has at times created conflict and a sense of normality to the topic.

1.6.2 Brothers and Sisters is a drama that follows the lives of the *Walker family*, particularly five adult siblings. *Kevin Walker* is openly gay. He had several romantic partners and an on and off relationship with *Sotty*, to whom he is currently engaged to. *Kevin's* homosexuality has raised issues within the family but for the most part, his

family supports him. They prove that when you love someone for who they are, their sexual orientation is not an issue (www.yahoo.com).

1.6.3 Modern Family is a sitcom taking a look at the lives of the extended *Pritchett family*. *Mitchell Pritchett* and his partner *Cameron Tucker* adopted a daughter named *Lily*. *Mitchell* and *Cameron* are devoted parents with clear role distinctions when it comes to parenting. *Cameron* is the nervous and nurturing type while *Mitchell* is more practical and less emotional. They have their quarrels and tender moments. Their relationship is an excellent example of a same gender family unit living a typical life. *Modern family* excelled in portraying gay parents, dismissing the stigma that has been attached to gay couples and adoption (www.yahoo.com).

1.6.4 Grey's Anatomy (www.yahoo.com) is a television series that follows the staff of *Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital*. While many of the staff has complicated lives, *Dr. Callie Torres* has a more complicated life. In season 3 of the show she is married to *George O'Malley* and later divorced. *Callie* becomes aware of an attraction to *Dr. Erica Hahn*. She explores her sexuality with *Erica* but later the relationship ended. Then she begins dating a pediatrician named *Arizona Robbins* in season 5. They are a close lesbian couple but struggle over the issue of having children of their own, causing them to break up. *Callie* dates a heterosexual man during her break up with *Arizona* and gets pregnant. Throughout this up and down they reconcile and got engaged but immediately after the engagement they got involved in a car accident, leaving *Callie* fighting for her life. After *Callie's* recovery, she and *Arizona* got married and they had a baby girl. They have support from both their parents although *Callie's* mother has difficulties accepting

that her daughter is a lesbian. This show is noted for its emotionally charged stories and this couple is loved by many viewers (www.yahoo.com).

1.7. Sexuality on television

For many years gay and lesbian television characters were not seen displaying their sexuality or involved in passionate relationships. Seldom, characters were seen proudly declaring their sexuality and their romantic behaviour with a partner. This strongly contradicts common behaviours seen among heterosexual television characters, even those in unmarried relationships. These homosexual characters can be labeled as possessing an inability to be in committed relationships. Although there has been a gradual improvement in the level of gays and lesbians representation, they were still invisible in television. It is believed that television can be more creative in how it depicts homosexuals across all platforms, and attempt to avoid stereotypes.

A study conducted by Raley and Lucas (2006:28) on the 2001 television season found that there was no difference in the number of displays of affection seen between gays and lesbians compared to heterosexual couples. The degree of affection was different. This shows how heterosexual characters are depicted as more expressive with their sexuality. On the other hand, a 2007 content analysis on prime-time television shows determined that the amount of time spent showing homosexual situations on television were relatively small, compared to the heterosexual discussion and sexual behaviour (O' Shannon, Corrigan & Walsh, 2012:58). In recent years, homosexual sexual behaviour has been more visible on television. But it seems female same-sex sexual behaviour is more common than male, possibly because heterosexual men are more

likely to feel threatened by gay men than lesbian women. Media play a critical role in educating a wider society as well as reassuring younger homosexual viewers by using positive role models. Representation of gay and lesbian people is still unusual that it stands out when included in programmes.

1.8 The positive effect of television

Television is one of the most powerful influencing forces when it comes to tackling prejudice. It can help gay and lesbian people to come to terms with their sexuality and identity. Television has a role to play in everyone's lives and in connecting people from different communities. People get informed and educated through television, and social issues are placed at the forefront of public consciousness.

Programmes and characters on television have helped some homosexual people to recognise their own sexuality by providing information about being gay or lesbian. This has enabled them to begin to understand their feelings and to appreciate that it is acceptable to be homosexual. Television is important to young people and those living in rural areas. Where they are isolated from gay and lesbian communities and may not encounter homosexuals in their everyday lives. Young people struggling with their own sexuality secretly watch television programmes with gay and lesbian characters and turn the sound off so that their parents would not know what they are watching. Television can help in changing general and social attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Some heterosexual characters have been portrayed as accepting homosexual characters and having emotional connections with them. Homosexual content in television programmes has supported gays and lesbian to explain their sexuality with

heterosexual family members and friends. Programmes achieve this by acting as source of information to enable homosexuals to explain their identity to heterosexuals and to challenge their ignorance, or fear of homosexuality.

The portrayals of gay and lesbian issues within broadcast media play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and educating society about different types of people. Positive changes in social attitudes have led to wider legal changes in gay and lesbian's rights. Television can play a key role in changing people's opinions and attitudes. Homosexuals rely on the media to get information and representations of them. In addition, positive portrayal of gay and lesbian lives could be useful in achieving an understanding between heterosexuals and homosexuals, and it could decrease prejudice.

1.9 The negative effect of television

Negative portrayals of gay and lesbian people on television can have a greater impact on the viewer. There is no significant level of positive coverage to counteract this view. There is a direct relationship between homosexual stereotypes on television and harassment, which is not something that just affect gays and lesbians. It also has repercussions for heterosexual people who are perceived to be homosexual based on stereotyped assumptions. Heterosexual women with short hair are often assumed to be lesbians. Men who are effeminate in their manner or dress code are accused of being gay because they fit the stereotype. Perpetuation of stereotypes, frequently in a negative way, contributes to an overall increase in discrimination.

Casual homophobia on television impacts on peer group cultures and can incite verbal harassment towards gays and lesbians. If harassment based on sexuality is left unchallenged it perpetuates the notion that homophobia is acceptable. Homosexuality is often presented negatively on television. These portrayals can discourage people from coming out because they realize that for their families and friends this is the only depiction that they get to see. This fear is reinforced by the fact that television commonly represents coming out as gay or lesbian as a drama whereby families are broken because one is homosexual. This has negative consequences for homosexual characters, and being gay or lesbian is seen as shameful. Such images can exacerbate some homosexual people's fears that if they come out in real life, they will lose family, friends and encounter violence.

Casual homophobia is a form of prejudice; it contributes to public culture in which the degradation of gays and lesbians is regarded as acceptable. This has an effect on individual gay and lesbian's self-esteem and confidence, therefore affects their psychological and physical health. The negative impact of television appears to be generally unrecognized by broadcasters, but it can further contribute to widespread prejudice.

For heterosexual family members negative television images can also make them fearful and anxious about what the future might hold for their homosexual child or sibling. This may prevent them from being open about their relative's sexuality with others. In these ways, television plays a part in restricting the freedom of lesbian and gay people. Negative portrayals of gay and lesbian issues can have an unbalanced impact on the viewer because there is very little positivity to neutralize this view. If the

overall inclusion of gay and lesbian issues increased, then the manifestation of homophobia through humour would not have the same impact on the perceptions of homosexuals.

1.10. Perceptions of heterosexuals towards homosexuality

Gay and lesbian programmes and the portrayal of gay lives do not have an impact on homosexuals, nor are they watched only by them. Heterosexual people also turn to the media for information and education about homosexuality. They are influenced by what they see and are shaped by the attitudes that the media reflect. Thus, it is crucial to understand the impact that gay and lesbian programming has on the heterosexual community and its attitude toward homosexuals.

Gay men and masculine lesbians are regarded as threatening to heterosexuality. Glamorous lesbians are embraced as part of heterosexual men's sexual fantasies and are therefore implicitly heterosexual. Most heterosexual are pragmatic about lesbian and gay issues on television, recognizing that with the choice of channels in the digital age, no one has to watch programmes which they find offensive. Famous television presenters and entertainers who have come out played an important part in changing some heterosexual people's attitudes towards homosexuality.

1.11 Impact of television on individual gays and lesbians

Netzley (2010:970) argues that television could teach gay and lesbian individuals about different gay issues, and establish role models that might be difficult to find in heterosexual communities. The increase of gay characters, especially those with

substantial character qualities on television shows provides more role models for gay youth and develops the feeling of acceptance. Drama is a powerful tool that should be used to educate viewers about sexuality, unlike comedy where gay and lesbian characters become the focus of the joke. Positive portrayals on television reinforce cultural acceptance of homosexuality. More and more audiences accept their homosexual family members, friends and colleagues.

A contradictory theory suggests that current television does not provide influential role models for gay and lesbian youth. Researcher, Gross (2001:90) claims that our media landscape is a “symbolic annihilation” because the lack of positive homosexual characters demonstrates the exclusion and isolation the media place on sexual minorities, making them less common. This has an effect on homosexual youth, who might already feel isolated from their primarily heterosexual community. They are not receiving information and guidance from gay and lesbian characters in television. But as the visibility of gay and lesbian characters increase, this symbolic annihilation that exists within television could slowly disappear and a clearer understanding of homosexuals could accurately be represented.

1.12 Theoretical framework

1.12.1 Queer theory

This theory has the desire to examine how identity is built, but the identity it examines is based on sexual orientation in addition to gender. It also shares with feminism a concern for society’s power structures. Furthermore, Queer theory is concerned with the

manner in which gay culture is absorbed or assimilated by mainstream or 'straight' culture.

Queer theory argues against the taken for granted notion that there are only two genders, corresponding to biological maleness and femaleness. In queer theory, both gender and sexuality are ambiguous, shifting, unstable and too complex to fit neatly into binary model. Theorists have linked gender to a theatrical performance - a matter of role playing, with no necessary correlation to one's biological sex. Queer theory tends to be less interested in whether homosexuality is a result of nature or nurture and more in the function that the question of causation serves in culture and ideology.

Queer theory interprets various dimensions of sexuality as thoroughly social and constructed through institutional practices.

Queer theory underscores the idea that sexual identity is fluid; that it evolves and can change over the life course. Instead of seeing heterosexual or homosexual attraction as fixed in biology, Queer theory interprets society as forcing sexual boundaries on people.

In this study queer theory shows us that the media play a role in gays and lesbians being ridiculed because of their gender. Queer theory states that in television, gays and lesbians are classified as outside of 'normal'. This stance creates an environment where gays can be excluded from the military or teaching career, banned from marrying, ridiculed through anti-gay jokes, and subjected to violent hate crimes. This theory is used in evaluating how television portrays homosexuals, that is to say, whether they are judged by their sexualities or personalities. In addition, it explores whether television contributes to the beliefs that the society has about gays being sex paedophiles.

1.12.2 Stereotype theory

It is believed that through stereotyped portrayals, the media reinforce existing patterns of attitudes and behaviours toward specific individuals, groups and institutions, especially minority groups. The stereotype theory contributes to this study in that the portrayals of gays and lesbians tend to be consistently negative, showing such people as having undesirable attributes and fewer positive characteristics than members of the dominant group (heterosexuals) in which the media function. Viewers include these meanings into their memories as relatively inflexible stereotyped interpretations that they use when thinking about or responding to any individual of a portrayed group, regardless of their actual personal characteristics. The media contribute to the stereotypes held by society. This theory can assist in limiting these stereotypes.

1.13 Significance of the study

Over the past few decades, homosexuality has moved from the margins of society to the mainstream. Even though some homosexuals have not “come out of the closet”, the issue of homosexuality has. And it has also become an issue of public policy and morality. Marches for equal treatment under the law have been followed by court decisions granting rights for everything from gay adoption to gay marriage. There is a call to talk about gays and lesbians as often as possible. There are television programmes that have at least one gay or lesbian character. Sometimes an entire programme is devoted to the topic of homosexuality. The onslaught of coverage makes homosexuality seem like merely another lifestyle. The main thing is strive to talk about gays and lesbians until the issue becomes thoroughly tiresome.

Depictions of gays and lesbians on television play a role in the struggle for sexual orientation equality. Homosexuals are depicted differently from heterosexuals because they are part of the minority in society; the majority of society is heterosexuals. Producers create television content that strive to please the majority. This study attempts to examine the gaps regarding broadcasting of sexual orientation inequality in television programmes. Honest non-stereotyped and diverse portrayals of gays and lesbians in prime time television can offer youth a realistic representation of the gay community. It can also offer positive role models for gay and lesbian youth.

Constructive representation of homosexuality on television can make young viewers to be open about their sexuality without the fear of being tormented and neglected by their peers. Moreover, these representations will encourage society to learn about the lifestyles of gays and lesbians and prevent seeing homosexuality as a threat to the human nature. This study is concerned about the attitudes held by viewers toward homosexuals, both in the selected television programmes and in real life. Furthermore, this study wishes to investigate how these attitudes are influenced by stereotypes.

Television's portrayal of gays and lesbians contributes to any specific perceptions and stereotypes held by viewers. Viewers reproduce what they see on television in real life because they consider television as a reflection of reality. Television has the power to influence viewers' perceptions and decisions. If there are more optimistic portrayals of gays and lesbians in television programmes, the more likely it is for viewers to make an informed overview relating to homosexuality and change their perceptions positively.

1.14 Ethical Considerations

Any study involving human beings as participants should highlight their privacy. It should be outlined to participants whether the information that they provide will be reserved secretly from public knowledge or not, and whether their names will be mentioned or not. This study comprises of people as participants. The researcher assured the participants that their names would not be linked to any information that they provided. They would be retained as confidential. None of the methods used required any participant to provide their personal details.

Personal details refer to surnames, names and identity number that might assist in locating a person. The questions asked to the research participants were in a language that they fully understood. The participants were informed on how they could exercise their rights, i.e. protection of the sources identities, if they are not comfortable with their identities being exposed. A clearance certificate from *Turfloop Research Ethics Committee* is attached, as addendum B, to this study.

1.15 Conclusion

We have seen that throughout the last few decades the number of lesbian and gay characters in television has increased. In less than a generation we have gone from having no representation of homosexuals in television, to having much more. But, at what cost do lesbians get this representation? One might think after briefly viewing the portrayals that homosexuals as a whole have made much progress in the last few years.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW RELATED TO GAYS AND LESBIANS

2.1 Introduction

Everywhere you look today, you cannot avoid the topic of homosexuality. It is in the news, television shows, movies, books, magazines and as we have most recently seen, in politics. Homosexuals are viewed very differently by society because they are minority group. Though many people think there is nothing wrong with being gay or lesbian, there are many who still believe it is immoral and unnatural. Many conflicting views float around about homosexuals' different portrayals and stereotypes in the media. These portrayals send intentional or unintentional messages to people witnessing them, thereby molding how people view gays and lesbians. Since the media have such an immense impact on how homosexuals are viewed, it is extremely important that we look at these stereotypes and understand the various messages they send (Allen & Hill, 2004:40).

There are several ways in which gays and lesbians are portrayed on television, many of which arguably create problems both for the programme maker and for the viewer. Homosexuality is still not fully accepted in today's society and traditional patriarchal portrayal of both men and women are still dominant.

Dines and Humez (1995:47) state:

The depictions of gays and lesbians in television play a role in the struggle for sexual orientation equality. Honest non-stereotyped and diverse portrayals of gays and lesbians in Prime time television can offer youth a realistic representation of homosexual communities; and can offer positive role models for gay and lesbian youth.

2.2 Attitudes towards gays and lesbians

Lesbians and gay men have historically been the victims of discriminatory laws and prejudices in South Africa. Legislation prior to 1994 denied lesbians and gays their basic human rights and reduced them to social outcasts and criminals. This oppression served its purpose for many years keeping lesbians and gays invisible. The unravelling of the legal and social stigma attached to homosexuality did not commence until 1993. The “Equality Clause” of article nine of the constitution was adopted on May 8, 1996. As a result, South Africa has one of the most progressive and inclusive constitutions with regards to homosexuality in the world. The South African government has shown exceptional commitment to acknowledging and upholding the human rights of lesbians and gays (Potgieter, 1997:12).

Greene and Croom (2000:54) maintain:

Gender differentiation reflects the belief that the natures of women and men require them to hold different social roles. Heterosexism reflects the belief that heterosexual relationships are necessary for a complete and happy life, especially for men.

Furthermore, Greene and Croom (2000:54) state that from a gender role belief system perspective, men hold more negative attitudes towards lesbians and particularly gay men as they place higher value on female dependence, gender differentiation, and

heterosexuality. Homosexuality is seen as a rejection of traditional gender roles, it present a stronger threat to the self-concept of individuals who are highly invested in traditional gender roles.

According to Rimmerman, Wald and Wilcox (2000:82) depictions of gays and lesbians in popular media, especially television have gay and lesbian characters presented in a positive portrayal which lead into change of attitudes of the viewing public. Personal contact with openly gay individuals has increased in recent years. More and more gays and lesbians are coming out to their friends and families. People are now aware that someone they deeply care about is gay or lesbian. This could increase support for gay and lesbian equality because contact with homosexual individuals reduces negative stereotypes and ignorance.

A recent poll conducted by CBS News concludes that as gays and lesbians' visibility has improved on television, so has cultural acceptance of homosexuality. 77% of Americans now say they have friends, relatives and co-workers who are gay. That is an increase of 35% since 1992, the year that *In The Life* became the first broadcast series to bring real gay and lesbian faces to television. There was a time when homosexuals were virtually invisible in the media. Public television's *In The Life* brought images reflecting the cultural and geographic diversity of gay and lesbian communities into living rooms across the country (Schmidt, 1995:10).

Ringer (1994:118) some people believe that homosexuality is natural and that gays and lesbians cannot change their sexual orientation; while others believe that homosexuality is unnatural and that sexual orientation is malleable.

Given that few lesbian and gay characters appear on television, Ringer (1994:118) argues:

Any portrayals of lesbians and gays that are not clearly negative should be valued. The movement away from television's depiction of lesbians and gays as murders, molesters may be seen as positive in the struggle for acceptance of lesbians and gays by the popular culture media. However, "positive" depictions of lesbians and gays usually constitute them as not significantly different from "positive" heterosexual.

In addition, Ringer (1994:108) recognises the multiplicity of experiences lived by lesbians and gays and resists essentialising lesbian and gay identity. Lesbians and gays share the need to survive a world that despises their desire and views their sexuality as dangerous. The new "positive" portrayals of lesbians create no substantial difference in television's portrayal of sexuality and fail to depict lesbian and gay experiences or issue any challenge to homophobia. Ringer (1994:108) men are still seen to be powerful, successful and rational in thinking than woman. It is still uncommon for a man to appear emotional and sensitive. As a result, homosexuality is rarely seen on network television, and representations of sexuality have been severely restricted and largely confined to the cinema.

When homosexual characters appear on television programmes, usually they are depicted negatively as "villains or victims of ridicule". The portrayal of homosexual characters on television is complex in that gayness is essentially invisible. Therefore, it is difficult to identify gay or lesbian characters. It has been argued by Dyer (1993:19) that whilst categorisation may be an activity common to all societies, the categorisation of sexuality is not. Gays and lesbians have been categorised negatively, often being

seen to be morally degenerative. This has led to negative stereotypical portrayals of both gays and lesbians, who have become so well recognised that certain homosexual organisation such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD) have challenged such views. GLAAD argued that although they may perform homosexual acts, gays and lesbians deserve the same respect as heterosexual people.

Janoff (2000:15) in many cases gay characters are completely defined by their “problem” and homosexuality is often constructed to appear morally wrong. Homosexuality is widely viewed as a negative symbol of masculine identity. Stereotypes provide instant recognition for the viewer and in this respect it is an important tool for programme makers, who require viewers to draw upon commonly held impressions of certain groups of people within society in identifying various characters’ lifestyle. Janoff (2000:15). Sexuality in the media with regards to gays and lesbians has not been successful enough to eliminate the homophobic fear that already exists. The media do not portray homosexuals in a positive way and few people who come forward to express their sexual orientation cause great sensationalism.

2.2.1 Societal attitudes toward homosexuality

D’ Augelli and Patterson (2001:46) state that societal attitudes toward homosexuality vary greatly in different cultures and different historical periods. So do attitudes toward sexual desire, activity and relationships in general. All cultures have their own values regarding appropriate and inappropriate sexuality. Some sanction same- sex love and sexuality, while others disapprove of such activities. As with heterosexual behaviour,

different sets of prescriptions may be given to individuals according to their gender, age, social status or class.

Some religions, especially those influenced by the Abrahamic tradition, have traditionally censured homosexual acts and relationship and in some cases implementing severe punishment for offenders. Since the 1970s, much of the world has become more receptive of same-sex sexuality between partners aged eighteen and above. The Pew Research Center's 2007 Global Attitudes Survey found that people in Africa and the Middle East strongly object to societal acceptance of homosexuality. On the other hand acceptance for homosexuality is much higher in Europe and United States. Many Latin American countries including Brazil and Mexico also have a gay accepting majority. In fact, besides South Africa, every country that has legalised either civil unions or same-sex marriage is located either in Europe and America.

2.3 Gays/ lesbians and violence

Moore (2001:63) says that there is still a lot of violence and discrimination against gays and lesbians. In the last decade there has been little improvement to curb the violence aspect. There has been a lot of gay bashing and home invasions of known gay people and also violence against straight men visiting in gay neighbourhoods. Most of these violent crimes are motivated by sexual orientation and peoples' fear of acceptance of homosexuality.

Lesbian and gay persons frequently face violence motivated by their sexuality or gender identity. Violence may be executed by the state, as in laws prescribing corporal punishment for homosexual acts and by individuals engaging in intimidation, mobbing

and assault. Violence targeted at people because of their perceived sexuality can be psychological or physical and can extend to murder (Green & Herek, 1994:108).

Wellings, Field and Johnson (1994:72) highlight that in the modern western world, homosexual acts have been legal in almost all countries since at least the 1940s. Violence against gays and lesbians is often qualified as a hate crime, motivated by homophobia. It is often connected with either religious or political ideologies which condemn homosexuality and relate it to being weak and morally wrong. However, many countries outside the Western world, particularly where the dominant religion is Islam are currently dangerous towards gays and lesbians, included is Africa and the Middle East. Discrimination against homosexuals influences both discriminatory legislation and physical violence. In Europe, the European Union's Employment Equality Framework Directive and Charter of Fundamental Rights offer some protection against sexuality-based discrimination.

There are very few support systems for homosexuals and there is also fear of reporting such crimes because of negative stereotypes of homosexuals in some judicial system. There is also the fear that if crimes against homosexuals are reported they face further ridicule and harassment from fellow employees and employers. They endure a feeling of being discriminated against and treated differently than before when there was no awareness of his or her sexual orientation. Janoff (2000:64) maintains that violence has a great effect on gays and lesbians and it has made them fear for their lives. They are discriminated against and society does not accept their lifestyle.

2.4 Gays/lesbians and television

2.4.1 History of homosexuals on television

Dow (2001:123) asserts that society has always had a general fear of homosexuality and that is why the media tends to support the already common perceptions instead of challenging them. Homosexuality did not openly and positively exist in the media up until 1970s. Any allusion to homosexuality in the 1940s to the 1960s was in a comedic form of exaggerated feminine men. Homosexual individuals were seen as perverse and promiscuous. Dow (2001:123) it was not until the 1970s that gay characters began appearing in television shows like *All in the family*. This gradual increase of visibility was a result of the growing LGBT advocacy and politicization. However, these characters were only cameo appearances, and usually involved the main characters journey from disapproving to accepting this “problem” of their sexuality. Television never portrayed these characters in any romantic relationships.

Greenberg (1988:102) since the start of television programming, the appearances of gay and lesbian characters in entertainment have both been limited. If they exist, they were either exaggeratingly stereotypical or associated with criminality. All the way through the 1980s, homosexual characters were seen on television as cameo roles with particular “problems” that hold almost non-existent lives. In the 1990s, gay and lesbian characters started to be seen as reoccurring characters in comedies and dramas. But these shows often experienced many negative feedback and boycotts from conservative groups. This usually resulted in the prime-time network pulling the show or the character, or preceding the episode with a “viewer discretion advised” (Greenberg,

1988:102). By 2000, gay and lesbian characters in American media had become more visible and mainstream. The growing numbers of gay and lesbian characters in the media demonstrates a possible growing acceptance.

Moore & Schuyler (2002:76) as the visibility of homosexuals started to shift, so did the shift in societal ideology. Also with the spread of the AIDS epidemic, starting in the 1980s and into 1990s, homosexuals were portrayed in more substantial, reoccurring roles. However, if they were not seen as asexual, the result of the AIDS epidemic prevalent within the gay community often implicated the controversial behaviours of homosexuals on television. After the ground breaking of series *Will & Grace*, and *Ellen* in the late 1990s, gay and lesbian characters started to appear more and more in prime-time television with supporting or lead roles (Moore & Schuyler, 2002:76).

King and Glatter, (2010:52) utter that the number of gay and lesbian characters seen on television programming in 1997-1998 television series has increased. These appearances on prime-time network television were slower than cable shows, because networks were trying to appeal to the mass public. Yet, gay and lesbian characters always acted in tasteful manners with limited sexual interaction, or else it would be labeled as 'viewer discretion'. But even into the early 2000s, media with gay characters was still minimal.

Gaitan and Horta (2006:87) argue that the number of gay and lesbian characters depicted on television is not as reflective of the population and these depictions may still possess traditional cultural stereotypes of homosexuals. These stereotypes are more subtle but their undertones deliver a particular message to its audience about the

represented homosexual community. The conceptual significance of this capstone is to understand the level of impact fictional gay and lesbian characters have upon its audience, particularly those viewers who share a commonality.

Many studies using cultivation analysis have shown that television shapes audiences' views on particular social groups, such as racial groups and specific genders. Cultivation theory suggests that audiences who watch many hours of television portrayals develop and "cultivate" views of society consistent with the patterns of television's pseudo- reality (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999:317-319). Subsequently, Cultivation analysis measures the extent to which television plays a role in shaping audience views and perceptions. One of the reasons homosexuality is not accepted by society could possibly be that lawmakers throughout the century have deemed it illegal.

Mason (2002:43) points out that few television's shows cast gays and lesbians. Gay men are portrayed as possessing feminine characteristics whereas lesbian women are portrayed as possessing a male dominant characteristic. In the shows the main focus is almost always their sexual orientation and what people think of them. Both of these shows portraying gays and lesbians try to educate and make the public aware through humour as to how difficult life is for these people (*Will & Grace 2002, Ellen 1999*).

Overby and Barth (2002:433) imply that television humour tends to be fast paced. The fast paced nature created by television humour, could energise the audience and affect audience mood positively. Or, it could move too fast for audiences to keep up with, lessening their chance for counter argument and even to form an informed opinion at all. Cultivation theory concerns the effects of television viewing on audiences'

perceptions, attitudes and values. Developed in the 1960s by George Gerbner, it suggests that the pervasiveness of television results in an effect on views, causing audiences to assume the views portrayed to them by what they see on television.

Shanahan and Morgan entail that (1999:65) notion of Para-social interaction suggests that viewers form beliefs and attitudes about people through television because of a simulated interpersonal contact. Attitudes toward homosexuals are fairly consistent, though in most cases, unfavourable responses toward homosexuals outnumber favourable responses. For instance, responses for heterosexual relationships being the only normal relationships are higher than those of homosexuality as a natural expression.

Sexual content of programming on American television has changed substantially since the medium was first invented more than 50 years ago. At its inception television rarely presented sexual themes. Throughout the early decades of television, topics such as contraception and other aspects of characters' sexuality were considered too sensitive to be portrayed in television shows. One important way in which television influences viewers is by providing sensational experiences on which to model beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour, when real-life experiences are more limited (Gross, 2001:46).

A close related idea is that the media depict sexual scenarios that people might not be able to see anywhere else, providing scripts for enacting various sexual behaviours such as people having sex with a new partner. Reliance on television shows for sexual scripts and television characters, as models for behaviour, may be particularly strong among youth, who may not have much first-hand experience with sexuality (Cohen &

Cohen, 1983:443). Teens are starting to solidify their sexual identities and become interested in sexual relationships. In fact, as many as one in five teens report that “entertainment” is their most important source of sexual information.

Bem (1993:89) says that television has been criticized for not providing good role models for adolescents, for example, self-discipline among teens is rarely portrayed in a positive light. The lack of positive role models on television is more extreme for gays and lesbian youth. Most lesbians and gay men grow up in a straight community with few homosexual role models; thus, they are particularly vulnerable to the portrayals of gays and lesbians in the mass media. Sexual minorities are often ignored by the mainstream media and treated as if they do not exist.

Entman & Rojecki, (2000:73) say that this exclusion has been posited to contribute to keeping sexual minorities invisible and without power, a process referred to as symbolic annihilation. Portrayals of gay and lesbian people of any age have been rare and often negative. Shows for adolescent audiences often portray an exclusively heterosexual environment, with only occasional brief appearances by adolescent characters that are confused by their sexuality. This is important because gay adolescents often cannot get information relevant to their sexual orientation from friends and family and may use television as a source of information about gay issues. The small number of gay characters on television, and even smaller number of adolescent gay characters, is proposed to contribute to a feeling of isolation among non-heterosexual youth (Entman & Rojecki, 2000:73).

When gay characters are portrayed on television, they are often shown in an asexual context. Until very recently, there are two gay characters were openly affectionate about their sexuality and partners on National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) currently popular prime-time series *Will & Grace*. Characters named *Will and Jack* were rarely shown being physically affectionate with other men; however the lead female character named *Grace*, who is heterosexual, has often been shown in sexual situations with men. *Will & Grace* has been criticised for reinforcing heterosexual norms and stereotypes about homosexual traits such as gay men being feminine, flamboyant and promiscuous.

Battles and Morrow-Hilton (2002:91) argue:

*More assimilated asexual character of Will
is often contrasted with the more flamboyant
Jack, who is made fun of for being campy and "queenly"*

Infrequent positive media portrayals of homosexuality may also influence the beliefs of heterosexuals. Watching television influences viewers' attitudes and beliefs through a process whereby the world as portrayed by the media comes to be perceived by high volume viewers as an accurate reflection of reality. Gagnon and Simon (1973:52). Regular viewing of television is proposed to create a shared set of conceptions and expectations about social reality among other diverse viewers. Some researchers have suggested that the lack of portrayals of homosexuality on television may influence the beliefs among heavy viewers that homosexuality is abnormal. Television is a major influence on the assumptions people have about members of minority groups such as gays and lesbians, because many viewers may have little personal experience with

such individuals. Television viewing is related to stronger negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians, regardless of viewers' political beliefs (Gagnon and Simon, 1973:52).

Wolf and Kielwasser (1991:68) maintain that the presence of gay and lesbian characters may have increased recently on both commercial broadcast and cable networks. It is unclear how frequently television addresses the sexual issues and concerns of sexual minorities. As noted earlier, when gay and lesbian characters have been included in programmes, they have often been portrayed in nonsexual contexts. Furthermore, most of what has been published to-date about homosexuality and television has been qualitative, focusing on how specific programmes have portrayed gay characters. Even though numerous content analyses have assessed the amount of sexual content shown on television, generally none have reported on the prevalence of sexual portrayals and talk about sexual issues related to gays and lesbians.

The first reality show to portray the life of a homosexual on national television was MTV's *The Real World* in 1992. The announcement was first seen as a shock; however, as cast members and viewers got to know the gay male cast member on a more personal level, they realized that he was just a typical person. *The Real World* continues to lure viewers into the lives of seven randomly chosen strangers each year. Out of those seven, each season brings with it the promise of a new gay or lesbian character that the viewers will come to know (Waugh, 2000:23).

Waugh (2000:23) *The Real World* is not the only television show that has contained homosexuality. *Will & Grace* is a sitcom mainly based on characters that are

homosexuals. In this show, *Will* and *Jack* are both homosexuals who do not have a sexual relationship, but are close friends. *Grace* is a heterosexual female who lives with a gay man named *Will*, and she does not have a problem with him being gay.

This shows how the homosexual lifestyle is increasingly becoming more common and accepted in society. Another reality show like *The Real World* that often contains homosexuality is “*Survivor*.” In 2000, when self-described “fat naked fag” *Richard Hatch* emerged as the first-season winning contestant of the phenomenally popular reality television show *Survivor*, he credited his survival success in large part to his homosexuality (Perez, DeBord, & Biesshke, 2000:31).

Television shows also try to illustrate that they do not always stereotype homosexuals on television. For example, on *The Real World*, two homosexuals were put on the cast, instead of the usual one. One of the homosexuals was more flamboyant and was therefore, considered a more stereotypical homosexual Waugh (2000:24). The other was more conservative so the other roommates were shocked when they found out he was gay because they were not expecting him to be a homosexual. This illustrates the stereotypes that society tends to put on gays.

Ott and Mack (2009:98) state that the casting of homosexuals in various television shows has skyrocketed because of the acceptance of homosexual characters shown in these television shows. Today there are around twenty-two television shows on major stations with a homosexual cast member as the main character of the show. This is proof that homosexuals are not only on their way to full acceptance but also that people are willing to celebrate them for their openness and bravery.

2.4.2 Television's influence

Television is now a dominant provider for audiences to both receive information and enjoy entertainment. Many people spend their time watching television. It is accessible, does not require skill and can easily show a story. Television has been key in defining, developing, sharing and cultivating a collective set of values and perceptions. Gross (2001:6) acknowledges “those who watch more television are more likely to project television’s versions of reality on to their conceptions about the world, its people, and how they function”.

The dominant group and their ideology place their own conceptions about social realities into the media, predominantly into television and the general public. These conceptions have a negative impact on the marginalized minority groups. People are most likely to create gendered stereotypes if they lack the knowledge of a particular group. Therefore, this notion is reflective on the common generalizations audiences place upon the gay community, by portraying feminine personalities and lifestyles (Hampton, 2009:34).

2.4.3 Depictions of Homosexual Characters

The media exists for the audience and is funded by advertisers, who aim to appeal to audiences. Therefore, those media corporations and businesses decide how reality is portrayed and how social groups are depicted. Prime-time televisions want to gain the largest audience, so throughout modern-day history the media has been relatively conservative to match common traditional ideology. If a group is not visible in the media, its existence is undermined. Representations in the media which relies heavily on

advertisers, who in return relies on the appeal of the audience, must attract the largest audience by being generic and safe. They must rely on what has been successful in the past. So previously invisible social groups when visible in the media, they must be depicted to mirror the values, ideologies and interests of the “powerful people who define the public agenda” and their largest audience. These ‘powerful people’ usually include the middle-aged, middle class, and heterosexuals, especially leading up to the late 1990s. This is one of the reasons why gay and lesbian depictions were always seen through a traditional heterosexual perspective (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003:91).

In 1972, theorist *Clark* developed four stages of media representation of minority groups, which begins with *non- representation*. This is when the minority group is excluded from any media visibility. When these individuals become visible in the *ridicule* stage, it is usually in a form of mockery or humour. The next stage is considered *regulation*, when the group is narrowly depicted in a socially acceptable manner. The final stage, *respect*, is when the group is normally portrayed in their daily life, with both positive and negative undertones. Based upon these stages, it seems as if current television has past the non-representation stage and it aims to overcome the *ridicule* stage. Yet depending upon the show’s script, plot, characters and issues presented in television, current shows seem to vary between the *regulation* and *respect* stage (Raley & Lucas, 2006:27).

The depiction of homosexuals is different from other gender or racial groups because homosexuals are self-identifiable, and usually discover their sexualities after / during adolescence.

Gross (2001:127) maintains:

Homosexuals have always been viewed as a controversial threat to society, so their media appearances have often been limited.

However, Walters (2001:76) affirms:

These depictions also differ because the homosexual community has known to be more easily assimilated into mainstream society.

Furthermore, Walters (2001:76) states that both homosexual and heterosexual audiences can equally enjoy a show featuring a homosexual narrative, whereas particular series targeted towards different racial and ethnic groups are usually only appreciated by the group.

In addition, the media provides context for how homosexuality is defined in popular culture. Dow (2001:126) claims that the number of gay and lesbian characters on television may give sight into the social progress of our culture. But how these groups are represented in these cultural mediums and how they fit into our primarily heterosexual society should really be an indication of the homosexuals' social and political status. Therefore, these fictional portrayals have given the homosexual community a reason to celebrate its progress.

Mass media seem to follow the gender standards set up by our society, which include our "normal" perceptions on the traits and behaviours of men and women.

Gross (2001:157) purports:

If gays and lesbians are portrayed in the media, it is in a narrow, stereotypical manner. Since most television programmes are presented by a heterosexual perception to a predominant heterosexual audience. Critics and academics claim that gays and lesbians are often shown in a gendered manner.

If, for example, gay men are not particularly masculine, they possess the desire to be a woman or hold careers that would stereotypically be held by either gay men/women. Lesbians are even seen to model men by appearance and behaviour or be sexually feminine. Furthermore, in many television shows, narratives consist of a heterosexual understanding of how a homosexual character influences their own feelings and identity. This may seem as a way for heterosexuals to accept the homosexual lifestyle, but instead it further marginalizes the homosexual community. Audiences will start to recognize and understand homosexuals in a heterosexist viewpoint (McKee & Wilson, 2011: 58).

2.5 The importance of visibility

Gay male and lesbian woman are minority figures that are greatly molded and remolded in today's mass media. Every minority group has its day with the media, trying to fight for proper representation within film, television, advertising and print media. Nowadays, both the media and the queer minority are in a back and forth discussion about what is proper media representation of this minority group. It is important for one to stay on top of the subject and keep a running list of where we have been, where we are going and what needs to be done before these portrayals can be truly accurate (Gross, 2001:95).

The way in which different forms of media present people to the public eye, speaks volumes about social acceptance, the misunderstanding about a minority group, and a society atmosphere. These representations can change social acceptance, correct the misunderstandings about the group, and twist the social atmosphere. It is because of this ability to change social acceptance that visibility is so important to gays and lesbians. “Increasingly, the lines between gay culture and straight culture are blurred, as gay themes and images enter into the everyday iconography of American society” (Comstock & David, 1991:75).

Herek, Gregory and Berrill (1992: 112) state that there are media organisations designed to combat negative stereotypes and designed to offer journalists and advertisers the tools with which they can better their coverage and portrayals of sexual minorities. Both GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and NLGJA (National Lesbian and Gay Journalist Association) are responsive think tanks that take a proactive look at this coverage as it happens in today’s mass media. What people watch on television shapes how they view and treat gay and lesbian people around them.

With shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Will & Grace* on television, many are beginning to note the growing change in media portrayal. But this is not always because of a welcoming attitude toward gays and lesbians. It can sometimes be influenced by outside forces like profit motivations. Ringer (1994:206) asserts that in recent years there has been some improvement in the representation of gays and lesbians on mainstream network television. The popularity of shows such as *Will & Grace*, or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* illustrates that networks are willing to feature

gay characters, as long as the shows draw high ratings, and generate profits for advertisers.

2.6 Views of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals AND Trans genders (LGBT)

British lesbian, gay and bisexual television viewers said in a recent survey that they wanted a more realistic portrayal of gays on British Broadcasting Corporation-owned television. In a study taken by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), viewers said that they wanted to see more images of lesbians and bisexuals as well as alternatives to the stereotypes of gay men shown on the network. LGBT participants' state that the portrayal of homosexuality in television rely much on stereotypes. Gross (2001:48) says that the study also shows that a large percentage of heterosexual viewers feel uncomfortable with certain gay content, specifically images of "emotional and physical intimacy" between same-sex characters. In television depictions, lesbians are generally shown as overly sexualised and not taken seriously, while gay men are often shown as effeminate or weak with little depth beyond the occasional quirky comment.

A gay equality charity criticized the BBC for its lack of a realistic portrayal of gays on television. It stated that throughout the 39 hours of television examined on BBC One, only about 44 seconds showed a positive and realistic portrayal of gays and lesbians. This observation seems dramatic, but not unbelievable. Note that the 44 seconds was not the entire length of time that gay characters were shown, but when they were shown in a positive light. Between the drugs, promiscuity and ignorance

portrayed by homosexual characters on television, it is a wonder that even 44 seconds could be seen as positive (Gross, 2001:93).

Queer as Folk, which premiered in 1999 and focused on the lives of three gay men, was one of the positive and realistic portrayals of gays presented on television. Shows that followed featuring gay characters often reduced the depth of the characters to comic relief. Many people are not comfortable seeing openly gay people, much less in intimate or thought-provoking situations. Gays and lesbians represent the unknown, and with that there is uneasiness in not knowing what to expect Moore, (2001:99). It does not mean that a particular group should be disregarded or made one-dimensional because of another person's apprehension, which is what remote controls were made for.

Allen and Hill (2004:203) argue that it is impossible to please everyone. Television shows will always represent certain people negatively to appeal to the audience's comfort with the negative actions associated with that group. However, this does not mean that these false representations should be accepted, because as soon as they are, they will stop being inaccurate depictions and will become stereotypes.

Media educators *Larry Gross* and *George Gerbner* argue that the media participate in the "symbolic annihilation" of gays and lesbians by negatively stereotyping them (often consigning them to the margins of entertainment media, playing either "colourful" and "flamboyant" characters or dangerous psychopaths), by rarely portraying them realistically, or by not portraying them at all.

Gross and Gerbner (1976:29) argue:

The commercial structure of the mass media limits the opportunity for representing diverse characters. Networks and film companies often shy away from portraying gays and lesbians for fear of alienating or offending advertisers, investors, and audiences.

Bryant and Zillman (2002:20), state that nearly one in five people is unhappy about the depiction of gay, lesbian and bisexual people on television according to a report commissioned by the BBC . Many lesbians feel that their depictions on television is not enough and are mostly portrayed either as "butch" or "lipstick" lesbians. Gay men said they would welcome a more realistic portrayal of gay life and criticised a tendency to feature camp men, though they said this is improving.

2.7. Portrayal of gays and lesbians in international television

2.7.1 Britain and American television

According to Oliver and Hyde (1995:15), the representation of gay and lesbian characters on prime time is certainly not entirely homogenous. An American show called *Cosby* includes an episode with elderly gay men that were African American. Nevertheless, these examples mark the exception to the rule that most shows with homosexual materials are part of a world defined by the white, urban upscale people populating it. The examination of the relationship between the industry's conception of its audiences and the recent deluge of prime- time homosexuality helps explain some of the forces at play behind one of the decade's dominant programming trends. It also leads to a consideration of the serious consequences at stake for gay politics.

Networks work to cultivate slumpy audience; prime time schedules have seen a slew of programmes featuring what network executives believe the world of this audience looks like a world that in many cases includes gays and lesbians. While more and more companies are openly reaching out to gay and lesbian consumers, network executives do not wish to target gay and lesbian viewers. Yet with the extensive attention paid to the statistical profiles of gays and lesbians, it is hard to believe that the demographic obsessed marketing, advertising and programming executives at work behind the networks remain unaware and unaffected by the numbers. Gay men lesbians represent the perfect market for networks eagerness to deliver a quality audience to advertisers (Butler, 1990:396).

The construction and promotion of the gay and lesbian market argue:

Advertising does not play a role in recent explosion of homosexual material on prime time. It is certainly possible that some producers and network executives consciously try to create programming that would particularly appeal to gay and lesbian viewers more frequently. However the highly attractive demographic profile of gay and lesbian market enables networks to push televisions conventions and use gay material in order to aggressively target their broader quality audience, an audience that apparently finds a gay twist with their television appealing.

When such strategy has an advantage of appealing to an audience that is as lucrative as gays and lesbians appear to be, it is much easier to risk offending more conservative viewers whose demographics are not attractive and who are not part of the target audience. Comstock & David (1991:20) an exception to the production of stereotyped homosexual appears in the soap opera *Dynasty*. The character of *Steven* is, in many respects, the sort of gay man homosexual movements in North America wish to see portrayed on television. His character is not stereotyped in any particular way and, to a great extent; he is simply an individual who happens to be gay. His character's lack of

"typing" is made more apparent due to the programme's form of melodrama and because a large number of the cast play stereotyped roles. However, despite this lack of visual stereotyping, the storylines revolves around *Steven*, his father's homophobia and unwillingness to accept his son's sexuality and therefore, can be seen as a stereotypical plot convention concerning the portrayal of homosexuality (Comstock & David, 1991:20).

Wolf and Kielwasser (1991:63) point out that the portrayal of gays and lesbians in soap operas is different to that of other television genres. As is the case with *Dynasty*, it is often unnecessary for the viewer to immediately identify a character as being homosexual. The programme is an on-going drama with regular viewers who are aware of the histories of individual characters. Wolf and Kielwasser (1991:63) characters are allowed to develop in a way not possible in many other forms of television. Therefore, there is no need for characters' lifestyles to be made identifiable immediately as is the case with once-off dramas or films.

This point has been particularly evident in British soap operas in recent years. The Channel 4 programme *Brookside* featured a plot concerning the character *Beth Jordache* who is lesbian; whilst *Eastenders* shown on BBC1 includes a similar storyline involving a gay couple, *Tony* and *Simon*. Yang (1997:447) emphasises that none of these characters appear different to those who are heterosexual in their visual appearance and they are not confined solely to plots concerning their sexuality. In this respect it could be said that homosexuals are being portrayed in a sympathetic manner. As is the case with *Dynasty*, these British soap operas have a regular audience which

enables characters' identities to develop slowly and also to change if scriptwriters wish them to.

However, Kunkel, Biely, Eyal, Farrar, Donnerstein, (2003:88) highlight that homosexual characters in both *Brookside* and *Eastenders* are to some extent stereotyped in the plots concerning their homosexuality in that the programmes portray homosexuality as a moral problem. *Dynasty*, deal with the issue of heterosexuals coming to terms with homosexuality. It is also significant that characters concerned have histories of family problems and it is these problems that the viewer, are reminded of when people try to come to terms with the issue of homosexuality. Although such programmes appear to be sympathetic to the portrayal of gays and lesbians on television they still largely rely upon the stereotypical plot conventions adopted by television programmes in portraying homosexuality to mainstream audience.

The visualization of homosexuals to a great extent has led to negative stereotypical portrayals on television. However, some form of representation which is immediate and economical is required in order to show gays and lesbians to audience. It is often impractical to portray a character's sexuality through narrative. Therefore, programmes rely on typification. Ringle, Ellis and Crawford (1996:126) underline that the importance of gay typification is to make people visible to the viewer and keeps the homosexuality of a character present throughout the text. Typing everything about certain characters is reduced to sexuality. Despite this, it allows homosexual perspectives to be present and gives gays and lesbians something to identify clearly with in the text.

Typification compact an abundance of social knowledge into a limited number of distinct signs. It is likely that many homosexuals never relate to the various gay types portrayed on television, most gays and lesbians remain invisible. Typification leads to negative stereotypical views of homosexuality. It is important to note that in many cases such types are used by homosexuals themselves. Gay sub-cultures have developed a way that many homosexual people have adopted lifestyles which are different to heterosexuals. Certain sections of the gay community have used various stereotypical gay signs quite willingly as a form of resistance to the negative categorization of homosexuals (Yang, 1997:62).

Craig (1992:203) mainstream television audience allows few images of men that male heterosexual viewers may find threatening. As a result viewers are rarely subjected to portrayals of people whom are not deemed to be publicly approved role models within society. The process of Socialisation within society leads parents and peers to provide ideas and images indicating what people must not become and what is deemed to be desirable by mainstream culture. Such actions can result in prejudice against behaviour seen to be stereotypical of homosexuals. Craig (1992:203) there are different representations of people within society; however, some are seen to be more acceptable than others. Therefore, it is these versions of what is considered to be the norm in society which are held in high esteem and as a result are more widely used and publicised on our television screens. To a large extent, such images and ideas concerning how people are meant to be and act are already made and constructed. Such ideas enable us to place ourselves in relation to others and recognise images as similar or different from the way we lead our lives (Craig, 1992:203).

Audiences vary according to programme genre and time-slots, representations are directed at the middle-class heterosexual because they are the majority viewers. Therefore texts are made to be pleasurable and acceptable in accordance with this majority's point of view. People outside the majority often have to position themselves in order to gain pleasure from certain programmes. People find different things acceptable or entertaining, viewers react differently to various portrayals on television and reactions to images of homosexuality are no different (Swanson, 1991:106).

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are short messages that are targeted to get the attention of specific audiences with relevant information designed to increase awareness of an issue, change attitudes, or encourage a specific behaviour. In the United States, some media outlets provide time or space for PSAs, although the campaigns are often considered “paid media” because television airtime is purchased to ensure reaching target audiences. Pullen (2012:48) brings out that evaluation of well-designed media interventions show that when used properly, media can have significant positive impact on a range of sex-related attitudes and beliefs as well as on behaviours concerning homosexuality.

2.7.2 Tanzanian television

The Tanzanian government upholds laws that ban homosexuality. It is believed that repealing these laws would reduce discrimination against LGBT people and encourage society to embrace the diversity of different sexualities. Organised hate groups have viciously attacked homosexuals and used violent language in an attempt to persecute and intimidate them. In Tanzania homophobic beliefs lead people toward prejudiced

actions at work, schools, clubs and television. Prejudiced views directed at homosexuals often stem from the perception that homosexual activity is immoral. Homophobia makes some people think that they are superior to homosexuals. Anti-gay bias is far more accepted among large numbers of Tanzanians than is bias against other minorities. Up until 1980, many psychiatrists still looked upon homosexuality as a mental disorder. Today, medical professionals believe that homosexuality is not an illness, mental disorder or emotional problem. Although in many societies gay men and lesbians are more accepted than in the past, homophobia continues to be prominent in Tanzania (Murray, 2000:52).

Crompton (2003:48) since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, gay men in Tanzania are frequently singled out for abuse as they are seen to be responsible for the spread of HIV. This view is fuelled by sensational reporting in the media, which has become progressively anti-gay. Crompton (2003:48) adds that homophobia continues to be a major barrier to ending the global AIDS epidemic. In Tanzania, the stigma and discrimination prevent men who have sex with men from accessing vital HIV prevention, treatment and care services. Tackling homophobia can help overcome this, and encourage gay men to be tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Tanzanian television broadcasts of anti-gay programmes leads to more discrimination against homosexuals. Pullen (2012:74) stress out that living in a homophobic environment forces many LGBT people to conceal their sexuality, for fear of the negative reactions and consequences of coming out. For people who have been brought up to believe that homosexuality is wrong, the realization that they might be gay

causes feelings of shame and self-loathing, leading to low self-esteem. Suppressing homosexuality involves denying an important part of a person's identity, and can have a serious impact upon their life and relationships. Furthermore, Pullen (2012:74) the dilemma of whether to 'come out' or not can cause a great deal of personal distress. LGBT people who make the decision to declare their sexual orientation face prejudice and discrimination from their family, friends, and from wider society. Homophobia causes harm and disruption to people's lives. For example many LGBT people have become homeless as a result of being rejected by their families after revealing their sexual orientation.

2.8. Portrayal of gays and lesbians on the television of Southern African Development Community Countries (SADC)

2.8.1 Introduction

There are many countries in Africa that form part of SADC, mostly which are against homosexuality. Zimbabwe and Zambia are the countries that were selected to be part of this study and represent Southern African Development Community Countries. The reason being that in these two countries it is illegal to pronounce oneself as a homosexual and one could be killed for being gay or lesbian. The illegality of homosexuals is stipulated in the constitutions of these two countries. In Zimbabwe and Zambia hate crimes against gays and lesbians are encouraged. Discussions about gays and lesbians in Zimbabwe and Zambia are as follows:

2.8.2 Zimbabwean television

There are no representations of gays and lesbians in Zimbabwean television; it is against the law in Zimbabwe to be openly gay or lesbian, penalties of being homosexual range up to ten years' imprisonment. Both Zimbabwean society and government do not accept the public display of homosexual literature and material. The organisation Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) tried to fight for some exposure in the media and be treated like human beings. President *Robert Mugabe* himself made a speech in which he is brutally dismissive of gays and lesbians and that this community should not be allowed human rights (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:5).

The 1995 theme for the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF) was "human rights and justice"; gays and lesbians of Zimbabwe were excluded from taking part in the fair. Stochetti and Kukkonen (2011:298) say that the exclusion of homosexuals from the book fair by President *Mugabe* propelled a vigorous debate on the extent and meaning of human rights, the rights and existence of homosexuals. Zimbabwean government has power and control over everything that lives and breathes in Zimbabwe. Anything that is printed or broadcasted in Zimbabwean television is censored.

Dunton & Palmberg (1996:7) GALZ wanted to exhibit and advertise its literature on the legal and constitutional aspects of gay rights. A sticker produced by GALZ with the text "don't hate! Tolerate" made an appeal to the general public, and was hardly a provocative self-assertion. But GALZ was denied registration, and the minister of Home Affairs *Dumiso Dabengwa*, had declared that homosexuality is abnormal and would not be allowed in Zimbabwe (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:7).

Taylor and Willis (1998:268) state that GALZ members who came to London reported on these incidents:

“A 24 year old black gay man was arrested twice in one day after reading a poem at a convention on prejudice in August 1995. His picture was Published in one of the Zimbabwean newspapers, and his college was informed that he was gay. Later The house he shared with his mother was burnt to the ground”.

In his opening speech at the official opening of *the book fair* on August 1, 1995 the president of Zimbabwe,) Robert Mugabe said:

“I don’t believe homosexuals should have any rights at all. It degrades human dignity. It’s unnatural and there is no question ever allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs. If you see people parading themselves as lesbians and gays, arrest them and hand them to the police. Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves, out of Zimbabwe. Let them be gay in the US, Europe and elsewhere”, (Nardi and Schneider , 1998:42).

2.8.3 Zambian television

There are no depictions of gays and lesbians in Zambia television or in any other kind of media; it is illegal to be homosexual in Zambia. Chapter 87 of the Penal Code of the Laws of Zambia, says the following about homosexuality: Section 155 (c) states that “any person who permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him; the order of nature commits a felony and liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for a term not less than fifteen years and may be liable to imprisonment for life”. Section 158 (1) states that “any male who whether in public or private commits any act of gross indecency with a male person or procures a male person to commit any act of gross indecency with him; or attempts to procure the commission of any such act by any male person with himself

or with another male person, whether in public or private commits a felony and is liable upon conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than seven years and not exceeding fourteen years.” Subsection (2) states the same as Subsection (1) but in respect to females (Dunton & Palmberg, 1996:7).

The above subsections are the perception and knowledge that people have about homosexuality in Zambia. Apart from knowing that homosexuality is unlawful in Zambia, it is doubtful that a lot of Zambians know the specifics of the practiced law. However, most Zambians have an idea about what the Bible says about homosexuality. Mortenbock and Mooshammer, (2011:94) state that the issue of homosexuality has arisen publicly in Zambia at various times but most notably in the mid-1990s when then outspoken Zambia Independent Monitoring Team (ZIMT) president *Alfred Zulu* attempted to register Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Association better known by its acronym LEGATRA whose objective was to speak for the people who were practicing homosexuality.

Hoad (2007:20) bring out that one or two people came out to publicly admit their homosexuality, and portraying that they were representative of a number of others who were forced to live a sheltered sexual life because of the Zambian culture which does not tolerate homosexuality. *Zulu* at the time said although few had come out in the open, "we have statistical evidence to the effect that there are over 500,000 homosexuals in Zambia, some of them are senior public figures. But they are too jittery to identify with LEGATRA openly."LEGRATA did not last long.

2.9. Portrayal of gays and lesbians in South African television

On May 8, 1996, South Africa adopted a new constitution, which in its Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. South Africa was the first country in the world to adopt such a sexual orientation clause in its constitution. Briggs & Cobley, (2002:85) it is estimated that around 4.9 million South Africans watch the famous soapie *Generations* every day. This is a huge number; more than the populations of Botswana and Namibia combined. So the question asked is, what responsibility, if any, comes with attracting an audience of this size and if soap opera producers are obliged to present a responsible, fair, non-discriminatory version of society. This is why viewers are allowed to complain to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) if they feel that what is broadcasted is offending them (Briggs & Cobley, 2002:85).

Miller, Rosga and Satterthwaite (1996:40) underline that all soap operas have similar themes, characters and story lines. There is always a villain, a town gossip, a rich family, a poor family, never-ending love triangles, murder, sex and scandal. But what has always been familiar about soap operas is their perpetuation of negative stereotypes in a very unrealistic television world. In recent years soaps have begun to incorporate marginalized groups and more realistic storylines, possibly in an effort to boost decreasing ratings. This has included people with disabilities, gays and lesbians and characters living with HIV.

Soap operas are powerful and their messages are taken seriously by many viewers (and this could be millions, knowing the numbers), Gevisser and Cameron (1993:32).

When we know that gays and lesbians are daily targets of violence, bullying and rape in South Africa, this type of portrayal is incredibly dangerous and irresponsible. South Africa is a diverse country with many cultures, ethnicities, languages, religions and ways of living, it is inevitable that some stereotypes will be created and reinforced. This is why we have the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA), which is meant to arbitrate when there are cases of public commentary that may be deemed unfair or when language or vocabulary can amount to hate speech.

Morgan and Wieringa (2005:34) emphasise that we need to change harmful portrayal of gay characters in sitcoms, soap operas and all mainstream media, if we want South Africa to stop making international headlines because of horrific, violent homophobic attacks. So long as our country stands out as a global hotspot for homophobia and hate crime, such issues should not be so quickly dismissed. Today, in democratic South Africa, important issues of free will and the protection of democratic choice for and by all and sundry - as embodied in the South African Constitution, are viewed as being erosions into and of the 'ancient indigenous strains of cultural practices in the country' and that the local television and film industries should not encourage any kind of moral collapse - which to them is exemplified by the gay and lesbian movements (www.genderlinks.org.za).

The 'after-tears' elders had out rightly rejected arguments by some of the 'ma-younger' junior imbibers that the South African television companies which featured the gay and lesbian topics in their productions; had helped to open and widen the gender debate,

and are doing so with the customary neutralism and circumspection expected within the industry (Pullen, 2012:52).

2.10 Conclusion

Strinati (2004:35) points out that it is apparent that the portrayal of gays and lesbians on television is problematic due to the existing prejudices within society. Television is sensitive to images of open homosexuality and is constantly concerned in providing acceptable programmes to a mainstream heterosexual audience. This leaves portrayals of homosexuality largely confined to cinema and specialist programmes. The development of stereotypical characters and plot conventions occurs for many reasons and to a great extent results in negative portrayals. Although such categorization is negative in that it affects viewers' reactions of gays and lesbians, it is essential to the programme makers in order to visualize individual characters. There are exceptions to the visualization of gays and lesbians within the genre of soap operas where characters can develop over a period of time.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is often only looked upon as an issue of unequal treatment; provocation to hatred, violence and aggression and even organised rape and murder. A policy programme that offers only equal treatment legislation is incomplete, as it does not deal with hate crime; which often constitutes a threat to the rights to life, liberty and security. An overview indicates that international governmental organisations until now have not been mandated by (the majority of) their member states to tackle the problem of discrimination in the widest possible sense. Neither in the sense of conceiving discrimination as more than unequal

treatment, nor in terms of covering all relevant “bias grounds” and not overlooking a sensitive issue such as discrimination and violence against LGBT people (Cagle, 2002:30).

Van Zoonen (1994:89) highlight the fact that producers are hesitant to make shows\ dramas that have a gay couple embracing each other in a warm relationship, but would be willing and excited to make a drama regarding gays acting as victims. They shy away because of their homophobia and failure to show how little support there is for the gay community. With more people coming forward and expressing their views on the unfounded fears of homosexuality, it may enlighten people not to be so homophobic but to treat everyone as an equal no matter what their sexual orientation may be. There are several magazines that offer insights and articles for those who wish to understand and become aware of gays and lesbians and the problems they face. There are different kinds of research methodologies, used in different research topics. The next chapter concentrates on the research methodology applied in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology refers to a set of methods and principles used to perform a particular activity. It is a way to find out a solution for any research problem. This research study uses the qualitative research approach. It covers the research design and the data collection methods.

The nature of this study required that the proposal be assessed by the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) as it involves sensitive issues concerning human beings and sexual orientation. The certificate is attached. The study's limitation lay in its aim to examine the portrayal of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes and not media as a whole.

This research study uses a flexible questioning approach. Although a basic set of questions were designed to start the project. Qualitative research is useful in observing motivations in participants, which are related with human behaviour (Wimmer & Dominick, 1983:116).

The researcher watched television daily, observing representations of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes, namely *Generations*, *Isidingo*, and *Rhythm City*. Observation of these television programmes started on 4 February to 2 August 2013. The total of episodes observed for each programme is 160 episodes. Analysis of

these programmes was done manually, by use of pen and paper. None of the episodes of the selected television programmes were missed during the period of observation.

Data came in a variety of forms: notes were taken while observing the selected television programmes. Focus groups consisted of respondents who were interviewed simultaneously. The nature of this study permits data analysis to be done early in the collection process and continue throughout the project. An inductive method is used. The induction method starts with many observations of nature, with the goal of finding a few statements about how nature works. The purpose for using an inductive method is to condense extensive and varied raw data. In addition to establish links between the research objectives and the findings derived from the data.

3.2 Research Design

Wimmer and Dominick, (1983:25) define research design as a set of plans for collecting information. It is based on research purpose, like exploration and description. Research design means the exact nature of the research work in a systematic manner. It involves information about the research work in view, framework of the study and availability of various data. It also lays out the structure of research (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983:25).

This study gives attention to crucial points pertaining to research design as stipulated by Leedy and Ormrod (1989). Data from the selected television programmes are needed to examine and analyse the portrayal of gay and lesbian characters. The data collected assist in finding out if the selected television programmes contribute to the stereotypical

ideology that the society has of homosexuals. The representation of gay and lesbian characters in television leads to the stigma and prejudice surrounding homosexuality.

Television has many programmes that have gay and lesbian characters. However for this study *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City* were selected because they are the most viewed programmes in South African television that depict homosexuals. Thus the findings established in the study can be generalised.

When structuring the setting of the interviews, it is in best interest of the study for heterosexuals and homosexuals to be interviewed independently. The reason is that accurate responses should be obtained from the participants, as they would be able to speak freely. Speaking freely could offend other respondents of a different gender, and end in dispute. Data from interviews and focus groups were tape recorded, and consulted at a later stage.

The researcher took notes every time she observed the selected television programmes. She consulted the notes at a later stage when reviewing which programme from the selected three, had a positive or negative representation of gays and lesbians. It would have been difficult to observe the programmes without writing notes, as that would have resulted in alteration of some information.

Data collected from observations, interviews and focus groups were analysed and interpreted manually, because the data were not complicated. Tapes used to record the interviews and focus groups discussions were transcribed and coded by identifying topics and themes. Generalisations of findings were made after the recordings from the interviews and focus groups were combined.

3.3 Profile of participants

- The total number of participants who participated in this study is thirty (30).
- Twenty four (24) participants in focus groups, 12 were homosexuals (6 gays and 6 lesbians. The other 12 were heterosexuals (6 men and 6 women).
- Six participants in interviews, 3 homosexuals (2 lesbians and 1 gay). the other 3 were heterosexuals (2 men and 1 woman).
- Age of participants = between the ages 23 and 26
- Race of participants = black
- Qualification of participants = Tertiary qualification
- Location of participants = Polokwane (Flora Park Dam and University of Limpopo Turfloop campus)

3.3.1 Participants

Participants in this study were both homosexuals and heterosexuals. The total number of participants in this study was thirty; twenty four participants took part in focus groups and six participants in interviews. Twenty four participants took part in the focus groups; twelve homosexuals (six gays and six lesbians) and twelve heterosexuals (six men and six women). Six participants participated in the interviews. Different participants were used for each data collection method (face-to-face interviews and focus groups). The participants were between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, living around polokwane in the Limpopo province. The criteria which were used to select homosexuals and

heterosexuals were their behaviour traits (physical attributes, lifestyle) and attire. Homosexuals were observed, looking at their personalities and approached at gay pride event that took place in October 2011 at Polokwane show grounds. A few of them were selected to participate in this study because they were many and the study could not accommodate them all, hence only a few were selected.

Gay pride fair is an event for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender (LGBT) people that take place every year during the month of October. Heterosexuals living around Polokwane were observed and approached by the researcher. Participants approached were asked if they watch the selected television programmes daily, those who did, took part in this study. There were different participants in the focus groups and interviews. Some homosexuals and heterosexuals were known to the researcher. Behaviour traits were used to identify the sexual orientation of the participants.

3.4 Data collection methods

The task of data collection initiated after a research problem had been defined and research design sketched out. When deciding about the method of data collection to be used for the study, two types of data were kept in mind: primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected for the first time, through focus groups and observations thus happen to be original in character. Secondary data on the other hand, had already been collected by someone else and have been passed through statistical process (Kothari, 2008:95). To gather information for this study, observation, interviews and focus groups are used as methods of data collection.

The researcher took into account the kind of knowledge that is sought to produce from analysis of observations, focus groups and interview data collected during this study. The need to avoid presumptuous questions that might distort the research process had been a critical factor to uphold right through this study.

This study is sensitive to other respondents, Hence in constructing the questions the researcher had to remember that she is dealing with human beings and empathy had to be expressed at all times. It made the respondents to be open and answer the questions with ease. Homosexuality is still a restricted topic to many heterosexuals. Therefore it was a challenge to find heterosexuals who would agree to be part of this study.

3.4.1 Observation

Observation is useful for collecting data in this study. It is concerned more with description and explanation. Non-participant observation is preeminent in this study because for the subjects to be inspected correctly, the researcher did not have contact (telephonically, e-mails etc) contact with characters. It was simple to do this as she had no means of communication or relationship with the characters. In return it helped her to make an objective observation when examining the representations of gays and lesbians in the television programmes. Those under observation were not aware that they were observed. Information obtained in observation related to what is currently happening and it is not complicated by the past behaviour (Wimmer & Dominick, 1983:121).

In this study selected television programmes were watched i.e. *Generations*, *Isidingo*, and *Rhythm City*. By watching these programmes the researcher was able to examine whether these television programmes contributed to the stereotypes that the society has about gays and lesbians. Observations also assisted in evaluating whether the portrayals of gays and lesbians were positive or negative. Notes were taken while busy watching the programmes, noting down how gays and lesbians were portrayed in each of the television programmes and the reasons for this portrayal. Interest in the behaviour of individuals was at the centre of the study; hence observation was the best approach to collect required data.

The characters are in *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm city* the researcher has been watching and taking notes while the characters were performing their roles. The television programmes broadcast every week day and are as follows: *Generations* at 20h00 on sabc 1, *Isidingo* at 19h30 on sabc 3 and *Rhythm City* at 18h30 on e.tv. Observation of these television programmes stated on 4 February to 2 August 2013. None of the episodes of these television programmes were missed, because each episode is of paramount importance to the study.

An advantage of using non-volunteer subjects is that they are not biased, the characters played on television are appointed to them by the producers. The characters were unaware that they were observed for a research study. Characters follow the script as it has been written by the script writer. Whatever they portray is in the script, they are not allowed to temper with it and they act it out as it is.

For the purpose of this study, observation is one way of collecting primary data. It is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to the interaction of the characters in the television programmes as it takes place. There are many situations in which observation is the most appropriate method of data collection. For instance, when one wants to learn about the interaction in a group, ascertain the functions performed by a worker, or study the behaviour / personality traits of an individual. It is also appropriate in situations where full and accurate information cannot be elicited by questioning, like in this study. The respondents are unaware of the answers because it is difficult for them to detach themselves from the interaction (Kumar, 2005:119).

The benefit of using observation as a method of data collection in this study is that first-hand information is collected by watching the television programmes. Furthermore, implementing this method is simpler and inexpensive in that the researcher never joined in on the activities. Although there were possible observer effects which might have biased the findings the observer removed her personal interests from the study. The observer is aware of her potential bias.

The observer planned in advance what aspects to observe. This included the environment, the characters from the television programmes, their relationships, behaviours and actions. Recordings were done through notes taken during the occurrence of events. Notes gathered were detailed and descriptive. They included descriptions, recalled information, interpretations and personal impressions. The notes have been organised into classifications by dividing each day's notes into sections that dealt with particular themes.

The aim of the observation is to ensure that the participants' behaviour is thoroughly scrutinised. It is possible to aggregate the behaviour of all those in the sample in respect of each type of behaviour being noted. Observation method is useful to this study in a variety of ways. It provides ways of checking for nonverbal expression of feelings; determining who interacts with whom, grasp how characters communicate with each other based on their genders.

3.4.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are a research strategy for understanding audience attitudes and behaviour. Focus groups in this study consist of twenty four participants, twelve homosexuals (six gays and six lesbians) and twelve heterosexuals (six men and six women), who were interviewed separately. A moderator led the respondents in a relatively unstructured discussion about the focal topic. The focus groups involve people who possess certain characteristics and are recruited to share a common characteristic of interest (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983:128-129).

Focus groups and interviews are used as part of a sample of volunteer subjects. This contributes to the study in that, homosexuals and heterosexuals gave their views regarding gays and lesbians representations in the selected television programmes. Samples used are good candidates in analysing whether these representations have a bearing on homosexuals and how it affects them in reality. In order for the researcher to interview the subjects, she had the legal and ethical obligation to obtain informed consent from the respondents of this study. The respondents were told what was

expected of them through-out the research study. They were allowed to ask questions if they felt that there was a need for clarity.

Prior to observation, the focus groups participants were asked to watch the selected television programmes, they agreed to watch and made their own notes regarding what they have observed. When watching these television programmes every individual had his\her own perceptions on how gays and lesbians are portrayed, and they brought these analyses to the discussions .The respondents met for twenty Saturdays to discuss and share their opinions on what they have observed from the homosexual characters in the programmes. By so doing it made the focus groups easier. Everyone came with their own interpretations and findings. The focus groups assist in understanding if the respondents share a common belief about these representations.

In the meetings, participants discuss their opinions about how television portrays homosexuals in these television programmes on a daily basis. To what extend do they feel that television exploits gays and lesbians, and what suggestions do they have to help television portray homosexuals more positive? Participants were interviewed at the same time and asked the same questions and given equal time to respond to the questions.

Data from focus groups are used to enhance understanding and to reveal a wide range of opinions, some of which the researcher did not expect. Focus groups have a focused discussion. Most of the questions asked are predetermined, the sequence of the question is established, and the questions are structured to further the goal of the

research. However, the moderator is free to depart from the structure if she feels that relevant information is presented by the participants (Seale, 2007:65).

The moderator, with the help of predetermined guidelines, stimulates free discussion among the participants on the subject of inquiry. The order in which questions and topics are covered is flexible. The discussion started with more general issues concerning homosexuality, and slowly flowed into more specific ones. A few probing questions were asked to reveal more in-depth information and to clarify earlier statements or responses.

Participants were homogeneous with respect to characteristics which may otherwise impede the free flow of discussion. The moderator plays the role of the note-taker because she knows the objectives of inquiry and is trained in observing and noting nonverbal group feedback such as facial expressions. The complete discussion based on notes and tapes is transcribed. These transcripts serve as basic data for analysis.

The informal homogeneous group setting and the open-ended nature of questions encouraged the participants to feel free from various constraints, to which they are subject to during individual interviews. They express their views openly and spontaneously. The moderator assists the participants to interact with each other and this interaction stimulates memories and feelings, thus leads to a full in-depth discussion of the topic at hand. Each participant relates to a group of people with similar backgrounds, the likelihood of participants giving answers they thought would please the interviewer is reduced.

3.4.3 Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were used in this study. Interviews have been traditionally considered the most reliable method of collecting data. The interviewer is able to see the people she is interviewing, and is able to make a nonverbal assessment of how things are going and whether the respondents offered reliable and valid information. Face-to-face interviews are sensitive way to make contact with culturally diverse populations and those who live in more isolated communities.

This study implemented interviews as data collection strategy. Face- to face- interviews ensures that the researcher has control of the interview setting. Any misunderstandings about the intent of questions are immediately clarified. Semi -structured interviews were conducted the reason being that it consists of predetermined questions related to domains of interest. It also administers a representative sample of respondents to confirm study domains and identity factors for analysis in a survey.

Semi-structured interviews are used because they combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open- ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused data. Wimmer and Dominick (1983:47) the questions in a semi-structured interview are pre-formulated, but the answers to those questions are open-ended in that they are fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the interviewee.

Six people were interviewed separately, three were heterosexuals and three were homosexuals. Interviewing them separately was in the best interest of the study to avoid unnecessary dialogues and arguments. These interviews assist in showing why some

heterosexuals have hostility towards homosexuals, and why homosexuals think that heterosexuals resent them because they are not well informed about their sexuality.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter covered data collection methods used in this study. Qualitative research approach is appropriate for this type of study. The availability of various data was considered. The data in this chapter is needed to validate whether television has positive or negative depictions of gays and lesbians. The selected television programmes are the main source of information and contributes to the findings. Methods used to collect data are best suitable for this kind of research, and makes the interpretation of data easier. Data presentation is put into detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises of a comprehensive breakdown of the interviews and focus groups meetings conducted with homosexual and heterosexual participants. Observation of the selected television programmes made by the researcher is also included. The breakdown of the interviews and discussions is outlined based on the questions asked during the interviews and focus groups. The answers to the critical questions relating to the selected television programmes and gays and lesbians are illustrated in these presentations. Face-to-face interview and focus groups questions (see Addendum A) are the same because the participants are not the same people. Participants who took part in the interviews did not participate in focus groups and vice versa.

4.2 Presentation of results

This is the presentation of results of depictions of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes.

4.2.1 Face-to-face interviews

The interviews were conducted on different days. Six participants were interviewed to share their perception of gays and lesbians as portrayed in the selected television programmes. Three homosexuals (2 lesbians and 1 gay) took part in the interviews which were conducted at Polokwane Flora Park Dam. The other three heterosexuals (1

woman and 2 men) participants are registered students at the University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus; their interviews were conducted at the university. Homosexual participants were excited to take part in this study because topics of gays and lesbians are rarely covered in- depth in academic studies.

In the questions below, responses of the participants are outlined and the participants are referred to as A, B, C, D, E and F. Each letter signifies a participant. Letters A-C represents homosexuals, whereas letters D-F represent the heterosexuals. If one or two letters are omitted in the tables it means some of the participants did not answer that particular question. In an event where readers share a certain sentiment the letters appear in the same block. The questions presented below are core questions. They are attached (see Addendum A).

Question 1: How do you get information or knowledge about your sexuality?

Table 4.1

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A&B	We do not have a source of information that gives us a true reflection of our sexuality. The media try to include the representations of homosexuality in programmes, although most of the coverage is not informative but sarcastic. Homosexuality is always seen as something people can make fun of.
C	I spend most of my time on the internet and social media. This is where I get information about my sexuality. American television

	shows are also my source of information when it comes to my sexuality. They help me to figure out who I am. I remember watching <i>Will</i> in <i>Will & Grace</i> and saying “wow that guy’s personality is exactly like mine. It is <i>Will</i> who made me realise that I am gay”.
D,E& F	The participants say that coverage of their sexuality is everywhere, when they watch television they see a heterosexual couple. Every kind of media covers heterosexual couples daily. Almost every television drama has a man and woman as a couple. Heterosexuality is seen and understood at early stages of growing up because it surrounds us every day.

The participants’ answers show that the media play a role in informing individuals about their sexualities. This shows that it is important that media must do a lot of positive representation of different sexualities.

Question 2: Do you think mass media have any influence on a person’s sexuality? Which types of mass media?

Table 4.2

Participant(s)	Answer (s)
A,B &C	Yes, mass media have an influence on a person’s sexuality. People model what they see in the media especially in television

	<p>and film. If gays and lesbians are portrayed as constant victims of homophobia and corrective rape, that is how they will be viewed in society and they are likely to become victims. Television shows such as <i>Isidingo</i> where a lesbian lady gets raped after declaring her sexuality is a negative depiction. It petrifies the viewers who were thinking of 'coming out of the closet', the scene portrayed lesbianism as something that is wrong and which needs to be corrected. A lot of adolescent viewers look up to the media to get more information about sexuality. If one sexuality is represented as better than the other, then viewers get distorted information. People expect media to show them right from wrong and shape the society yet the media are doing the opposite.</p>
D,E & F	<p>Yes they have an influence on a person's sexuality. We grew up knowing that a man should be with a woman but nowadays two men can date. This is the influence of the mass media. People see two men or women kissing on television and want to be like them. If the media portrays this behaviour as "normal" then it encourages people to be gays and lesbians. It is an adoption of American television.</p>

Participants A-F all agree that mass media have an influence on a person's sexuality, particularly television. Their sentiments are informed by the fact that television is one of the most loved and viewed medium. The use of pictures in television makes it to have

an immediate effect on its viewers. Viewers respond quickly to what they see in television than in any other media.

Question 3: Which homosexual character(s) from the selected television programmes: *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*, do you like/ relate to and why?

Table 4.3

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A	I relate to <i>Suzie</i> in <i>Isidingo</i> because she always stayed true to her sexuality. Although her partner was raped <i>Suzie</i> was there to support her. Because the character of <i>Suzie</i> was feminine it assisted in proving wrong the stereotype that lesbians are masculine. What I did not like is that her character was short lived, it was not recurring.
B	<p>The character of <i>Stone</i> has qualities that I like. When <i>Stone</i> decided to cancel his wedding plans to her girlfriend and tell his family that he is gay. It showed courage, this is a positive portrayal of gays because he declared his sexuality to his family and friends. He thought being “open” might cause feelings of rejection from the family and friends, but he told them anyway.</p> <p><i>Stone</i> is a good illustration of gays because he is masculine and not feminine. Stereotypes have made people believe that gays are feminine and flamboyant. They have been represented as drag</p>

	queens for many years. This character has showed that a man can have masculine attributes and still be gay.
C	<i>Prada</i> is the character that I like in <i>Isidingo</i> . Even though the issue around his sexuality is hardly discussed. He is outgoing and never lets life's challenges bring him down. Prada is the one who makes sense of his friends' relationships; he gives them advice about love. The friends know that they can continuously go to him for support; he is someone that they can depend on all the time.
F	I am not homosexual but I like the characters <i>Senzo</i> of in <i>Generations</i> and <i>Charlie</i> in <i>Isidingo</i> . They give information that I did not know about homosexuals. Their characters give a glimpse of gay and lesbian lives. <i>Senzo</i> was resented by his father but he still declared his sexuality, even after his father threatened to disown him that takes courage.

Each participant likes a particular character from the selected programmes. Other participants like two characters from different programmes. This shows that every character has a unique attribute that makes them likable by viewers.

Question 4: Which homosexual character(s) do you least relate to and why?

Table 4.4

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A	<i>Charlie</i> in <i>Isidingo</i> is my least favourite because her character had a negative depiction after she was raped. I felt as if this programme encouraged corrective rape, because right after the rape incident she wanted to change her sexuality. A homophobic person might believe that to change a female lesbian's mind about her sexuality she must be raped.
B	<i>Senzo</i> in <i>Generations</i> is the gay character that I cannot relate to. He declared his sexuality as gay and then slept with a heterosexual female. The role of <i>Senzo</i> makes viewers to underestimate gay men. They believe that gay men need women who can fulfil them sexually to stop them from being gay.
F	I am neither gay nor lesbian but I related less to the characters of <i>Suzie</i> and <i>Charlie</i> in <i>Isidingo</i> . I felt that they gave us heterosexual viewers a vague insight into the homosexual life. It seems as if this lesbian couple was introduced for one to be a victim of corrective rape, then their roles were cut thereafter. It is a pity that their roles were not recurring ones. We could have learnt a lot from their characters, if they had positive depictions.

The role of *Charlie*, as a victim of corrective rape, in *Isidingo*, is a disappointment to one of the respondents. The depictions of characters are one of the factors which contribute to viewers having least favourite characters. If characters are portrayed negatively, it has an effect on the people that are depicted. The role of *Charlie* being raped may be perceived as a way of eradicating lesbianism in society. Homophobic people might start resorting to rape as correcting the sexuality of lesbians. The role of *Senzo* declaring that he is gay but impregnates a woman has a negative effect on the perceptions that viewers have about gay men. This adds to the impression that gay men need women to satisfy them sexually in order for them to be “straight” men. The character of *Prada* is categorised by the stereotypes that defines a gay man as feminine and flamboyant. Heterosexual viewers look up to the media to provide information about the “homosexual life”, to make them understand this sexuality but instead it donates the stereotypes.

Question 5: Looking at *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*, do you feel gays’ and lesbians’ visibility in today’s mainstream media is prevalent? Are they accurately represented or do you think they are not accurately represented?

Table 4.5

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A	The visibility of gays and lesbians in mainstream media is prevalent and negative. A gay man cannot be attracted to both men and women. <i>Generations</i> made viewers to perceive sexuality of a gay man as something that can be changed whenever one

	<p>pleases. It also made viewers to criticise gay men, some viewers believe that this sexuality can be challenged if an attractive woman continue persisting to be with a gay man.</p>
B & C	<p>The presentation of <i>Charlie</i> in <i>Isidingo</i> was negative because she considered changing her sexuality after being raped. She ended her relationship with her partner thinking that the rape was her fault because she is lesbian. She blamed herself for being raped; she thought that maybe something is wrong with her sexuality. Viewers who do not understand the message in this role might take it that to change a lesbian into a heterosexual female she must be raped. This kind of roles contributes to the high rate of homophobic attacks in society. Viewers imitate what they see on television, if gays and lesbians are treated mostly as victims and that is how they will be treated in reality.</p>
D,E & F	<p><i>Generations</i> and <i>Rhythm City</i> reflected another kind of gay men that many people did not know about. The characters of <i>Senzo</i> and <i>Stone</i> showed that not all gay men are feminine. These roles taught us that you can be masculine and still be gay.</p>

The respondents state that the visibility of gays and lesbians in today's mainstream media is widespread, but the characters are mostly represented negatively. They said this looking at gay and lesbian characters in *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*. Heterosexual respondents said that the character of *Senzo* and *Stone* depicted gay

men that they never thought existed. “We are used to gay men having feminine characteristics; gay men with masculine features still come as a surprise”.

Question 6: If prevalent, does this make you comfortable with your sexuality?

Table 4.6

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A & B	We are comfortable with our sexualities. The age that we are at right now does not get easily influenced by the media. Although negative depictions have an effect on adolescent children’s because they look up to the media for information about their sexuality. What they see on the media has some sort of influence on their decision making. If their sexuality is depicted as negative, this could influence their choices of sexuality.
C	The character of <i>Prada</i> in <i>Isidingo</i> is a representation of feminine gay men. The role of <i>Prada</i> exaggerates the manner in which feminine gay men hold themselves. He gets underestimated a lot and his views are hardly taken into consideration.

The visibility of gays and lesbians is widespread in mainstream media but it does not have an effect on how the respondents feel about their sexuality. The media has an influence on viewers who have not yet conformed to any sexuality. The depictions of gays and lesbians are mostly negative thus it can have an impact on the choices that adolescents make about their sexuality. Adolescents are delicate when it comes to

making decisions about their sexuality; they look up to the media to find people they can model.

Question 7: Do you notice a difference between how homosexual characters are treated or portrayed on television, compared to heterosexual characters?

Table 4.7

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A,B & C	Homosexual characters are treated as people who do not form part of society. They are presented as “abnormal”. Homosexual characters in television programmes mostly have subordinate roles to heterosexual characters. Homosexuality is portrayed as some kind of disease that gays and lesbians needs curing from.
D,E & F	Heterosexuals are the majority of the society. They have always been seen as the “normal” and only form of human sexuality. Hence there is more positive representation of heterosexuality than homosexuality. Gays and lesbians are still seen as a taboo to many and are struggling to understand this sexuality. This is influenced by the inaccurate depictions of gays and lesbians by the media. Looking at the role of <i>Senzo</i> in <i>Generations</i> , in one scene he is gay and in the other scene he is attracted to females. This kind of depictions makes it hard for viewers to believe that homosexuality really exists.

Homosexuals are treated and portrayed as the minority group of society. Homosexual characters always try to justify their sexuality to their heterosexual family members. Their characters seek a sense of belonging through their families. They are portrayed as people who need approval from society for their sexuality to be accepted and respected. Heterosexual characters are constantly represented as main characters in most programme text and as superior to homosexual characters. Heterosexuality is seen as the only and right sexuality. Homosexuals have inferior roles and continuously explain their sexuality to heterosexual characters.

Question 8: How would you like gay and lesbian characters to be portrayed in *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*?

Table 4.8

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A,B & C	It is difficult to say exactly how we would like gay and lesbian characters to be portrayed in <i>Generations</i> , <i>Isidingo</i> and <i>Rhythm City</i> . What we need is an accurate representation of gays and lesbians. More research should be done about homosexuality. Producers or writers of programme texts should be homosexuals because they better understand the issues that affect them on a daily basis. Positive depictions of homosexuals should override programmes with homophobic attacks and corrective rape. Constructive characters of gays and lesbians should have recurring roles.

The respondents want positive portrayals of gays and lesbians in *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*. Positive and accurate depictions could lead to a better understanding of homosexuality by viewers. Producers of programme texts have the power to influence the perceptions of the viewers. Therefore they must play the social responsibility role by transmitting fair and precise information to viewers. The media have a role to build society not contribute to its division and perpetuate stereotypes about homosexuality.

Question 9: Which homosexual characters do you think are most influential in representing homosexuals?

Table 4.9

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A,B & C	Homosexual characters that have leading roles are more influential when it comes to depicting gays and lesbians. <i>Senzo's</i> character is more influential to viewers. However it could do with more representations of homosexuals. If portrayed accurately this character would make a lot of positive impact in how gays and lesbians are perceived in society. The character of <i>Senzo</i> is one of the main characters and it is a recurring role. It can be used as a character that educates viewers about gays. <i>Generations</i> is one of the most watched television programmes in South Africa, the

	character of <i>Senzo</i> influences many viewers. If represented positively, then homosexuals would receive more positive responses from viewers.
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Homosexual characters with leading roles are influential because they appear regularly in the programmes. *Senzo* in *Generations* is the only character that has a leading role in the selected television programmes. More homosexuals characters need to have recurring leading roles, but these roles must be positive and informative. The character of *senzo* is an astute business man who is capable of making important decision. This character has eradicated the stereotype that gay men are feminine and weak.

Question 10: Do you feel like you often follow the behaviours of homosexual characters you see on television?

Table 4.11

Participant (s)	Answer (s)
A,B & C	No we do not model behaviours of homosexual characters in television. As we have stated before that at our age we hardly get influenced by television characters, especially with issues of sexuality. The manners in which the behaviour of homosexual characters is presented in television are inaccurate. It is because of this that we do not model homosexual characters; their depictions are vague and incorrect. Making it had for these

	<p>characters to have an influence on viewers (especially homosexuals) who know the real lives of gays and lesbians. One can only follow a behaviour that he/she relates to; it is difficult to model someone who does not exemplify your life. Although positive depictions of gays and lesbians could have an influence on viewers who are still figuring out their sexualities.</p>
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The respondents do not model the behaviours of homosexual characters on television. They feel that their age and experience contribute to them not being influenced by the negative depictions in television. Although they stated that negative depictions can have an influence in the choices that adolescents make about their sexuality. If a certain sexuality is depicted as wrong, this could have negative effect on viewers who are still searching for information about that sexuality, be it their own sexual identity or not.

4.2.2 Observations

4.2.2.1 Generations

Generations is one of the most viewed television soapie in South Africa. *Senzo* is a gay character in *Generations*, who desperately seeks for his father's approval in everything that he does. When *Senzo* realizes that he can no longer hide his sexuality from his family and friends, he decides to be open. His father could not come to terms with the fact that his son is gay and threatens to disown him.

The character of *Senzo* is complex; it gets portrayed both negatively and positively. It is depicted positively in essence that *Senzo* has stayed true to his sexuality despite the

challenges that he has faced. But his sexuality is tested when he impregnates a heterosexual woman. This representation mocks homosexuality, and creates doubt about gays in the mind of the viewers. A gay man cannot be attracted to a woman (www.wikipedia.org), so *Senzo*'s character is a negative portrayal of gay men. It paints the picture that gay men need women to change their sexuality. Although *Senzo* does not change his sexuality after impregnating a woman, his character remains questioned by viewers, whether he is really gay or bisexual.

Senzo has a leading and recurring character. He is a good example of masculine gay men. He is a successful businessman. *Senzo*'s father has finally accepted his son's sexuality though it took long for this acceptance to unfold. This character has decreased the stereotypes that gay men are feminine and colourful. If portrayed positively, *Senzo* can be a gay character that educates viewers about the life of gay men.

4.2.2.2 Isidingo

Isidingo has both gay and lesbian characters. *Prada* is gay and *Charlie* is lesbian. The character of *Prada* is a feminine and flamboyant gay man, who is sentimental and sensitive. He is a pillar of support to all his friends and gives them advice about their relationships. The problem with this character is that *Prada* seeks approval from his family and he would do anything to please his mother, even if it means doing things he does not agree with. He is lonely and desperate to find a partner.

Prada's friends know they can always depend on him. He plays a supportive role rather than a leading one. His life is hardly covered; storylines that talk about him and his sexuality

are rare. He is known as an IT specialist, and as a person who gives relationship advice to his friends. There is no background of his character except the depiction of him as a vulnerable gay man.

Charlie is a lesbian woman who has been a victim of corrective rape. Her character opened up positively when she got support from her father, regarding her sexuality and attraction to ladies. *Charlie's* father went an extra mile of asking her to teach him about lesbianism to show his daughter that he loves her regardless of sexuality. In the mind of the viewers this could be perceived positively and encourage parents to support their children's choices of sexuality. It could also boost the confidence of lesbian viewers to be open about their sexuality to family and friends.

The role of *Charlie* is represented positively because she gets support when she declares her sexuality to her father and friends. After the rape incident, the character of *Charlie* turned from positive to negative. She gets raped because of her sexuality, and lack of evidence made it difficult to arrest the culprit. As a result he was not convicted. This disturbed *Charlie* psychologically and felt that the justice system failed her. She started wearing sloppy unattractive clothes; this was her defence mechanism so that she does not get raped again. She felt that by wearing slackly clothing no one will find her attractive. She ended her relationship with her partner *Suzie*, thinking that she will be safe from being a victim of corrective rape again. But that did not stop the rapist from terrorising her.

The character of *Suzie* was portrayed positively but unfortunately the role was not recurring. She was a strong headed woman, who was proud of her sexuality and

declared it to friends. She supported her girlfriend *Charlie* after the rape. Their relationship never got a story line that was recurring. The role of *Suzie* concluded after the rape and Charlie ended their relationship.

4.2.2.3 Rhythm City

The character of *Stone* is a masculine gay man coming from a Christian family. He had difficulties accepting that he is attracted to males. As a result he tries to suppress this feeling by being in a relationship with females despite his attraction to males. As time went on he realized that his sexuality is something that he cannot run away from and he declared it to his family and friends. His mother had troubles accepting that *Stone* is gay but eventually she did.

The representation of his family accepting and supporting *Stone's* sexuality is constructive, because it encourages viewers to be open about their sexuality and their families to support them. The role of *Stone* being a responsible gay man who takes care of his family in the absence of his father is a positive depiction. It shows that you can be a gay man and still be a bread winner and the head of the family. He is always looking after the well-being of his family.

Writers and producers of *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City* should be challenged to create characters and storylines that can help our country overcome violence, hate and conflict. Progressive viewers should also be challenged to take up a pen and complain when they feel offended by what they see on their television screens. It is only when these harmful stereotypes are confronted that our leaders actually stop perpetuating them.

4.2.3 Focus groups

The focus groups discussions were conducted for twenty Saturdays. Twenty- four participants were interviewed to find their perception of gays and lesbians as portrayed in the selected television programmes. Focus group interviews were conducted at the *University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus*. There were twenty-four participants, twelve homosexuals (6 lesbians and 6 gays) and twelve heterosexuals (6 women and 6 men). The participants were grouped according to their sexuality, homosexuals and heterosexuals had their discussions separately. There were Different participants for interviews and focus groups. There were no participants who took part in both interviews and focus groups.

In the questions below delicate responses of the participants are outlined. Each letter signifies a participant. Homosexual participants are referred to as A and B. Letter A represents gays and letter B represents lesbians. Heterosexual participants are represented by letters C and D. Letter C represents woman and letter D men. If one or two letters are omitted in the tables it means some of the participants did not answer that specific question. In an event where readers share a certain sentiment the letters appear in the same block. The questions presented below are core questions. They are attached (see Addendum A).

Question 1: How do you get information or knowledge about your sexuality?

Table 4.11

PARTICIPANTS	ANSWERS
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A	<p>We get information about our sexuality from mainstream media, especially in film and television. But because we have already acknowledged our sexual identities the information represented has less effect on us personally.</p>
B	<p>Media are source of information about our sexualities but what they portray is more of fiction than reality. We can tell when lesbian characters are being exaggerated because we know ourselves and lifestyles better.</p>
C & D	<p>Our sexuality has always surrounded us when growing up. We would see our parents together, and this instilled a sense that a man should be with a woman. It is something that we grow up seeing and have accepted it as “normal”. Hence a lot of people have difficulties acknowledging that there are other sexualities beside heterosexuality.</p>

The participants stated that they get information about sexuality from the media. The media does not have that much influence on their sexual identities because they have already declared their sexualities. Heterosexuality has always been there in media and society, therefore it is always seen as the only sexuality and the media adds to this stereotypes. it is the role of the media to teach and inform society about other sexualities.

Question 2: Do you think mass media have any influence on a person's sexuality? Which types of mass media?

Table 4.12

Participants	Answers
A&B	Yes, the media can have an influence in people's sexualities especially on people who are still trying to find their sexualities. Adolescents are most vulnerable when it comes to sexuality; they look up to the media to give them information about our sexualities and their pros and cons. If homosexuality is depicted as some sort of "curse" in the media then this adolescents get diluted information which can have a major effect on their sexuality. People suppress

	<p>their actual sexual identity because they are afraid of being terrorised. They see the media portraying homosexuals as victims of homophobic attacks. Television and film are the most influential media because of their visual nature. Pictures have more effect on viewers, than written text. What they see is hardly forgotten.</p>
C & D	<p>Film and television are the most influential types of mass media. Age is a contributing factor when it comes to how a person gets influenced by the media and to what extent. People who have matured and identified their sexualities do not usually get influenced by the media. They are also people who look to the media to get information about their sexualities.</p>

Mass media has an influence on individuals who are still identifying their sexual identities. They take the information from the media because it is their source of information about sexuality. Media has less or no influence on people who have already

declared their sexualities. Television and film are the mass media which have the most influence on their viewers. Pictures can say a lot of things; it is rare to forget what one has seen. Pictures have an immediate effect on viewers.

Question 3: Which homosexual character(s) from the selected television programmes: *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*, do you like/ relate to and why?

Table 4.13

Participants	Answers
A	<p>We like characters of Senzo, <i>Prada</i> and <i>Stone</i>. These characters have their good roles and their down falls. We can like their roles today and not like them tomorrow. The characters change from time to time; they can have positive and negative depictions.</p> <p><i>Senzo</i> and <i>Stone</i> are masculine gay men who are responsible. <i>Senzo</i> is a successful business man and <i>Stone</i> is a hardworking man who wants a bright future. <i>Prada</i> is a feminine gay man who likes to see people happy and would go out of his way to make that happen. All</p>

	these characters have one or more characteristics of gay men.
B & C	The character of <i>Suzie</i> is likable but was short-lived. She gives an insight of the lives of lesbian women. Her character shows that there are feminine lesbian women and that they are not different from heterosexual women except their sexuality.
D	We like <i>Senzo</i> and <i>Stone</i> because they do not act like women. One cannot tell that they are gay until they say so.

The role of the characters in this selected television programmes change all the time. They can be depicted in a manner that makes them to be our favourite in a particular scene, and least favourite in the next scene. Some participants relate to more than one character depending on how they will be represented in different scenes.

Question 4: Which homosexual character(s) do you least relate to and why?

Table 4.14

Participants	Answers
A	As we have stated above that our most adored characters could be our least depending on how they are depicted in particular scenes. For instance the scene where <i>Senzo</i> had sexual intercourse with a woman made him our least favourite for that particular plot.
B	The character of <i>Charlie</i> after the rape incident, when she decided to end her relationship with <i>Suzie</i> . Charlie could have confided to her partner to show how strong their relationship is instead of pushing her away.
D	The character of <i>Prada</i> is least likeable because he is too colourful and feminine.

Respondents like or least like characters depending on the kind of scene they play. Characters in television programmes evolve with time. A character can be a murderer in

one scene which makes him least likable by viewers, and in the next scene he could have repented and changed his ways, making him more likable.

Question 5: Looking at *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*, do you feel gays' and lesbians' visibility in today's mainstream media is prevalent? Are they accurately represented or do you think they are not accurately represented?

Table 4.15

Participants	Answers
A &B	Gay and lesbian characters in today's mainstream media are more prevalent than in the past years. There are both accurate and inaccurate representations of gays and lesbians in all the selected television programmes. One character has both positive and negative depictions of homosexuality. Although presentation outweighs the representation of gays and lesbians.

There is prevalent visibility of gays and lesbians in the mainstream media, but the characters do more presentations than representations.

Question 6: If prevalent, does this make you comfortable with your sexuality?

Table 4.16

Participants	Answers
A&B	The prevalence of gays and lesbians in the mainstream media does not make us uncomfortable with our sexuality. We already know and have confined our sexual identity and comfortable with it. Positive or negative depictions of our sexuality on television do not shake our comfort ability. Although negative depictions might have an effect on people who are still trying to identify their sexuality.

Prevalent negative portrayals of a particular sexuality can have consequence for people who are still figuring out their sexuality.

Question 7: Do you notice a difference between how homosexual characters are treated or portrayed on television, compared to heterosexual characters?

Table 4.17

Participants	Answers
A & B	Homosexuals and heterosexuals will always be portrayed differently. As long as heterosexual characters keep on getting leading roles than homosexuals. In a work scene heterosexuals are superiors and homosexuals are subordinates. Television has a role to play in building the society. if these gaps between homosexuals and heterosexuals are closed in television depictions then it would be easier to close them in society. Television should strive to give a balanced portrayal of both sexualities. Most viewers model what they see in television, more positive depictions of each sexuality leads to a constructive society.
C& D	It is believed that heterosexuals are the

	majority to homosexuals. Most of the television programmes aims to cater for the majority. As a result more positive portrayals are of heterosexuals than homosexuals.
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Television has a role to play in closing the gap of differences between how homosexuals and heterosexuals are portrayed. There should be a balance in representing these sexualities. No sexuality should benefit at the cause of the other.

Question 8: How would you like gay and lesbian characters to be portrayed in *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*?

Table 4.18

Participants	Answers
A & B	All we ask for is an accurate portrayal of gays and lesbians in this television programmes. These programmes should inform viewers about the life style of gays and lesbians not present them in a way they think gays and lesbians should be.
C& D	Gays and lesbians should be portrayed in a way that informs the viewers about

	their sexuality.
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Participants want an informative accurate portrayal of gays and lesbians in the television programmes. They need a representation that can teach them about the lifestyles of gays and lesbians.

Question 9: Which homosexual characters do you think are most influential in representing homosexuals?

Table 4.19

Participants	Answers
A,B,C & D	<p>Participants stated that homosexual characters with leading roles are the ones who have more influence. <i>Senzo</i> in <i>Generations</i> is an example because of his success and class viewers are bound to be captivated by him.</p> <p>The characters of Charlie and Suzie have been influential because Charlie is a survivor of corrective rape. Charlie wants to make an awareness campaign of corrective rape to support lesbian women who have been raped.</p>

The way in which homosexual characters are represented in television has an influence on the viewers. Viewers identify themselves with characters; roles played on television are depictions of people's lives. More accuracy and fewer stereotypes are needed when representing gays and lesbians.

Question 10: Do you feel like you often follow the behaviours of homosexual characters you see on television?

Table 4.20

Participants	Answers
A & B	We do not model the behaviours of homosexual characters in television. Even if we wanted to it would be difficult because the lives presented in television is not same as ours. There is an omission of the lives of gays and lesbians, and an addition of stereotypes in the representations. This is dangerous because young homosexuals who need more information about their asexuality look up to the media. Representation of their sexuality is distorted and could result in them getting inaccurate information which leads to confusion.

Respondents do not follow the behaviours of the characters in television but fear that young homosexuals may follow these roles when searching for information about their sexuality. This could lead to them getting inaccurate information about their sexuality.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

Interpretative analysis is used to evaluate data in this study. The nature of this study and the methodology selected do not demand for Statistical Package for Social Science. The three methods used were sufficient to collect data. Therefore data collected from the interviews, observations and focus group were analysed manually (pen and notebook). The reason being that the data collected were not complicated and it could be analysed and interpreted manually and there was no need to do it automatically.

Data analysis was done early in the collection process and continued throughout the project. The information gathered in this study was analysed manually. Tapes used to record the interviews were transcribed; the recordings from the interviews and focus groups were combined. Information collected from the focus groups, interviews and observations were analysed through evaluation of the responses from homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Focus group discussions provided a great deal of data, including interview notes and transcripts of the session. This information was analysed and organised in an understandable manner. The researcher listened to the tapes and read the transcripts to generate a list of key ideas for each topic under discussion. Organising, analysing, and making sense of all this information was challenging because the researcher had to outline each and every question in an attempt to get the results.

5.2 Researcher's observation of the selected television programmes

Three television programmes were observed during this study, namely *Generations*, *Rhythm City* and *Isidingo*. The motive for observing these programmes was to examine the depictions of gay and lesbian characters. The selected television programmes were observed throughout the study.

5.2.1 Generations

Looking at the character of *Senzo* and how it unfolded three years ago, he is portrayed as shy and not attracted to females. The storyline where *Senzo's* father does not accept that his son's sexuality and turns into an alcoholic; portrays being gay as a curse and unacceptable. This subplot may have a negative effect on parents whose children are homosexuals. Also on gays who are still struggling to be open about their sexuality, because of the fear of being rejected by their parents. Although *Senzo* has support from his step mother and friends, he longs for his father's acceptance.

The character *Senzo* has positive and negative traits. It is positive in that he is portrayed as an affluent business man, who strives to support his family. It shows that a gay man can take care of his family, the same way a heterosexual man can. *Senzo* portrays gay men negatively when he had intercourse with a woman and impregnates her. This depiction can make viewers wonder how a gay man can be sexually aroused by a heterosexual woman. This representation raise confusion in the viewers mind, making them question gay men. It can paint an image that gay men need women who are persistent and sexually seductive. If *Senzo* is portraying gay characters in reality, he

should have been able to resist sleeping with a woman, because gay men are not attracted to women or cannot be sexually aroused by them.

Noluntu knows that *Senzo* is gay but she persuaded him, and got pregnant. Now, this raises questions of what the writer is aiming to achieve. This representation undermines homosexuality, because *Senzo* gets tempted by *Noluntu*, but he is supposedly gay. *Noluntu* plans to give the baby for adoption. Viewers could ask that why can't *Noluntu* give the baby to *Senzo* since she says that she is not ready to raise it. It could be that the writer is saying that gay men are not fit enough to raise children on their own or *Noluntu* is punishing *Senzo* because he does not want to marry her. *Generations* portrays *Senzo's* appearance positively in that majority of people perceive gay people as being flamboyant and promiscuous (Dow 2001:123). But his character shows us that you can be masculine and gay. The overall representation is negative in that it portrays a gay man as someone who can be sexually aroused by a woman, making the viewers question homosexuality.

5.2.2 Rhythm City

The character *Stone* is a young man from a disadvantaged family. He had a girlfriend whom he promised to marry. During lobola negotiations, *Stone* realized his attraction to males. He tried to suppress his feelings towards males by abusing alcohol. *Rhythm city* with this representation shows that gays can be courageous, For example, when *Stone* realizes that he cannot run away from his sexuality, and cancels the wedding.

Stone's sexuality causes tension in his home. His mother could not come to terms with his sexuality. His friends were astonished that someone they grew up with is gay. They

wondered why he was not gay when they were still young. They did not want to be friends with him anymore because they do not feel comfortable around him. They are scared that he might be attracted to one of them. As months past the representation of *Stone* changes. Both the family and friends came to an understanding that nothing has changed about *Stone* except his sexuality.

The character *Stone* in *Rhythm City* represents gay character negatively and positively. It is negative in that he dated a girl first and tried to string her along as a way of suppressing his attraction to males. He was never in a meaningful relationship. It is positive in that it displayed that even though it has been hard for his family and friends to accept his sexuality, in the end they understood and treat him like a 'normal' person. Moreover, it displayed that being gay does not mean possessing feminine characteristics.

5.2.3 Isidingo

There is a gay character known as *Prada*, he is colourful and feminine. His sexuality is hardly mentioned except when his heterosexual friends talk about going out and picking up girls. He is more of a supporting character whom gives love advice to female friends, but he is single and lonely. The representation of *Prada* not having support from his family is negative. In that it paints an image in the viewers' mind of being neglected by family because of homosexuality, which creates fear of openness about sexual identity.

There are two characters named *Suzie* and *Charlie*, a lesbian couple. *Charlie* was confused of her feelings towards *Suzie*. Since she has never been in a relationship with a female, but she got support from her father and friends. The depiction of lesbianism is

positive, as it shows people accepting homosexuality. Nevertheless, there is a negative depiction of *Charlie* when she becomes a victim of corrective rape because of her sexuality. The storyline can be seen as sarcastic because at the one end it encourages people to be open about their sexuality. On the other hand it suggests that if one is open about her sexuality she is subject to becoming raped.

The character of *Charlie* being raped by someone she trusted instils a sense of anxiety in the viewers' minds. It can make viewers to hold back opening up about their sexuality, because they are not sure of who to trust. This character brings panic to some viewers who are still not open about their sexuality. However; *Charlie* depicts what happens in reality. *Charlie* was confused and traumatized after the rape, ending her relationship with *Suzie*. This can send a negative message that lesbians can change their sexuality after being raped, making them vulnerable to rape perpetrators. It can also encourage victims of corrective rape to speak up and report it as *Charlie* did.

5.3 Viewers/ respondents details

Twenty four subjects participated in focus groups twelve homosexuals (six gays and six lesbians) and twelve heterosexuals (six males and six females). Six subjects (three homosexuals and three heterosexuals) participated in the interviews. All participants were between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-six and twelve identified as members of the gay and lesbian community. The age range of the participants was significant because as young adults, they are still forming their own identities. All interviews and focus groups were conducted face to face in private settings.

Participants were found through personal contacts. The interviews took about twenty to fifty-five minutes to complete, based upon participants' discussion.

5.3.1 Homosexuals respondents

Besides learning through interactions from friends and acquaintances, or researching on the internet, 50% of homosexual participants feel that main source of their knowledge and information regarding gay and lesbian sexuality came from television during their adolescent stage. Ten percent (10%) of the participants received the guidance and knowledge from their parents or role models who taught them about homosexuality. In terms of current gay and lesbian visibility in mainstream television, all participants agree that it is getting better, and representation is gradually improving. However, it is just not there yet. Gay respondents answered questions regarding to gay characters in the selected television programmes, while lesbian respondents answered questions regarding to lesbian characters.

During their adolescent stage 50% of the homosexual participants sourced information about their sexuality from television. This shows that at this stage in their lives they were still in the closet and television was their main source. Ten percent (10%) show that they talked to their parents about homosexuality. They had an opportunity to critic what they saw on television by asking their parents and then form their own conclusions. Fifty percent (50%) of the participants took information first hand from television; they had no one to discuss it with. Hence, it is important for television to be positive and give accurate portrayal because some viewers depend solely on it (Gross, 2001:95).

5.3.1.1 Senzo in Generations

Twenty five (25%) of gay respondents stated that *Senzo* is the first gay character they have viewed in South African television, which is not colourful, feminine and promiscuous (Battles and Morrow-Hilton 2002:91). Even though the respondents have feminine characteristics, they were happy that masculine gays are also getting the exposure. One of the gay respondent stated that “Gone are those days when one thinks that you have to be feminine in order to be gay”. This illustrates that *Senzo* as a masculine gay character is a positive sign that gays are represented in the media, even though he has some negative qualities.

Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents both gays and lesbians understand *Senzo* seeks for his father’s approval in everything he does, except for asking for approval for his sexuality. It sends a negative message of fear and doubt to young gay viewers who are still struggling to come out to their families. It is portrayed that for them to be proudly gay their parents have to approve their sexuality first. The part where *Senzo* was not accepted by his father could discourage viewers to acknowledge their sexualities with fear of rejection from their families.

Twenty five percent (25%) of the respondents said that it was a break through when *Senzo’s* father finally accepted his son’s sexuality. the character of *Senzo* was represented positively until he impregnated *Noluntu*, it was portrayed as sexual ridicule, and that makes the viewers at home to doubt the sexuality of gay men.

Noluntu knew that *Senzo* is gay but still persuaded him. The mockery comes when *Senzo* responds to *Noluntu’s* feelings for him. A gay person is not attracted to females

and cannot have sex with them (www.yahoo.com). Because of how gay men are portrayed on generations, they hear comments like “there is no such thing as a gay person all these gays need are women”.

The majority of heterosexual men do not take gay people serious, and generations add to their stereotypes. They see homosexuality as something one can turn on and off whenever it suits them. *Senzo* has impregnated *Noluntu*. His father, *Sibusiso* is happy and says his son has proven that he is a “man”. He told *Senzo* to marry *Noluntu* so that the baby can take his surname. This shows that *Sibusiso* never really accepted his son’s sexuality, because if he did he would not ask *Senzo* to marry *Noluntu*.

The gay participants comprising of 25% of the respondents said that “homosexuals should intervene when they are not portrayed accurately in television because the representation affects them in reality. They can do this by getting involved in the production of programmes. The producers might see it as entertainment but it has an effect in on people’s lives, and these negative portrayals increase the rate of homophobia (Gagnon and Simon, 1973:52).

5.3.1.2 Prada in Isidingo

Eighteen percent (18%) of gay respondents know that *Prada* is gay because he is colourful and feminine (Mason 2002:43). The 7% forgot that *Prada* was gay until the researcher mentioned it to them. The reason why they forgot is that *Prada*’s sexuality is hardly mentioned except for when his friends talk about girls. “His character is so minor in that he can say 20 sentences in seven episodes”. Since *Prada* is feminine, he spends

most of his time with his female friends, and his male friends use him as an “ice breaker” whenever they want to pick up women.

When his male friends have relationship problems with their girlfriends, they ask *Prada* for advice since he is “in touch with his feminine side”. “The character of *Prada* does not teach us anything about being gay; he is just a plus character in *Isidingo*. Nothing is being said about his life and preferences. Although his friends have been in relationships, he has never been in any or talked about being attracted to any guy.

Gay participants agreed that the character of *Prada* needs more exposure. He should be more than just his friends’ side kick. Supplementary representation should be done about his career, and sexuality. He should take turns with friends when they talk about their relationships. He should talk about his partner; his character should not be confined to that of a relationship adviser to his friends. *Prada’s* homosexual friends should be introduced in the programme, because for a gay character to be portrayed accurately he should have homosexual friends’ not just heterosexual friends.

5.3.1.3 Stone in Rhythm City

Twenty five percent (25%) of the gay respondents stated that the character of *Stone* was shown for a short time. *Stone* showed that the stereotype that all gays are feminine is not true. He had the responsibilities that heterosexual’s man has, like being the head of the family while his father was away, and taking care of his siblings.

Six percent (6%) of the respondents recalled the time when there was a loan shark who was terrorizing *Stone’s* community. There was no heterosexual man who could stand up to him; they were scared of him but *stone* stood up to him. This was a positive depiction

of a gay man because it showed that you can be gay and still be masculine. *Stone's* sexuality was not mentioned much in the soapie. He was treated like any other man in his community; motive being that he stood up to a loan shark proving that he is a "real man".

5.3.1.5 Suzie and Charlie in Isidingo

Twenty five percent (25%) of the lesbian respondents declared that when *Charlie* was introduced in the show she was rebellious and had feelings for a heterosexual man. This is when the character of *Suzie*, a professional lesbian tennis coach was introduced. At a later stage *Charlie* got into in a relationship with *Suzie*.

The depiction of *Suzie's* reluctance towards her affection to *Charlie* was polarized by the corrective rape. Most of the respondents said that they do not understand why corrective rape was brought into the show. This portrayal can makes young lesbian viewers to be scared to reveal their sexuality. Corrective rape can make people to view lesbianism as an exclamation to be raped.

Twenty five percent (25%) of the lesbian respondents asserted that after the rape of *Charlie* made her question her sexuality and relationship with *Suzie*. *Charlie* did not want to be lesbian if it meant that she was going to be raped every time she expressed her sexuality, then she ended her relationship. Although the representation that lesbians get raped in reality is true, but they do not change their sexuality because of it. *Charlie* should have been portrayed as a fighter not a victim of circumstance, resulting in her change of her sexual identity. The character of *Charlie* failed to represent lesbianism accurately. *Charlie* was supposed to seek comfort and support in her partner, not leave

her because she is afraid that she might get raped again. Charlie's decision not to be a lesbian anymore after she was raped; sends a negative message to the viewers that rape can change a lesbian woman into a heterosexual.

5.3.2 Heterosexuals respondents

Heterosexual respondents comprised of 50% in this study, 25% being female and 25% being male. The male respondents seem to have a problem with gay characters than lesbian characters. They proclaimed that "we do not see anything wrong with two women kissing or holding hands, but when men kiss is an insult to the nature of men". Although 8% out of the 25% said that they do not have a problem being friends with gay men as long as they do not want anything more than friendship.

Nineteen percent (19%) of the male respondents said that the depiction of gay characters in generations makes it difficult for "us" as viewers to acknowledge that we have gay men in our communities, because their sexuality is not constant. "One minute Senzo is gay, the next minute he has made a female pregnant". This makes us not to take gay men serious and question their sexuality. Gay men are not supposed to be sexually attracted to women but *Senzo* was.

The male respondents stated that they tend to forget that there are gay characters in *Isidingo* and *Rhythm City*, because they have minor characters unlike *Senzo* who has a lead role in generations. *Prada* and *Stone* characters never talk about their sexuality and have never been in meaningful relationships. Their characters do not have an effect on viewers; they viewed like other characters though *Prada* is feminine.

Six percent (6%) said that personally they do not have a problem with gay people. They believe that the manner in which gays are represented in these programmes can change for the better. 19% did not care how gays are portrayed in these programmes because it does not have an effect on their everyday lives.

Twenty five percent (25%) of the female respondents affirmed that they were happy when the character *Suzie* was introduced in *Isidingo*. There were few lesbian characters in South African soapies and had fleeting roles. Below are some of the comments made by the respondents relating to *Isidingo*.

“When *Suzie*’s girlfriend was raped, we lost trust that lesbians can be depicted in a positive manner. We acknowledge that lesbians are raped almost every day but there is more to lesbianism than corrective rape.”

“We thought that *Isidingo* would break this cycle of lesbians being portrayed as victims of corrective rape. To make matters worse after the rape, *Charlie* lost herself. She did not want to stand tall and say that even though she was raped, it does not change her sexuality. Instead she got scared and ended her relationship.”

Twenty percent (20%) of the respondents felt that a group of lesbians who are victims of corrective rape should have been introduced. Their roles would be to give *Charlie* support in overcoming this traumatic experience. Negative representations of lesbians in television lead to most females keeping their sexuality a secret. They are fearful the same could happen to them, especially adolescents who are still figuring out their sexuality. Female respondents stated that they do not have a problem with lesbian characters. They actually do like them and have lesbian friends in their lives.

Fifty seven percent (57%) of homosexual respondents said that they get information about their sexuality in the media. The information does not affect the way they live because of their maturity level. Although they are concerned about the impact these negative portrayals might have on adolescent homosexuals who are still trying to understand their sexualities. Adolescent homosexuals look to the media to get knowledge about homosexuality, thus they should have lesbian and gay characters as role models. Television influences the decisions made by its viewers' especially young vulnerable homosexuals.

Twenty one percent (21%) of gay respondents related to the character of *Senzo* in *generations* because he is masculine and successful. But they felt that by sleeping with *Noluntu* he has played a heterosexual role. Fifteen percent (15%) of heterosexual males liked the character of *Senzo* and *Stone* for the reason that they are not flamboyant and feminine. "Feminine gay characters are trying too hard to be female and they are annoying at times".

Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents felt that gays and lesbians are visible in today's mainstream media especially in television, yet there is much that still needs to be done. Gays and lesbians are represented as a mockery in television and not accurately. In order to have accurate representations of homosexuals, the producers of homosexual content must be gays or lesbians. Homosexual characters must be represented by people who are homosexuals in reality. This would prevent misrepresentations of the minority group.

Fifty percent (50%) of the heterosexual respondents were uncomfortable with intimate scenes of gay men on television than of lesbian females. They had to change channels on numerous occasions if intimate scenes between gay men were broadcasted, while they were watching television with their parents or siblings. But they do not feel uncomfortable if there are intimate scenes between lesbian couples.

Twenty three percent (23%) of gay respondents declared that they get a lot of hostility from male heterosexuals. They are seen as a disgrace to the “male species” mainly gays with feminine characteristics. Unconstructive depictions of gay characters in television contribute to the negative attitudes that people already have about gays. Furthermore, gays have more female friends than male friends. “Female friends have fewer judgments than males. Most males stop being your friend once they find out that you gay,” acknowledged the respondents.

“Lesbians experience discomfort when they are represented as victims of sexual assault. People think that masculine lesbians want to be “men”; they do not understand that we are women who are attracted to other women. *Suzie of Isidingo* was the first lesbian character who was feminine in South African television, we had dramas like *Society* with lesbian characters but they were masculine in physique”.

All participants agreed that television does portray homosexual people but it does not portray the diversity of homosexuals. Furthermore, they discussed how the representations on current mainstream of homosexual individuals still possess stereotypical depictions. Gay characters are portrayed as being more emotionally unstable.

Sixty five percent (65%) of the respondents stated that females are the ones who usually notice the difference between gay male and lesbian female characters. In the entertainment world, it has become 'trendy' to be a gay man. Stereotypes now associate being gay men as attractive, well dressed and successful; things that in general society views as positive things. Stereotypes associate lesbians as being butch women who are footballers, drunkards and abusive partners. Almost every pretty feminine lesbian in television is portrayed as someone who is not entirely sure about her sexuality or as a bisexual and still attracted to men.

Fifty five percent (58%) of homosexual respondents said that the lack of gay and lesbian characters in television in the early years played a role in how uncomfortable they felt about their sexualities. There were no homosexual role models or representations of gays and lesbians. Television has an influence on the attitudes and behaviours of young homosexuals, but experience and age allow them to be more comfortable with their sexuality.

Homosexual respondents proclaimed that they do not feel that current television directly impacts their behaviours and attitudes at this stage of their lives. They also feel that television does not influence their current attitudes and behaviours. Seven percent (7%) of heterosexual male respondents admitted that what they see on television has a negative impact on how they perceive gay men. "Gay and lesbian characters have made some homosexuals to be comfortable in public, seeing that homosexuality is now a little common in mass media. More people now know about the lifestyle of homosexuals," declared a heterosexual female.

Homosexual participants recognized that there are gay and lesbian individuals, who are similar to these stereotypical depictions of homosexuals and they deserve to be represented. However, these overly exaggerated stereotypes seem to have a negative effect on viewers. It becomes impossible for homosexuals to relate to these characters, despite their visibility. Negative portrayals often contribute to society's discrimination of gays and lesbians.

Some of the gay respondents said that "When *Senzo* and *Jason* were introduced as a gay couple in *Generations*; it was always like 'oh my God, there are gays' on this show!". People were threatening to stop watching the show, but they gradually passed that stage. "It was more like this is the gay couple on the show and the characters will slowly fade".

The gay characters have recurring roles, and viewers have acknowledged that. This has demonstrated how far society has come towards acceptance of homosexual community. Gay and lesbian respondents agree that the most effective homosexual character on television would be someone who is not only portrayed positively, and who is not defined by his sexuality. There must be more depictions of who these characters are as a part of society and their purpose in life. The character's sexuality need to be a secondary quality to the character. Many of the participants are not influenced by what they see on television. This is due to their age and life experiences.

5.4 Theoretical framework confirming findings

The stereotype theory suggests that society create and maintain stereotypes for the sake of their own survival and often at the expense of other people (Fourie, 2001:275). Television is one of the biggest narrations of stereotypes, it portrays people in a manner that it thinks is acceptable in society. The findings of the study have shown that stereotypes depend on generalisation, which imply the negation of individuality; in other words stereotype is considered valid for all members of the group concerned. For example, the role of *Senzo* in *Generations* has instilled most of the viewers mind with the belief that a gay man can get attracted to woman, if she is persuasive, making them doubt the sexuality of gay men. Stereotypes may be negative or positive, depending on how the group or person is assessed. The character of Charlie in *Isidingo* may be viewed negative as she was a victim of corrective rape, this scene could be viewed as a perpetuation of the stereotype of corrective rape, making lesbians prone to rape. The character can also be positive in that it encourages lesbians to report corrective rape to the police.

The findings show that television is the main source of information to some viewers, and can have an influence on their perceptions, especially those who only depend on it. Stereotyped portrayals have a negative effect on the behaviours, attitudes and self-identification of some viewers within the society, more than positive depictions. Stereotypes have real and mainly negative consequences for the group or individual as part of the stereotyped group. For example, stereotypes of gays and lesbians being confused about their sexuality and having subordinate roles. The result is a social reality

that creates the impression that stereotypes are accurate. Therefore it is significant for television programmes to portray homosexuals positively and accurately.

Queer theory states that gays and lesbians are mostly judged by their sexuality and not personalities (Fourie, 2008:346). Viewers who do not have information about homosexuals rely on the media (television) to give it to them. These viewers take the portrayals as true because they do not know how gays and lesbians are like in reality. However, viewers who associate with homosexuals are able to critic what they see on television. Society constructs characteristics and assumptions relating to biological sexes, with particular qualities laid out to define what is acceptably masculine and feminine. For instance, most people have difficulties accepting gays with feminine traits and lesbians with masculine features, hence they are always victims of homophobic attacks because of their physical attributes. Television shows sexuality as a cultural construction, some viewers react to images upon such construction, acting negatively when they encounter something which contradicts such formations.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This study had several limitations, because of its nature most of the respondents were from urban areas. It represented a community with generally better access to television. Those with poor television coverage and not open about their sexuality were not included in this study for reasons of accessibility. As the observation process was done, there were limitations in the conclusion that can be made. For instance, the episodes observed in the selected television programmes were limited to the issues that occurred during the period of this study; which may vary at different times of the year. The

research project intends to provide an overview and identify opportunities for change rather than focus too much on poor coverage. Additional research should be done to gain more in-depth insight into the relationship between media and homosexual community.

Three television programmes were selected because they have coverage of gays and lesbians. The selection of these programmes was grounded on the fact that their plots contain elements that the study was aimed to address. The study's limitation lay in its aim to investigate the portrayal of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes and not the media as a whole. This study could have had extensive effect, if it included other kinds of media such as newspaper and radio.

5.6 Conclusions

Hampton (2009:34) lesbian character portrayals seem to be more complex, as viewers note they are usually depicted as masculine in a negative manner. If they are feminine and attractive, they are often viewed as having a fluid sexuality. This is different to gay male characters, females feel gay characters are thought to be 'trendy' and remain within the homosexual boundaries.

Waugh (2000:23) states that the increased visibility and exposure of gays and lesbians in society has lessened fear and allowed some homosexual individuals to be comfortable with their sexuality. Gays and lesbians feel that the exposure is often seen as a contributing factor to homosexual social progress. It places the homosexual community at the forefront of society and influencing mainstream's acceptance.

Based upon this study, it was discovered that regardless of the gradual increase of gays and lesbians visibility in mainstream television in the past decade, representations are not yet accurate. Gross (2001:6) stereotypical characterisation still exists in mainstream television programmes. These portrayals have a complex impact on homosexual audiences, depending on the storyline. Negative depictions seem to have a lot of impact on the audiences' attitudes and behaviours than positive portrayals. However some perceptions and amounts of influence do differ. Television depictions are also not influential to young adults in the early mid- 20s, as opposed to teenagers who are still forming their sexuality identities.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY

6.1 Introduction

This chapter captures the findings, recommendations and conclusions related to this study. Television has a paramount influence on how society responds to minority groups. As a result it contributes to the stereotypical beliefs that the society has of homosexuals. The representation of gays and lesbians on television leads to the stigma and prejudice surrounding homosexuality. This happens because gays and lesbians are mostly portrayed as victims of homophobic attacks and treated as outcasts. Heterosexuality has always been portrayed as the only sexual orientation. This becomes problematic as it leads viewers to hide their sexuality because they do not want to be alienated by their families and friends.

6.2 Findings

6.2.1 When *Generations* first introduced a gay character, viewers made their opinions known and a controversial kiss between two gay male characters caused an outcry among traditionalists and community leaders. Admirably, at that time the show did not back down. Gays and lesbians are a part of the wonderful diversity of South African society and they are also viewers of shows like *Generations*. However, *Morgan and Wieringa (2005:12)* emphasize that soap operas also reinforce stereotypes of gay people just as they reinforce negative gender stereotypes about heterosexual women and men. Homosexual men are often portrayed as effeminate, soft, gentle, and not

masculine: Submissive in relation to other men. Recently one of the lead characters in *Generations* referred to a gay male character as "my girl." This reinforces a very negative stereotype about gay men, it is far from a progressive soapie's attempt to raise awareness.

6.2.2 Yang (1997:89) highlights that when homosexuals are portrayed on network television, they are usually presented in a negative stereotypical way. They are rarely presented in a sympathetic manner and even when this does occur plots tend to focus on heterosexual characters' acceptance of homosexuality. This was broadcast in the South African soap opera *Generations*, when the character *Sibusiso* was battling to accept that his only son *Senzo* is a gay man. It resulted in *Sibusiso* being an alcoholic because he just could not come to terms with the fact that there is a gay man in his family.

These television portrayals of gays and lesbians are often thought to have positive and negative outcomes, with the potential of homosexual characters to be role models. Television as a source of information has a great influence on the viewers' perception, particularly those who depend solely on television for information. Stereotyped portrayals have a negative effect on homosexual viewers' attitudes, behaviours and self-identification within the society, more so than positive depictions.

6.2.3 Heterosexual participants who know people who are gay and lesbian said that television has not changed what they think or relate to homosexuals. However, there were some jokes that they now know more about their sex lives having seen lesbians and gay sex depicted on television.

6.2.4 Gay and lesbian audiences perceive the current fictional television landscape and depictions as a misrepresentation of their represented demographic. Even though gay and lesbian visibility on fictional television shows has increased in the past years, the representations are still not accurate and traditional stereotypes are still prevalent.

6.2.5 Gay and lesbian adolescents find television to be a primary source of receiving information about sexuality and being exposed to a homosexual lifestyle. Viewers rely on television for information on homosexuality, if it does not directly exist in their environment, especially for adolescents who are not surrounded by other homosexuals.

6.2.6 Television programmes are important starting place for gays and lesbians to discover various characteristics and lifestyles of homosexual individuals. Yet if these portrayals are depicted with a stereotypical emphasis, it can influence gay and lesbian audiences' self- perceptions and attitudes towards homosexual community.

6.2.7 Heterosexual audiences do not seem to have a problem with gay and lesbian characters, as long as they are not portrayed in an asexual manner. Whereas others wonder what television is aiming to achieve by representing homosexuals on television. They reckon television is influencing their children negatively with the presence of gays and lesbians in television programmes.

6.2.8 Societies construct a number of characteristics and assumptions relating to the biological sexes, with certain qualities laid out to define what is acceptably masculine and feminine. Sexuality is a cultural construction, and therefore viewers react to images upon such constructions. Viewers act negatively, perhaps without realizing when they encounter something which contradicts such formations.

6.2.9 People remember their personal reactions to a message rather than the message itself. A receiver relies heavily on his/her evaluative mental responses to message content, rather than on the content itself to arrive at an attitudinal position after exposure.

6.2.10 There is a limited coverage of gays and lesbians in the selected television programmes. One cannot find gay and lesbian characters in one show all at once, the show either has gay or lesbian characters.

6.2.11 Coverage is often mainly about scandals and negative stereotyping around sex, creating an impression that gays and lesbians are outside of normal society. Television tends to sensationalize homosexuality, few coverage are celebratory in nature. Many harmful stereotypes exist and individuals are seen as deviant and immoral rather than normal people that happen to have a different sexual preference.

6.2.12 Respondents felt that training is needed for LGBT organisations, including how to create a media strategy, write press releases and manage media relationships.

6.2.13 Future research is needed to determine what influence homosexual characters in entertainment television have on attitudes toward homosexuality.

6.2.14 Attitude change research is needed to investigate what can be done to decrease negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Current studies contribute to this line of research by demonstrating how media can be used in a pro-social manner to change attitudes towards homosexuality, although future research is still needed.

6.2.15 One person might view a stereotypical effeminate portrayal of a gay man as negative due to it perpetuating a stereotype, whereas another person might view the portrayal as positive due to the character's likeable and humorous personality.

6.2.16 Men express a more negative attitude toward homosexuals (especially gay men) than women do. This is because in society heterosexuality is strongly linked with masculinity that by rejecting homosexual men who are breaking gender norms; heterosexual men are affirming their masculinity.

6.2.17 Some heterosexual people do not believe it is desirable to exclude or censor representations of lesbian and gay sexuality. They argue that achieving empathy between homosexual and heterosexual communities is the most effective way to challenge prejudice.

6.2.18 Viewers think that there should be more documentary programmes about lesbian and gay contemporary social issues. The documentaries should not focus only on the negative aspects of homosexual lives.

6.2.19 Gay activists have been adept at turning tragedies into opportunities to promote the gay agenda. The gay agenda includes a desire for acceptance of homosexuals and even approval of the homosexual lifestyle along with a set of rights and legal structures that support homosexuality.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Tackle homophobia by addressing prejudicial attitudes and discrimination in all areas of society.

6.3.2 Attitudes toward a range of homosexual rights and practices should be investigated, for example, attitudes toward the legal rights of homosexuals to adopt children.

6.3.3 Producers of programmes with lesbian and gay characters should conduct research on homosexual issues. More exposure to positive portrayals of minority group members that produce Para- social interaction are needed to be associated with a decrease in prejudicial attitudes.

6.3.4 The development of formal policies is an important step for communicating and practicing inclusiveness. Government policies should make it clear that harassment and bias directed at lesbians and gays are no more tolerable than racist behaviour and will be subject to the same procedure and penalties.

6.3.5 There should be a real and accurate portrayal of gay and lesbian lives and not only what media producers think homosexuality is about, because being homosexual is not all about same sex, having sex with one another but it is about emotions, love and faith.

6.3.6 There should be people in media houses who belong to the gay and lesbian community that have knowledge and skills and would benefit from an environment that provided them with more opportunities to cover homosexual issues. Focus on training,

sharing information and creating opportunities for homosexuals to access the media and tell their own stories.

6.3.7 Gay and lesbian sector, organisations and individuals can take a more pro-active approach to media. This will mean engaging the media about bad coverage on homosexuality. It would bring together representatives from different sectors for mutual learning, thereby helping to develop relationships at the same time. This could include collaborative projects that would bring media and LGBT sectors together.

6.3.8 Training is needed for media practitioners to make them aware of their unconscious homophobia and to be sensitive on sexuality issues. Mainstream media can be more viable and join forces with LGBT organisations to gain a better insight on homosexual issues.

6.3.9 More homosexual characters on South African television and dramas about gays and lesbians are needed.

6.3.10 Further research is necessary to identify the limiting conditions for televised portrayals to influence various attitudes concerning minority groups. The research should explore the relationships among different types and intensity of contact between heterosexuals and homosexuals when assessing the relative influence of direct and Para-social interaction.

6.3.11 Research studies investigating the influence of the media on attitudes toward homosexuals is important because gays and lesbians are the target of extensive prejudice manifested in a wide range of behaviours, from verbal attacks to physical attacks.

6.3.12 Future research is needed to examine participants' familiarity with homosexual characters. It could be that the more exposure the participant has with homosexual character the more likely the character is to influence the participant's subsequent attitudes toward homosexuals. Exposing participants directly to television clips of portrayals of homosexual characters should be considered.

6.3.13 Researchers should consider investigating participants' reactions to negative portrayals of homosexuals in television, to non- stereotypical portrayals of homosexuals, to the actors and actresses depicting homosexual characters, and to homosexual media portrayals over time.

6.3.14 In order to understand the portrayal of gays and lesbians in television, we need to look at the past representations of homosexuality in the selected television programmes. This will help in understanding how the portrayal of gays and lesbians has evolved throughout the years. In South African television, there were no representations of homosexual characters. This practice emerged during the past years. Although they are portrayed negatively, they are at least now recognized as part of the society. Being homosexual is still a taboo to majority of television viewers in the society; hence they are not represented at a larger scale than heterosexuals.

6.3.15 The portrayal of gays and lesbians in television has been determined by different factors, such as the educational level of the viewers, customs and traditions. An individual who has information or has learnt about homosexuality is different from the one who believes that homosexuality is some sort of a curse. Traditionally people were taught that a man supposed to be with a woman in order to have a functional family and

that same sex relationships do not work. Not that the homosexual were not there in the past, but simply because they did not have a platform to state their views and support structures such as the LGBT organizations.

6.3.16 For gays and lesbians to be accepted by society, television broadcasters need to be educated about homosexuality and the right way of portraying them in television. Television is a medium that provides viewers with entertainment and information but it should also serve as a medium for development. More people are coming forward and expressing their views on the unfounded fears of homosexuality. It may enlighten people not to be so homophobic but to treat everyone as an equal, no matter what their sexual orientation may be. There are several magazines that offer insights and articles for those who wish to understand and become aware of gays and lesbians and the problems they face.

6.3.17 Homosexual behaviour can be promoted through seminars and diversity training. In many of these programmes homosexuality is presented in a positive light. While biblical convictions about homosexuality are ridiculed and stigmatised, these convictions are slightly relegated to personal opinion.

6.3.18 Try to convince media organisations to adopt a sexual orientation policy. These policies are adopted to deal with alleged sexual discrimination. When such a policy is in place, it provides an important foothold for gay activists to enact more of their agenda.

6.3.19 The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation is a media watchdog. GLAAD is dedicated to promoting and ensuring fair, accurate and inclusive representation of people in the media. As a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based

on gender identity and sexual orientation. The organisation has been described as one of the most powerful entities and has a successful influence on the media, it should start being proactive in regulating media content.

6.3.20 The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) is another national organisation that works primarily at the community level. The mission of NGLTF is to build the political power of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community from the ground up. They accomplish this by training and organizing activists to advance the gay agenda. They also have a Policy Institute, which has become the homosexual movement's key think tank and provides research and policy analysis for the gay agenda. Similar organisations are found in South Africa but are not proactive unless there has been a hate crime against homosexuals. These organisations should start taking initiatives and playing their roles.

6.3.21 Public opinion is one primary source of mainstream values and religious authority is another. When conservative churches condemn gays and lesbians, there are things that can be done to confound the homophobias of true believers. We can use talk to muddy the moral waters. This means publicising support for gays by more moderate churches. The theological objections about conservative interpretations of biblical teachings, exposition of hatred and inconsistency are rising. Many liberal churches and denominations in USA have been more than willing to publicly support gay rights and homosexuality. This is however still a struggle in South Africa and Africa as a whole.

6.4 Conclusions

Despite the growing coverage of gay and lesbian characters on television in the past years, the diversity and representations of homosexual depictions do not seem to be as accurate as they should be; nevertheless they are getting better. Gay and lesbian characters are rarely seen as lead characters, but they are recently portrayed as equal members of the cast. The stereotypical flamboyancy portrayed by a majority of gay characters still exists. This reveals how even though visibility of gay and lesbian characters and issues on mainstream television has drastically increased since the late 1990s during the reign of *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*, those similar depictions are still prevalent throughout mainstream television shows.

When you really start to study it, the progress has not been that great. Time and time again, lesbians and gays are portrayed by the standards set forth by the heterosexual society. They are unfairly treated as compared to heterosexual characters and couples. Even in the 1990's there is still much conservatism when it comes to homosexual portrayal and any break of tradition can be punishable. While there may be progress in the numbers, there is yet to be real progress made in the quality of representations of gays and lesbians. Herek (1998:81) the presence of gay and lesbian characters on television programmes decreases prejudice among viewers. The positive portrayal of gays and lesbians in television programmes has an effect on the attitudes of some viewers. The attitude changes are not much, they do not change homophobes overnight but the increase of homosexual representations can increase more positive attitudes of viewers.

A general assumption is that television not only shapes public opinion and popular culture but also mirror real life. Entertainment television has been known to influence attitudes, behaviours and trends. Audiences often look to entertainment television to introduce different people and situations, recognise common perspectives and understand certain experiences. Television has been known to fail in accurately representing and depicting certain minority groups and in this case, gays and lesbians.

As lesbians and gay men become progressively more visible in the South African media and society, the heterosexual public's attitudes towards homosexuals will continue to evolve. It is through comprehensive research in this area that we can move further away from homophobia and towards accepting people regardless of their sexual orientation.

It is apparent from the research that work needs to be done in building the quantity and quality of homosexuals' presence in the South African television. It is clear that there is a lack of knowledge and skills in covering gays and lesbians issues effectively. This provides a very interesting opening for the LGBT sector, as it shows that there is a possibility of developing strategies to help media houses in their work and for the two groups to interact in a mutually beneficial way. It has become necessary not only to focus on what media are doing wrong, but come with strategies in helping them with accurate representations of gays and lesbians.

Lack of research hampers the recognition of accurate representations and the understanding of the impact of current character portrayals. In order to develop positive attitudes, further advocacy for equal rights and the elimination of the social and legal marginalisation of gay and lesbian community is needed. The media should recognise

and understand whether their current homosexual character portrayals mirror as a reflection of social realities. In addition, knowledge regarding if and how audiences are affected by these television images could influence the visibility of positive role models and play a most important role in sexuality education. It is hoped that this research will contribute to on-going programmes and will also be part in continuing work to build good media portrayal on homosexual issues. This information would generate and improve accurate character depictions and further impact young homosexual individual's self-perceptions and acceptance.

Producers of television programmes that depict gays and lesbians are not adequately informed about homosexuality. It is almost impossible to expect people to produce a programme about a certain topic (in this case gays and lesbians) without having conducted thorough research. Complications and full understanding of homosexuality play a role here as referred above. Hence, homosexual producers are needed in the production of programmes where there are gay and lesbian casts. This could increase positive representation of gays and lesbians on television, resulting in a constructive treatment of homosexuals in reality. Television soaps such as *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Rhythm city* were examined and analysed on how the characters portray gays and lesbians.

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TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 09 May 2013

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/FHM/25/2013: PG

PROJECT:

Title: The portrayal of gays and lesbians in selected television programmes.

Researcher: Ms SE Mabokela

Supervisor: Dr MA Kupa

Co-Supervisor: N/A

Department: Media Studies

School: School of Languages and Communication Studies

Degree: MA in Media Studies


PROF. TAB MASHEGO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**.

Note:

- i) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
 - ii) The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.
- PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.**