

**A Cultural Studies Project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen***

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Journalism in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the Durban University of Technology**

**Andile Samuel Dube**

**(20913150)**

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**Ms. Tarryn Frankish (M.SocSc: Psychology, Summa Cum Laude)**

**(Supervisor)**

**Professor Jean Philippe Wade (PhD)**

**(Co-Supervisor)**

## DECLARATION

I declare that 'A Cultural Studies project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen* is my own work. Sources used and quoted have been rightfully indicated and acknowledged. This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Journalism, in the Faculty of Arts and Design, at the Durban University of Technology and has not been submitted anywhere else for examination.

14/ 09/ 2022

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Andile Dube

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Date:

Student Number: 20913150

## Approval for Final Submission

14/ 09/ 2022

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Ms. T Frankish  
(Supervisor)

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Date:

14.9.2022

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Professor Jean Philippe Wade  
(Co-Supervisor)

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Date:

## ABSTRACT

Even though the South African Constitution protects the rights of LGBTQ+ people and bans discrimination based on sexual orientation, gay people in this country are still victims of the most horrific homophobic abuse and vile discrimination.

By virtue of its vast reach, the media, television in particular, is an important tool to educate and inform people of the rights of gay people and teach about sexuality. Content creators are responsible for producing the programmes people are exposed to on television, therefore, they are tasked with creating representations of gay people.

This study explores the perceptions of media undergraduate students on the representations of black gay people in television, specifically, SABC1's *Uzalo* and Mzansi Magic's *The Queen*. These two telenovelas have been chosen, because they have black gay characters and are among the most-watched shows on prime-time television. *Uzalo* has an average of approximately 10 million viewers and *The Queen* has roughly eight million viewers per episode.

The research followed a Cultural Studies approach to explore the role of telenovelas and the active audience paradigm to examine the dynamics of power in the representations of LGBTQ+ on television in South Africa. The study also draws on feminism to highlight the discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community in the African continent. Representation Theory is used as a lead theory in this study, while Social Cognitive Theory is used as a second theory. Two focus groups were held with undergraduate media students from the Journalism Programme and Video Technology Department from the Faculty of Arts and Design in a South African university. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from these two focus groups.

The study found the visibility of gay people on television has increased over the years. In addition, there are instances where the representation is positive and educational, however, the majority remains negative and relies on stereotypes. These findings indicate the media is a powerful tool that can be used to educate the wider public with regard to marginalised people. Going forward, educational implications of LGBTQ+ persons' representations need to be considered when represented. Therefore, the study posits that representations on popular culture are important as these telenovelas are part of creating

the reality that is lived by the minorities they represent. As such, television does not only represent the world, but it helps in its creation and the audience who watch these telenovelas are co-creators.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, television, telenovelas, representations, social cognitive, Uzalo, The Queen

## **DEDICATION**

I would not be where I am today, were it not for my late grandmother, Domo Melta Dube. She was not educated and none of her children had the opportunity to go to university but my grandmother understood the importance of education. Back in 2009, when I first embarked on my higher education journey, my grandmother was very supportive emotionally and financially. I am proud of the fact that I became the first person in my family to graduate from university and that my grandmother witnessed this when I graduated for my diploma in 2012. I wish she were still alive today, so she can witness me furthering my education. I love her and think about her every day.

I also dedicate this paper to my fellow LGBTQ+ community members, many of whom face daily persecution for living their truth, and to those people who lost their lives at the hands of homophobes. I pray and hope their death is not in vain.

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## DEFINITION OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full Words
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
COVID-19	Coronavirus variant
DStv	Digital Satellite Television; a commercial television station in South Africa (and other African countries?)
DUT	Durban University of Technology
CS	Cultural Studies
FR	Feminist Research
GLAAD	Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
LGBTQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. Asexual
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SA	South Africa
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
USA	United States of America

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the perceptions of university undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay characters portrayed on two of the leading South African telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. Since this thesis is looking at representations of LGBTQ+ people in South Africa's popular culture, particularly television, it uses a cultural studies framework to examine the dynamics of power in the representations of LGBTQ+ on television in this country. By using a cultural studies approach, this thesis notes the serious influence of popular culture on the population with regards to sex, gender, and sexual orientation. As with women, gay people are often regarded as one of the most vulnerable groups in the world, therefore, this study draws on feminism to highlight the discrimination of gay people in South Africa and the African continent. This type of research deals with issues of gender, authority and opportunities in pursuit of social change. By drawing on feminism, researchers seek to empower women and other vulnerable clusters and change prevailing patriarchal structures. However, since this study lies in the field of journalism, Media Representation Theory is the lead theory and Social Cognitive Theory is a secondary theory used to guide this study.

Upon graduating, media students work in the media industry, which includes television, in various capacities as content creators of the shows we watch on television. Therefore, this study is particularly interested in the way media students view the representations of black gay men in television.

While there has been a substantial amount of research conducted on the impact of gay visibility in the media, there seems to be very little research that examines portrayals of black homosexuals in the media. There is very little literature that speaks to the representations of black gays and the impact of these representations. Data that are available mostly explore shows that feature white characters, which may be attributed to the minimal representation of black gayness in television; this is not only in SA, but around the world as well. Therefore, it is worth noting this lack of representation of black homosexuals in SA is rooted in the history of the African continent, based on the perception that homosexuality is 'unAfrican'. This notion that homosexuality is a western 'thing', is believed by many countries in Africa. Even though SA protects the rights of sexual minorities, there are still those that harbour

homophobic attitudes towards gay people. This project discusses SA's stance on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) community. While the constitution has been hailed for being progressive, gay people in this country are still victimised in horrible ways that include verbal and physical assault and even murder. By exploring the perceptions of university undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay characters portrayed on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, the study hopes to gain an understanding of how viewers regard these representations and their cognitive impact.

### **1.1 Context of the Study**

The Post-Apartheid era in SA has seen an increase in the visibility of black gay men on television. Popular, locally produced television programmes, such as *Generations*, *Isidingo*, *The Need*, *The River*, and *Uzalo*, as well as *The Queen*, to mention a few, have not shied away from featuring homosexuality in their storylines. However, the portrayal of black gay men in these shows has been met with a mixed reaction from viewers. Some praised the television industry for the increased inclusion of gay characters and storylines, others have criticized the portrayal of gay men as a mere ploy for ratings and not respectfully representing the diversity of gay people, thus, perpetuating existing stereotypes.

The study used a qualitative method to explore student perceptions of the representation of black gay men in two of South Africa's (SA) leading prime-time telenovelas, SABC1's *Uzalo* and Mzansi Magic's *The Queen*. According to the Broadcast Research Council of SA (2020), *Uzalo* is the most watched show in the country, with close to 10 million viewers per episode and *The Queen* is one of Mzansi Magic's most watched programmes, with approximately two million viewers per episode.

The framework for this study is the Cultural Studies approach which according to Buckingham (2012: 93) originated during the study of English literature and its meeting with the emergent discipline of sociology. The work done by Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart around the 1950s represented a serious challenge to the elitism of traditional literacy criticism; in varying ways both argued for a broadening of the concept of culture, and the importance to study, not just the received canon of literacy texts, but a largely broader range of cultural practices (Buckingham 2012: 93).

What defines Cultural Studies is its concern with the relationships that exist between particular cultural practices and broader processes of social power. Cultural Studies examines how meanings and pleasures are created and distributed within society such as the

manner in which individuals and social groups use and interpret cultural texts; and the role of cultural practices in the construction of people's social identities (Buckingham 2012: 94). As Buckingham (2012: 94) puts it, Cultural Studies is defined by its concern with the relationships between precise cultural practices and broader processes of social power. It looks at how cultural meanings and pleasures are produced and circulated within society; how individuals and social groups use and interpret cultural texts; and the role of cultural practices in the construction of people's social identities.

"In this sense, Cultural Studies is primarily concerned with the political dimensions of cultural practice; and it has paid particular attention to the ways in which power relationships – for example, based around social class, gender and 'race' – are reproduced, resisted and negotiated through acts of cultural production and reception" (Buckingham 2012: 94).

Even though this study does not engage feminist theory, it draws on feminism because of the link between feminism and LGBTQ+ rights, because both are linked to sex and gender and fighting the injustices suffered by women and homosexual people.

According to Robbins (1996, cited in Brayton, Ollivier and Robbins 2010: 1), the classic answer to what makes a research feminist, is that it is conducted by, for and about women. However, Brayton *et al.* (2010: 1) assert there is no single definition for FR but certain key elements help differentiate it from traditional social sciences research, research that studies women, or that studies gender without seeking change.

Similarly, Fanow and Cook (2005, cited in Krause *et al.* 2017: 212) state that the principles of FR methodology are rooted in acknowledging the significance of gender, authority, and prospects for social change; in adhering to these, researchers can empower women and other oppressed groups and change present patriarchal structures.

This means it is important to understand that FR does not only highlight injustices towards women alone, it can also be used to bring attention to issues of poverty, inequality, race, and LGBTQ+ issues, among others. FR has been chosen as the approach for this study, because it involves action towards social change and gender justice.

Ehrt (2019) explains the feminist movement, for more than a century, has been opposed to the belief of sex and gender defining societal roles, in addition to the accompanying gender-based discrimination and violence characterised by this notion, Furthermore, Ehrt (2019) emphasises that the same root cause lies at societies' ill-treatment of women and LGBTQ

people, thus, a middle-ground for the feminist and LGBTI movements, making cooperation uniquely possible. According to Ehrt (2019), protests by masses of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) groups against homo-, bi-, trans and inter-phobia, have voiced their plight in fighting against discrimination and violence; for the right to live a dignified and respectful life. Ehrt (2019) argues it is on the terrain of gender where the feminist and queer movements come together, highlighting the shocking non-existent knowledge on LGBTI issues is hard to eradicate - and most of the time, communities perpetuate these ideas. In addition, the author asserts society holds a view that the sex one is born with defines their gender, and that both this sex and associated gendering inform one's gender role as social beings, as well as one's sexual orientation. Those who deviate from this fixed pattern can, as Ehrt (2019) explains, experience severe consequences such as viciousness, prejudice and ill-treatment of women and queer people. Matakala (2021: 1) states that 2021 marked 59 years since the establishment of the Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO) in July 1962, as a branch under the Organisation of African Unity, now called the African Union (AU), dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment. In SA, 9 August is dedicated to commemorating the 1956 march by women to the Union Buildings to protest the then state's apartheid pass laws (Matakala 2021: 1).

However, two generations later, Matakala (2021:1) emphasises the current situation in the country is such that, generations later, women and girls' human rights and wellbeing are still violated, revealed by the Coronavirus pandemic, which has exposed pre-existing structural gender inequality and discrimination. Matakala (2021:1) cites research by Amnesty International, which found policies implemented by the South African government to fight the spread of Covid-19, did not consider issues that overwhelmingly affect women and girls. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, gender-based violence was already entrenched in SA, nevertheless, during the height of the pandemic there was a surge in the number of cases of women and girls being abused. According to Matakala (2021: 1), this was attributed to the development and implementation of restrictive measures to lessen the spread of Covid-19.

As hospital beds in wards reached full capacity and ran out of much-needed oxygen, shelters for women were similarly experiencing the effects of gender-based violence. Matakala (2021: 1) mentions SA's Grace Help Centre in Rustenburg as one of the shelters unable to accommodate more victims, as it had reached capacity to house 30 people in the initial stages of the pandemic.

An article by the Mail & Guardian (2021) points out that an average of 137 women are murdered by someone close to them like a family member daily, according to the United Nations (UN) under-secretary and Women executive director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. The article states that besides physical violence, domestic abuse can take place in many forms such as sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological or acts of intimidation or threats. In addition, the Mail & Guardian (2021) argues that during the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown measures and their socio-economic effects increased gender-based violence against women and limited their access to assistance.

As reported by the Mail & Guardian (2021), data by the UN show one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence. In SA, Mail & Guardian (2021) states a staggering total of 2 695 women were reported to be murdered in 2019-20; this means a woman is killed every three hours. The country has the fourth-highest female interpersonal-violence death rate out of the 183 countries on the World Health Organisation's 2016 list (Mail & Guardian 2021). Another concerning statistic mentioned by Mail & Guardian (2021) is that 51 percent of women in South Africa claim they have been victims of gender-based violence and 76 percent of men said they have perpetuated gender-based violence at some point in their lives. In 2019 and 2020, a staggering 53 293 sexual crimes were reported in the country, which translates to an average of 146 a day (Mail & Guardian 2021). Another worrying fact highlighted by the Mail & Guardian (2021) is that SA is reported as having one of the uppermost rates of rape in the world, 132.4 occurrences per 100 000 people.

These figures indicate that while the South African Constitution protects the rights of women and girls, as with LGBTQ+ people, they are still abused and marginalised. The statistics presented above mainly speak to gender-based violence mostly committed by family members or intimate partners, however, they indicate the level of violence, discrimination and oppression faced by women in SA. Gay people are also murdered and ostracised daily in the country, with an increase over the years in the number of gay people murdered in suspected hate crime killings. These will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

According to Kushnarenko (2019), feminism and LGBT issues are combined because the root of homophobia and transphobia is the inequality that is persistent among men and women.

“In our society, men and women are still depicted as Venus and Mars, black and white, two polar opposites that may complement one another but are not equal.

Even though we see women getting more opportunities in various sectors now, can they truly use them as easily as men do? How hard do women have to work just to reach the starting point that men already have?” (Kushnarenko 2019)

Gender norms and stereotypes in the media are exacerbated with regards to representations of sexuality, when included at all. It is thus salient to examine the ways LGBTIQ+ representations are understood and approached by those who produce these portrayals. This project investigates the kind of representations of black gay men depicted in *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, two of SA’s most watched telenovelas. By understanding the perceptions held by university undergraduate media students on these representations, the study may be helpful in identifying areas of improvement in creating LGBTQ+ content on television.

This study uses a Cultural Study approach because in a country like South Africa which is steeped in culture and patriarchy, gay people are seen as threatening the status quo that in you are gay you are not man enough. Therefore, gay people are sometimes oppressed based on this cultural belief that a gay man is a disgrace to the fixed ideology of culture that a man is supposed to be romantically involved with woman only. Cultural studies is concerned with the study of power dynamics in cultural contexts and the manner in which these dynamics affect social class, gender, sexual orientation etc. In is in this sense that this study uses a cultural studies approach and draws on feminism which deals with the oppression of minorities. Culture and feminism both deal oppression of groups for certain reasons like power, patriarchy etc. Understanding representations of gay people and the role culture plays in the creation and interpretation of these representations is important. Based on these contestations is the reason for using a CS approach and drawing on FR.

Since this study lies within the field of journalism and draws broadly on media studies, Media Representation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory were employed as guiding theories.

## **1.2 The Research Focus**

### **1.2.1 Problem Statement**

As mentioned in section 1.1, under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996: 8), sexual orientation-based discrimination is not allowed. However, many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) people in SA are still subjected to various forms of homophobia and discrimination that sometimes lead to violence. Media reports of

LGBTQ+ killings suggest while the Constitution protects the rights of gay people, many are still victims of vicious homophobic attacks. Igual (2020: 1) reports at least three LGBTQ+ people were killed since December 2019.

Television is a powerful tool in reaching many people and shaping their thinking and ‘ways of seeing’ on certain issues. Therefore, this research uses *Uzalo* and *The Queen* as case studies to examine the types of representations seen in television regarding black gay males in SA. Undergraduate media university student perceptions of these representations will be explored. Media students have been chosen, because they become creators of these representations after graduating. Thus, this study aims to highlight the role television and content creators can play in fighting homophobia in SA. By engaging university undergraduate media students to be mindful when they represent minorities on television, this research may be helpful in mapping out new ways future LGBTQ+ representations can be managed and created.

### **1.2.2 Aim**

The aim of this study was to explore the importance of representations of black gay men on television and asks whether these representations play a role in shaping viewer attitudes towards homosexual men.

### **1.2.3 Objectives**

1. To unpack the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representation of black gay men in South African prime-time telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*.
2. To determine what stereotypes undergraduate media students have on the representations of black gay men on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*.
3. To establish undergraduate media student perceptions on the creative process and the dynamics of representing black gay men.
4. To investigate how undergraduate media students think new representations of black gay men can be created and managed in telenovelas.

To achieve these objectives, four questions were asked:

### **1.2.4 Main question**

What are the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*?

### 1.2.5 Sub questions

- What stereotypes are evident amongst the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*?
- How do undergraduate media students experience the creative process and the dynamics of representing black gay men?
- How can new representations be created or managed in the media industry?

### 1.2.6 Outcomes

It is anticipated the outcome of this study may contribute to undergraduate media student understanding of the importance of realistic representation of gay people on television.

## 1.3 The genre of soap operas and telenovelas in South Africa

Miller (2000: 1) writes that the field of television studies includes production and audience ethnography, policy advocacy, political economy, cultural history, and textual analysis. This field of research borrows from and contributes to media studies, mass communication, critical race theory, communication studies, media sociology, critical legal studies, queer theory, science and technology studies, cultural studies, feminist theory and Marxism. Miller (2000: 1) maintains that inside television studies itself, there are clear differences of method. But television studies' abiding preoccupation is to question power and subjectivity in terms of access to the means of communication and representation

“This questioning recurs across sites, albeit with due regard to the specificity of different media and their social uptake—the occasionality of culture. Those emergent forms we currently call ‘new media’ evidence many of the same discourses: concerns with soap-opera audiences, or broadcast ownership and control, have been transferred to e-mail discussions and domain names” (Miller 2000: 1). According to Mkhwanazi (2015: 1), the word telenovela means television novel and the format gained popularity in Latin American countries. Telenovela Studies (n.d) points out that telenovelas began in the 1950s in Latin America. They are daily serials that air five or sometimes six times a week during primetime television and during the day. “They have a limited run which varies but, on average, they have 120 episodes known in Spanish as capítulos, which means chapters” (Telenovela Studies n.d).

There can be much confusion between telenovelas and soap operas (soapies/soaps), as both are similar in so many ways; however, Mkhwanazi (2015: 1) notes some differences between

the two are that a telenovela is shorter, and normally runs for about a year before ending. Mkhwanazi (2015: 1) additionally points out that telenovelas have recurring themes that resonate with viewers. These themes include success stories of people overcoming poverty, hardships and in some cases, they spark civic activism. Telenovelas usually conclude with a happy ending, such as a wedding, explained by Mkhwanazi (2015: 1) as done so that viewers can get closure. Similarly, Burton (2013: 220) writes that in South Africa, soap operas have adopted the dominant characteristics of American soap operas and infused them with issues of social justice in their narrative constructs.

“While the narrative elements of the genre are very similar, specifically the centrality of families and the struggle over power and influence, South African soap operas, affectionately known as soapies, are decidedly different in how they incorporate issues of social justice into their narratives and the speed at which this occurs. Social issues that have been incorporated into the narratives include HIV/AIDS, sexual behavior, birth control, discrimination, inequality, homosexuality, social rejection, and exclusion. These issues are deconstructed through narratives that address struggles over language, power, and meaning’ (Burton 2013: 220).

South Africans are spoilt for choice when it comes to locally produced telenovelas that air on e.tv, Mzansi Magic and South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) channels during primetime television, which runs from 19:30 to 21:00. In the last years, South African television channels have introduced locally produced telenovelas such as *The Queen*, *Uzalo*, *The River*, and *Umlilo*, along with *Isibaya*, *Gold Diggers* and many others. These telenovelas have attracted millions of viewers due to their intriguing and gripping storylines that keep the audience glued to their television screens every evening. Some of these storylines deal with plots of lies and deceit, love and betrayal, rags to riches, and family feuds, as well as business rivals, and so on. The majority of these telenovelas have not shied away from featuring homosexuality in their storylines; these include *Uzalo*, which airs on public broadcaster SABC 1. and *The Queen*, which airs on cable channel Mzansi Magic. These two telenovelas are discussed further below, as are the homosexual characters they have featured over the years. Judging by the numbers these telenovelas attract, it is important to scrutinise the role they have on the audience.

### **1.3.1 SABC1’s *Uzalo***

*Uzalo* is a South African prime-time telenovela that first aired on the SABC on 9 February 2015. The show is set and shot in the KwaMashu township in the city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, SA. *Uzalo*'s co-executive producer and creator, Duma Ka Ndlovu stated South Africans are interested in stories they can relate to: "But they don't want stories that look down on them or patronise them. They want people who understand black life, township life, and African life; someone who gives them a sense of pride" (Mkhwanazi 2015: 3). When *Uzalo* started, the show centred on the lives of the Mdletshe and the Xulu families, and the KwaMashu Township community. However, over the years the show has evolved and new characters have been introduced, while some old ones have left. At the start of *Uzalo*, viewers were introduced to the character of openly gay and flamboyant GC, played by Khaya Dladla, who is also openly gay in real life.

The introduction of GC, an openly gay man living in a township, symbolised a progressive step by the creators of *Uzalo* in representing black gay men living in a South African township. Even though *Uzalo*'s audience comprises both heterosexual and homosexual viewers, the popularity of the character means viewers warmed to him. It could then be argued this would have been a perfect opportunity to highlight the plight of young black gay men living in South African townships, as LGBTQ+ persons living in townships often face much homophobia and violence that, sometimes, leads to them losing their lives. When the killings of gays and lesbians that have been murdered in SA in the last few months are examined, the majority happened in townships. This reflects LGBTQ+ people in townships are still not entirely free or accepted.

In September 2019, *Uzalo* made history by becoming the most-watched show in the country. Ferreira (2018: 1) reported that on 25 September 2019, the show pulled in more than 10.2 million viewers. Since then, *Uzalo* has continued to be the most-watched show in SA. The latest data by the Broadcast Research Council of SA (2020: 1) shows *Uzalo* has consistently remained the top show on SABC 1 and in the country, with data for January 2020 showing an average of 9 308 207 viewers. It must be noted, while viewership numbers change all the time, however, *Uzalo* remains in the most-watched shows category in the country.

### **1.3.2 Mzansi Magic's *The Queen***

*The Queen* is set in Johannesburg's glamorous Waterfall Estate, in the Gauteng province of SA. This telenovela follows the lives of the Khoza family, the Mabuzas, and the Makes. Produced by Ferguson Films, *The Queen* premiered on the Digital Satellite Television

(DStv) Mzansi Magic on 1 August 2016. Since its inception, the show has been one of DStv's most-watched shows. The latest data released by the Broadcast Research Council of SA (2020: 5) for January 2020, show *The Queen* had 1 216 717 viewers. These figures may seem low compared to *Uzalo*, however, it is worth noting *The Queen* continues to be among the top shows for DStv.

Since its start, *The Queen* featured three LGBTQ+ characters: two openly gays, Kgosi and Prince, and one bisexual, Schumacher. Kgosi has since left the show; he was played by the 58-year-old seasoned actor, Sello Maake KaNcube. Even though Maake KaNcube left the telenovela last year, he is still very much associated with the role of Kgosi, with pictures of his visible hand gestures associated with being gay circulating as memes on social media.

After the departure of Maake KaNcube, *The Queen* hired openly gay vlogger, Moshe Ndiki, as the new gay of the show. Ndiki plays the character of Prince, an openly gay personal assistant to Harriet Khoza (Connie Ferguson). Ndiki has also been quoted in articles, saying he has nothing in common with his character. In Joyce's (2018: 1) article, Ndiki says the only thing he has in common with his character, Prince, is their sexuality. On the show, Prince stays with the Khoza family because his own family has disowned him for being gay.

At the beginning of the show, we were introduced to bisexual Schumacher. The actor who plays Schumacher, Vuyolwethu Ngcukana, is heterosexual in real-life; however, he has taken it on himself to campaign for LGBTQ+ rights. On the show, Schumacher has had relationships with both Kgosi, Prince and some women. Last year, Ngcukana made headlines when he tweeted a series of tweets on Twitter calling out the television industry for failing to accurately tell the stories of the LGBTQ+ community and using them for profit. Kekana (2019: 1) reported that in his tweets Ngcukana said writers should not use the LGBTQ+ community as props for 'spicing up' storylines. Ngcukana's tweets suggest many writers only include gay characters on their shows to boost their ratings, not because they want to educate viewers about homosexuality. Considering Ngcukana's tweet, it is vital to examine the role the media can play in educating the wider audience on sexual orientation.

#### **1.4 Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

As stated above the approach for this study is Cultural Studies. The approach will be discussed in detail in the third chapter (Methodology). Since this study deals with the manner in which gay people are represented in popular culture, particularly television in South Africa, Cultural Studies is used to explore the active audience paradigm and the

dynamics of power in the representations of LGBTQ+ on television. Buckingham (2012: 94) argues that mass media such as television, film, advertising and newspapers are the only one element of the broader field of Cultural Studies.

“Some of the more ethnographic work undertaken here has looked in a more holistic way at social and cultural practices – for example, those of youth ‘subcultures’ - of which the use and interpretation of media form only a part. Nevertheless, there is a strong tradition of empirical research on media within the Cultural Studies tradition, which incorporates the analysis of media texts alongside the study of audiences. Such work is typically qualitative, and in the case of audience research there is a strong emphasis on analysing the ways in which different social groups talk about what they watch and read” (Buckingham 2012: 94).

Since this study deals with marginalised groups, it draws on feminism, which according to Robbins (1996, cited in Brayton *et al.* 2010: 1), the classic answer to what makes a research feminist is the fact that it is usually conducted by, for and about women. However, Brayton *et al.* (2010: 1) state there is no single definition for FR but that there are certain key elements that help differentiate FR from old-style social sciences research, studies that research women, or studies gender without seeking change.

Similarly, Fanow and Cook (2005, cited in Krause, *et al.* 2017: 212) write that rooted in the principles of FR methodology is acknowledging the centrality of power dynamics, gender and hope for social change; in doing this, researchers hope to empower oppressed groups like women, children and queer people as well change patriarchal structures that exist in society.

It is, therefore, important to understand that FR does not only highlight injustices towards women alone, it can also be used to bring attention to issues of poverty, inequality, race, and LGBTQ+ issues, among others. FR has been chosen as the study approach, because it involves action towards social change and gender justice.

Since this study lies within the field of journalism and draws broadly on media studies, Media Representation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory are used as the guiding theories. These theories will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

In order to gather data for this study, two focus groups were held with media undergraduate students from the Journalism Programme and Video Technology Department from the Faculty of Arts and Design at a South African university. Both the focus group discussions

lasted for approximately an hour and a half. The students were invited to participate in the study regardless of gender, race and sexual orientation, so they could provide critical and varied viewpoints on representations because of their diversity and different experiences. Thematic analysis was then used to analyse and present the data gathered from the participants.

When analysing the data, Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-phase guide to conducting thematic analysis that was followed. These steps were used as a foundation for thematic analysis for this study. The six steps are: familiarizing yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; and reviewing themes; as well as defining and naming themes; and producing the report. This will be elaborated on further in chapter three.

### **1.5 Dissertation Outline**

Chapter One introduced the study topic, context of the study which includes the background, aim and objectives. Chapter one also features the history of telenovelas, it explains in detail about the two telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen* which this study investigated, while outlining the theoretical and methodological approaches used to conduct the research. Chapter Two (Literature Review) presents a review of literature relating to the visibility and representations of gay men on television. This will include the role of the media, television, gay visibility on television, as well as primetime television and its influence, primetime television and gay men, and cultural studies and gay representations, in addition to gender, sex and sexual orientation, gender identity, and masculinity, along with heteronormativity, positive portrayals of gays and lesbians, FR, and media representation theory as a research orientation, with media as a source of information, impact of gay representation on television, social cognitive theory as a research orientation and the shift in gay rights around the world also included.

Chapter Three (Research Design and Methodology) begins by explaining the research setting for this study, then discusses the research approach, which is Cultural Studies. After discussing CS, the method used to generate data is elaborated on. This chapter will also discuss the focus groups and how participants were sampled. Further to this, ethical, reliability and validity issues of the study will be explained.

Chapter Four (Data analysis and Discussion of Findings) will discuss the data analysis and the findings. The participant and focus groups discussions will be introduced prior to

presenting how thematic analysis was used to code the data and identify emergent data themes.

Chapter Five (Interpretation of data and Conclusion) presents the interpretation of the data in response to the research questions of the study. Most data can be interpreted as negative, with very few positive findings. This chapter will also include the researcher's reflections, as well as a discussion of the study limitations. In conclusion, the researcher will offer recommendations with regard to future research in this field of research.

## **1.6 Summary**

This introductory chapter outline the research problem, which is that although sexual orientation-based discrimination is prohibited by the SA Constitution, (LGBTQ+) people in the country are still subjected to many forms of discrimination that sometimes leads to violence. This situation motivated the current study, which explores perceptions created by representations on television of black gay men and asks whether this plays a role in shaping stereotypical viewer attitudes towards homosexual men.

The next chapter comprise a review of literature regarding the various factors that impact LGBTQ+ rights, including the role of the media, representation, and media representation and social cognitive theories, as well as LGBTQ+ rights globally.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

First, this chapter begins by discussing gay rights in SA and the African continent, in order to show the importance of conducting studies such as this one. This chapter also discusses literature concerning the visibility and representations of gay men on television. The literature review presented in this chapter is an analysis of the types of LGBTQ+ community depictions in television programmes that have aired in SA and abroad. It seeks to elaborate on how these representations of homosexuality may be read by viewers.

Most importantly, the review of literature presented also seeks to comprehend the effect of the portrayal of gay men in popular shows with LGBTQ+ characters. By understating the impact of the representations of gay men in SA, it is hoped the role television can play in educating viewers about homosexuality may be identified and, therefore, help in the fight against homophobia. This is achieved through an examination of previous studies that explored the influence of gay-themed shows on the attitudes of heterosexual viewers. The chapter also discusses the potential role of television as a platform for educating viewers about homosexuality and the role that can be played by content creators in representing gay men.

Last, Media Representation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory are presented as the guiding theories for this study. Therefore, they will be discussed in relation to the representations of the LGBTQ+ community in television, particularly gay men and the impact of their representations on viewer attitudes towards homosexuality.

#### **2.2 Gay men and the South African Constitution**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996: 8), no individual should be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, because of their gender, sex or sexual identity, among other things. However, Francis and Msibi (2011: 160), state even though post-apartheid SA encourages the language of inclusivity and tolerance, institutions such as education and many others continue to reproduce patterns of heterosexism.

Media reports of LGBTQ+ killings suggest while the Constitution protects the rights of gay people, many are still victims of vicious homophobic attacks. Igual (2020: 1) reports at least

three LGBTQ+ people were killed between December 2019 and January 2020. In December 2019 the body of a lesbian woman, Portia Simphiwe Mtshweni, was found mutilated in Tweefontein in Mpumalanga and in January 2020, the decomposing body of transgender activist, Nare Mphela, was found in Mokopane. Just recently, a 23-year-old LGBTQ+ activist and openly gay man, Lindokuhle Cele was gruesomely murdered in uMlazi Township, Durban. Cele's killing sent shockwaves throughout the country, prompting social media to start the hashtag #Justice4Lindo. Nene (2020: 1) found Cele was stabbed over 21 times all over his face, with the knife left jammed in his eye. Mothata (2020: 1) asserts it is understood the incident was a homophobic attack, because Cele and the accused knew one another.

As highlighted by DeBarros (2021: 1), close to 20 gay and lesbian people were murdered in SA between February and June 2021. These individuals were killed in various gruesome ways, including stabbing, being slashed, disembowelled, dismembered and burned. DeBarros (2021: 3) identifies the members of the LGBTQ+ community reported murdered in SA in the last five months by Mamba Online as;

- Sebokeng's Bonang Gaelae's throat was cut on 12 February.
- Nonhlanhla Kunene was found dead and half-naked in Pietermaritzburg's Edendale township on 5 March.
- 34-year-old Sphamandla Khoza, was viciously attacked. He was beaten, stabbed and his throat slit in Durban's Kwamashu township on 29 March.
- On 2 April, Nathaniel Mbele from Tshirela, Vanderbijlpark, was stabbed in the chest.
- Khulekani Gomazi, was accused of sexual assault then beaten to death in Mpophomeni in KZN on 3 April.
- On 10 April, 41-year-old Andile Nthuthela's body was found mutilated and burned in KwaNobuhle, Kariega.
- Lonwabo Jack, who was out celebrating his 22nd birthday on 17 April. His body was found the next day lying on a pavement in Cape Town's Nyanga township.
- On 24 April, Lucky Kleinboy Motshabi's lifeless body was found naked with stab wounds in a field in Limpopo's town of Dennilton.
- Phelokazi Mqathana, a 24-year-old lesbian was stabbed to death on the weekend of 1 May in the Khayelitsha township in, Cape Town, was reportedly killed after she rejected a man's advances.

- Also, in Cape Town, Lindokuhle Mapu, who was stabbed to death in on 9 May in Mfuleni.
- Flight attendant and artist, Aubrey Boshoga, whose lifeless body was found dumped on the gate of his home on 29 May in Johannesburg.
- On June 6, Masixole Level's body was found on a street in Eastern Cape's Kwazakhele township.
- Anele Bhengu, was gruesomely killed. Her body was found with stab wounds and had been mutilated in KwaMakhutha, KZN on 13 June.
- Lulama Mvandaba, died a few days after he was assaulted outside a shebeen in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape.
- Motse Moeketsi was reported missing on 18 June and a few days later was his body was found in Freedom Park in Gauteng.
- Around 27 June, Sheila Lebelo, was murdered and raped in Atteridgeville, Gauteng.

Morris (2017: 1) cites a report by the Centre for Risk Analysis, under the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR), which states four-in-ten people in SA are familiar with situations whereby someone has been killed for being a homosexual or for being assumed to being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Morris (2017: 1) further states 49 percent of black respondents said they know of someone who was murdered because of being gay, which is a large number compared to the 26 percent white respondents. These findings show that gay people, particularly in the black community, are still targets of vicious homophobia. This study, therefore, posits it is important to educate society with regard to sexual orientation and because of television's vast reach, it can play an influential role in this regard.

Speaking at the National Freedom Day celebration hosted on 27 April 2021 in Botshabelo, Free State, South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa condemned the LGBTQ+ killings that have gripped the country since February. As reported (South African Government 2021: 1) the president said as a country, SA must say no to homophobia and all forms of intolerance against the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+) community. In his speech, the president acknowledged that there has been a series of ghastly crimes against the gay community and as a nation, the country must be deeply ashamed. President Ramaphosa also said he to make clear that hate crimes would not be tolerated in SA and perpetrators of these crimes will be found and face the full might of the law (South African Government 2021: 1).

Even though the president's speech offered a little hope for the LGBTQ+ community, some are not satisfied that the government is doing all that it can to protect the lives of the queer community. At present, organisations dealing with queer civil issues in SA are calling for the government to urgently pass into law the Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill, as they believe this is one of the ways that could help deal with homophobic and transphobic hate crimes and killings. McEwen (2021: 1) asserts a joint statement by these queer civil groups pointed out the urgency in finalising and enacting the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill, as they hope will assist in the government's efforts to equally protect and offer access to rights for LGBTQ+ communities.

The Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill was drafted in 2016 and in 2018 was approved by Cabinet (McEwen 2021: 1) but has yet to become law. According to the Justice and Constitutional Development department (RSA 2018: 1), the bill aims to:

- “Give effect to the Republic's obligations in terms of the Constitution and international human rights instruments concerning racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, in accordance with international law obligations;
- Provide for the offence of hate crime and the offence of hate speech, and the prosecution of persons who commit those offences;
- Provide for appropriate sentences that may be imposed on persons who commit hate crime and hate speech offences;
- Provide for the prevention of hate crimes and hate speech;
- Provide for the reporting on the implementation, application and administration of this Act; and
- Effect consequential amendments to certain Acts of Parliament; and to provide for matters connected therewith.” (Justice and Constitutional Development department RSA 2018: 1).

The Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill will ensure LGBTQ+ persons are protected and those that perpetrate crimes against them are brought to book and prosecuted accordingly. In addition, there needs to be a reform of the police, as well as the justice system in this country. Many LGBTQ+ people are afraid of reporting hate crimes because they are ridiculed or not taken seriously by the police. Even though the Constitution protects the rights of gay people, this is not enough, as it appears this is only on paper, not in reality. Homophobia takes place

in many forms, such as making hate speech remarks to incite an individual to violence. By classifying homophobia as a hate crime or hate speech, progress can be made in fighting it.

### 2.3 LGBTQ+ rights in Africa

The literature presented above addressed the South African Constitution, gay rights and the current treatment of gay people in the country. It is of importance to also examine gay rights in other African countries, as that may help in understanding why there are those in SA who still believe homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’. According to British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News (2021), there are 69 countries in the world where homosexuality is outlawed and nearly half of these are in Africa. Furthermore, BBC News (2021) notes that of the 53 countries that are part of the Commonwealth, 36 still have laws that criminalise homosexuality. The Commonwealth is an association of countries with most being former British colonies. Surprisingly, most of the anti-sodomy laws date to the time when these countries were under British rule. Even though Britain itself has opted to decriminalise homosexuality, these countries have chosen to outlaw it. Similarly, Rakhetsi (2021: 1) states most anti-LGBTQ+ laws in Africa date back to the colonial era. However, the impact faced by queer communities today is stigma, discrimination, threats and violence.

Originally, British anti-sodomy laws only applied to men, nevertheless, today countries that were homosexuality is not allowed also have harsh criminal penalties for women who participate in same-sex relationships (BBC News 2021). Below is the list (Table 2.1) published by BBC News (2021) of the 69 countries where homosexuality is outlawed.

**Table 2.1: Countries where homosexuality is outlawed**

Antigua & Barbuda	Mauritius	Yemen
Algeria	Mauritania	Zimbabwe
Afghanistan	Morocco	Zambia
Bangladesh	Myanmar	
Bhutan	Nigeria	
Brunei	Namibia	
Barbados	Occupied Palestinian Territory (Gaza Strip)	
Burundi	Oman	
Cameroon	Papua New Guinea	
Chad	Pakistan	

Comoros	Qatar	
Cook Islands	Samoa	
Dominica	Saint Lucia	
Eswatini	Saudi Arabia	
Ethiopia	Saint Kitts and Nevis	
Egypt	Saint Vincent and The Grenadines	
Eritrea	Senegal	
Ghana	Somalia	
Guyana	Singapore	
Grenada	Solomon Islands	
Guinea	Sierra Leone	
Gambia	South Sudan	
Iran	Sri Lanka	
Jamaica	Sudan	
Kenya	Syria	
Kiribati	Tanzania	
Kuwait	Togo	
Lebanon	Tonga	
Liberia	Tunisia	
Libya	Turkmenistan	
Malawi	Uganda	
Malaysia	Tuvalu	
Maldives	Uzbekistan	

According to Reygan (2016: 85), SA has a long history of not representing black lesbian woman in media, which this shows racial, gender and class inequalities. It can be argued this is deeply rooted in the belief that homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’, therefore, there are those that do not believe two women can be in a romantic relationship together. Over the years lesbian and gay people have been subjected to horrible forms of violence, with many countries in the African continent that still do not acknowledge the rights of homosexual people; not only do they not accept them, they rebuke them with stinging punishment. Spurlin (2010: 15) asserts nationalists believe same-sex desires are a ‘western aberration’

and should you be a gay or lesbian African, you are importing lifestyles that are considered empire invidious imports. The claim that homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’ is not only omnipresent in South Africa but also elsewhere on the African continent. This claim raises questions of who has the power to decide what is or what is not African? In his book, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* published in 2007, Neville Hoad refutes the claim that homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’. Munro (2008) writes in his review of *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* that the book is an important contribution to the growing body of cultural studies work that challenges Euro-American queer theory in order to put race and globalization at the centre of sexuality studies. Munro (2008) writes that Hod’s book clearly states that “the racialized narratives about homosexuality as ‘unAfrican,’ in particular, provide leaders in Africa today with a discourse through which to assert national sovereignty and cultural authenticity, when they are otherwise embedded—enthusiastically, anxiously, or unwillingly, as the case may be—in Western models of “development” Munro (2008).

McClinton (1995, cited in Spurlin 2010: 15) notes lesbians and feminist theorists researching postcolonial history conclude same-sex relationships between women existed long before colonialism. Msibi (2011: 56) argues the dawn of human rights in Africa has allowed many to claim a homosexual identity; this has aggravated the already increased fear of the apprehensive man. In addition, this has seen many African countries employing harsh responses, often using colonial anti-sodomy laws, to deal with those who are gay. Msibi notes this was at a time when colonial authorities wanted to regulate sexuality.

With this analysis, the factors resulting in the lack of representation of black gay men in media, are shown as largely imbedded in the history of the country and the African continent. SABC News (2021: 1) reports that two transgender women were sentenced to five years prison in Cameroon for “attempted homosexuality” and public indecency because of the clothes they wore to a restaurant. According to the report, the two women, said to be local media celebrities known as Loic “Shakiro” Njeukam and Roland “Patricia” Mouthe, were also fined 200 000 CFA francs (\$372.44). Since May 2020, an estimated 53 people have been arrested during raids on HIV and Aids organisations, where some were beaten and made to have forced “anal examinations” so that accusations of homosexuality can be confirmed (SABC News 2021: 1) The news report additionally disclosed Cameroon as one of more than 30 African countries that does not allow same-sex relationships and people in have been sentenced harsh prison sentences for being suspected of being homosexual.

Human Rights Watch (2021: 1) reports the situation in Cameroon is dire for the LGBTQ+ community, with police arresting, beating and threatening gay people daily. Human Rights Watch (2021: 1) stated that since February 2021, a 17-year-old boy was among the 24 LGBTQ+ people who were tortured and arrested by police, for allegedly participating in consensual same-sex or for not being gender conforming. Furthermore, some of those arrested were forced to take a Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) test and undergo anal examination.

Between February 17 and April 8, 2021, Human Rights Watch spoke to 18 people by phone, including five who had been imprisoned, ten members of Cameroonian LGBTQ+ nongovernmental organizations, and three lawyers. In addition, the organization studied medical records, police reports as well as reports by Cameroonian and international LGBT organizations and court documents. These showed that on February 24, the police raided the office of an organisation called Colibri which assists with HIV prevention and treatment amenities to Cameroonian LGBTQ+. During the raid, 13 people were arrested on homosexuality charges, including seven Colibri staff. These people were threatened and verbally assaulted by police, interrogated without legal representation present and involuntarily made to sign statements they had not read (Human Rights Watch 2021: 1).

A transgender woman aged 22 was among those arrested by police who called them devils and told them they were not humans nor normal (Human Rights Watch 2021: 1). Another 26-year-old transgender who was part of the 13 arrested, was forced to have an HIV test and subjected to anal examination, which she describes as the most mortifying thing she has ever been made to do. Human Rights Watch (2021: 1) notes this transgender's experience is not an isolated case, as there is a long history of Cameroon prosecutors using medical reports based on forced anal examinations in court, where these reports have contributed to convictions of people charged with consensual same-sex conduct.

Ghana is another African country that prosecutes LGBTQ+ people. Igual (2021a: 1) reports that 21 people were arrested in a hotel called, Nurses and Midwives in May 2021. According to Igual (2021a: 1), a press statement released by the Ghana Police Service said these people were "advocating LGBTQI activities" and police had found them with things like books and brochures which spoke about hate crimes and many other LGBTQI topics. Igual (2021a: 1) states that even though same-sex relations are illegal in Ghana, it is not technically deemed unlawful for one to identify as LGBTQ+. In the same article, Igual (2021a: 1) mentions that

22 people were arrested by police in March 2021, after police claimed they had attended a lesbian wedding. Consensual male to male sex in Ghana is described as “unnatural carnal knowledge”, is unlawful and penalties include three years’ in prison. Igual (2021a: 1) reports that many LGBTQ+ people in Ghana fear being outed so that fall victim to extortion.

In another development in Ghana, a new bill called “Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill”, is being put to parliament. According to Akinwotu (2021: 1), this bill proposes jailing LGBTQ+ people and those who sympathise with them to up to 10 years. A leaked draft of the bill further indicates supporting people who are intersex would be criminal and the government can instruct intersex individuals to receive “gender realignment” surgery. Akinwotu (2021: 1) reports this bill would be the first biggest step in criminalising the LGBTQ+ community and its supports, since gaining independence from colonial decree. Another aspect that has sparked outrage about the bill, is that groups or people found to be financially supporting those groups thought to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights or offer support may be prosecuted. Further, Akinwotu (2021: 1) states the bill makes it clear media companies and social media platforms that publish content that could be seen as “encouraging children to explore any gender or sex outside of the binary categories of male and female”, could face up to 10 years in prison.

Igual (2021b: 1) points out that Ghana’s speaker of parliament, Alban Bagbin, who had previously served as the Minister of Health, proclaimed his support for the anti-LGBTQ bill. Bagbin was quoted as saying “I am very clear in my mind that the Parliament of Ghana will pass this Bill [to criminalise LGBTQ]. I have gone through it and I will confirm that the Bill will be a reference point for many countries. It has gone through all the provisions of the constitutions, laws, and international obligations. This pandemic must be fought by all of us. I can tell you [it] is worse than Covid-19” (Igual 2021b: 1).

Nigeria is another African country that does not allow same-sex relationships and imposes draconian punishments on those who are homosexual. The country has been vicious towards gay people for years now and the strict sentences imposed on Nigeria’s LGBTQ+ individuals do not appear to be going away anytime soon. Just recently, five men were arrested by Islamic religious police in the state of Kano on charges of homosexuality (Igual 2021b: 1), with a statement by the Kano State Hisbah Board that these men were apprehended by police ‘after community members suspected they were engaging in same-sex sexual acts’. As Igual

(2021b: 1) explains, the religious police force known as Kano State Hisbah Corps is responsible for the enforcement of Sharia (Islamic) law in this state.

Sharia Law, according to the Human Dignity Trust (n.d), is practiced in 12 northern states and criminalises same-sex relations between both women and men. Moreover, the five Nigerian men arrested could, in theory, face death by being stoned, as that is the maximum penalty for homosexuality, while other penalties could include 100 lashes (Igual 2021a: 1). The Human Dignity Trust (n.d) highlights section 214 of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act criminalises “carnal knowledge against the order of nature” and the penalty for this is 14 years imprisonment. Furthermore, this also applies to sexual contact between men, with section 215 of the same Criminal Act criminalising attempts to commit the offences forbidden under Section 214.

Another Criminal Code Act of Nigeria, under section 217 bans gross indecency amongst men, or the procurement or attempting to procure thereof, and the consequence for this is three years incarceration (Human Dignity Trust n.d). The country also has a Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, which according to the Human Dignity Trust (n.d), prohibits same-sex marriage or civil union and the penalty for this, is 14 years imprisonment. In addition, under the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013, Section 5(2) states that offenders who register, operate or participate in gay clubs, societies or organisations, may be imprisoned for 10 years; this also includes making a public show of a same-sex relationship. The last section of Nigeria’s Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act criminalises what it describes as “administering, witnessing, aiding or abetting the solemnisation of a same-sex marriage or union”, or support of LGBT organisations, also with a 10-year imprisonment punishment (Human Dignity Trust n.d).

Msibi (2011: 61) asserts, compared to other African countries, homophobia in SA has taken different forms, because of the constitution that protects homosexual people. “Unlike other African countries, where expressions of homophobia are institutionally, socially, and individually permitted and endorsed through the law, homophobia in South Africa operates in violation of the law” (Msibi 2011: 61). Rakhetsi (2021: 1) agrees, stating that the country was the first and still remains the only African country to legalise same-sex marriage and has a constitution that protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Furthermore, the Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Act was initiated in 2018, while in 2020, the

Civil Union Amendment Act was passed into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa. The Act prohibits marriage officers from refusing to perform same-sex marriages.

Msibi, in his 2011 research, refers to a 2008 unpublished study conducted by the Forum for the Empowerment of Women that 46 sampled women from a Johannesburg township, which found 41 percent had been raped, nine percent were rape survivors, 39 percent were insulted and 17 percent had been abused verbally. Men who engage in same-sex relationships who participated in the same study said they had also been sexually and physically violated. This suggests while the South African constitution protects the rights of sexual minorities, they are still victims of horrific homophobic violence. Therefore, as television is one of the leading sources of information, its role in educating people can be critical and, hopefully, change their negative perceptions or attitudes towards people who participate in same-sex relationships.

#### **2.4 The role of the Media**

Media and communications scholars, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: xvi) state while there are many types of fictional programmes on television and the popular mixture genre of reality television, viewers continue to be exposed to a series of similar, consistent messages shown during prime-time television; irrespective of platform, time of day, network, or show chosen. The authors argue even smart and conscious viewers of television may experience television in two outwardly contradictory ways. Furthermore, viewers know and can articulate that the programmes they watch on television are fictional, yet, at the same time and frequently, they believe and internalise the elusive and often subliminal messages they are receiving. This means, as viewers, even though we know the shows we are watching on television are not real, we tend to internalise and believe them. Just recently, the much-loved Netflix drama series *The Crown* caused an uproar with its portrayal of the British Royal Family. Many pointed out the show, which depicts the lives of Queen Elizabeth II and her family, is filled with ‘mistruths’ viewers might interpret as fact. This escalated to where British Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, wrote to Netflix with a request to include a disclaimer at the beginning of each episode, informing viewers *The Crown* is a fictional drama.

In an article by Hassan and Adam (2020: 1), Netflix said it would not be issuing a disclaimer, because they have always presented *The Crown* as a drama and have the confidence the estimated 29 million viewers who watch *The Crown* globally, know the show is fiction but broadly based on historical events. Earl Spencer, the brother of Diana, Princess of Wales,

voiced his concern regarding his sister's prominence in season four of *The Crown*, with her turbulent marriage to Prince Charles, stating viewers could interpret scenes "as gospel". The Earl also urged the show's creators to alert viewers the scenes are not a true representation of real events. This clearly emphasises television as a powerful source of information and influence. Therefore, the messages viewers receive from television must be scrutinised, along with the way that they affect us.

Media culture is stated by Douglas Kellner (1995: 1) to play a role in shaping the way the world is viewed. Forms of media such as film, television, radio, and other culture industries provide us with models of how gender is interpreted, of what success and failure means and how power and powerlessness is viewed. Kellner argues the media outlines what is considered moral or evil, good or bad, positive or negative (1995: 1).

Similarly, Gerbner *et al.* (1986: 17) note television is the most prominent source of information and socialisation and since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been an enormous presence and source of influence. Parents, grandparents and the clergy have been replaced by television as sources of information (1986: 33).

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 33) assert, because of the growth of media, it is important to analyse the messages we are receiving, suggesting one of the ways this can be done, is through a field of study known as media literacy. This field of study comprises of monitoring content from the media, the production and effect, as well as the industry itself. Media Scholar, Silverblatt (1995: 2-3) states media literacy consists of five fundamental elements:

1. "Awareness of media impact on the individual and society involves educating media students, consumers, and producers to understand its enormous influence and to learn independence from its impact.
2. Understating the process of mass communication involves learning the ways messages are sent and received in both interpersonal and mass communication.
3. Developing strategies to understand and interpret media messages utilises detailed analytical questions or keys that revolve around process, context, framework, and production values.
4. Using media to understand contemporary culture and ourselves reviews media texts and images to unravel cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes.
5. Enhanced appreciation and enjoyment of media is one of the media literacy aims advanced by insights integral to the process." (Silverblatt 1995: 2-3).

Teaching media literacy is important to enable people to understand the messages they receive from the media and differentiate between fiction and fact. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 34) point out some states in America have started including media literacy in their curriculum, because of media pervasiveness and its influence on young people.

Scholars argue that in the USA, access to the media has been persistently restricted by “controlling interests” (Fiske 1987, 1989; Gitlin 1986; Hall 1980; Poster 1990, cited in Shugart 2003: 67). These interests comprise corporate owners of the media who have an interest in maintaining political influence, as well as the social, economic and cultural status quo in which they have thrived. Shugart (2003: 67) finds it unlikely ‘access to the media’ has been restricted in the USA, however, a restricted range of views in mainstream media was apparent, meaning “a hegemonic consensus was established which marginalized more radical views”.

Even though controllers of the media stated by Shugart (2003: 67) are no less a factor nowadays, with a dissonance of media content resulting from the way facilitated technologies, and the postmodern settings in which they occur and simultaneously contribute to. This suggests the visibility of other notions does not signify the implied political threat it once did. Therefore, it has become usual to see representations of marginalised communities in the conservative media of the status quo. Further to this, Shugart (2003: 67) maintains there are many reasons why various views are now found in the media. This can be attributed to the rise of new media, specifically social media, which Shugart says is a far more democratic structure of participation, in addition to the shift in attitudes towards marginalised groups since the 1960s, with the LGBTQ+ community campaigning for improved representation in the media. However, Walters 2001 (cited, in Shugart 2003: 67) argued, even though LGBTQ+ people are part of the public’s consciousness like never before, their prominence does not guarantee validity.

Similarly, Gross 2001 (cited, in Shugart 2003: 67) states when previously overlooked groups or viewpoints gain visibility, the way they are represented reflects the bias and interests of those in powerful positions who set out the public agenda; these were mostly middle-aged white men from the middle and upper class and are overpoweringly heterosexual.

According to Shugart (2003: 68) the audience is another noted factor that causes complication in the increased visibility of homosexual people in mainstream and popular media. This is because the audience is regarded as mainstream and assumed to be

heterosexual, especially by virtue of the audience's acceptance of these representations, it is constantly featured as an issue. As Shugart (2003: 68) states, interpretation of these representations always depends on the viewers, because the pursuit for legitimacy is rooted in the assumption of a majority audience filled with heteronormative sensibilities. Heteronormativity will be discussed broadly below but for now, an examination of television is detailed, as it is one of the most popular forms of entertainment media.

## **2.5 Television**

Miller (2010) indicated that television is 'more popular than ever', pointing to its powerful influence in contemporary societies, with millions of individuals glued to their television screens, watching their favourite shows. Content creators are constantly attempting to generate catchy programmes that will see them recording high viewership numbers.

Croteau and Hoynes (1997: 180) suggest one of the reasons why television is thought to be so ideologically charged, is its dependence on conventional pragmatist forms of image creation that disguise the workings of the camera. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 34) highlight that this means, while we know problems do not resolve themselves skilfully in a 30-minute format, when the characters and plot of a certain TV programme closely bear a resemblance to real people, the thirty-minute steadfastness nonetheless seem more trustworthy, reliable and possible to the viewers. In other words, we need to look underneath the surface of the storyline and characters to discover whether and to what extent the programmes we watch reinforce the dominant ideology. "For example, the perceived family norm in the United States involves married heterosexual couples with children. Cultural studies proponents suggest that this norm explicitly and implicitly conveys the message that any family outside of this configuration is, by definition, other or abnormal" (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 36).

This may be why pictures of gay and lesbian characters and their families did not exist on television up until recently. Moreover, those that exist may still be considered as problematic for various reasons, such as conforming to the idea that a normal family consists of a heterosexual setting.

### **2.5.1 Gay visibility on television**

According to Shugart (2003: 68), media representations of gay men and lesbian women has, historically, been limited and selective in the United States of America (USA). However, recent studies show an increase in the visibility of homosexual characters on television. In a study examining prime-time network programming for 2001, Raley and Lucas (2006: 29)

found 80 dramas and comedies shown on television, with six (7.5 percent) of those that feature at least one recurring gay male or lesbian character.

Similarly, a study by Fisher, Hill and Grube (2007) examined gay, lesbian and bisexual content on television for two seasons. Their study assessed the occurrence of behaviours and verbal messages that are related to the sexuality of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in programmes that aired on commercial and cable networks in America from 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. The study found sexual content related with homosexual characters was present in about 15 percent of programmes assessed. The findings from both these studies indicate visibility of gays and lesbians in television has increased over the years. Nevertheless, it must be noted the increased depiction of the LGBTQ+ community in television has been met with scrutiny for not accurately depicting the representations.

In their analysis, Fisher *et al.* (2007: 11) find, when it comes to the sexual socialization of gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescence, the quality of the portrayal was found to be problematic. The authors add that the portrayal tended to reinforce stereotypes, such as that gay men are promiscuous. Furthermore, Fisher *et al.* (2007: 11) indicate their analysis shows a large portion of content related to gays, lesbian and bisexuals, happens in various forms of comedy. The content is presented in a funny manner and may contain stereotypical and negative depictions.

From the beginning, the history of LGBTQ+ community portrayal on television has long been problematic for many reasons. Russo (1981: xii) states even though gay people's existence became unavoidable, they were reflected on television and in real life as dirty secrets. This is supported by Fejes and Petrich (1993: 397) in their argument that gays in American television in the 90s were used as comic devices. Homoerotic images and behaviour such as cross dressing and role reversals were merely shown as a ploy for comic relief. This included showing them in asexual context (Fejes and Petrich 1993: 397). As Shugart (2003: 69) points out, these portrayals skirted the realities and insinuations of homosexuality, desexualising the characters by almost never showing them in romantic or sexual circumstances. Gross (1994, cited in Shugart 2003: 68) maintains that until quite recently, when shown in mainstream motion picture or television, gay men were represented negatively. They were shown as either victims or villains and, in both capacities, appeared as glitches to be solved, most of the time reflecting gender stereotypes that characterise gay men as feminine and lesbians as manly.

It must be noted these gendered stereotypes about gay men and lesbian women still exist in television, as content creators only present gay men as effeminate and lesbians as manly, or gay men are presented as wanting to be women and lesbians as wanting to be men. This type of representation can be very confusing for viewers, especially when they are not aware of the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. Several authors argue the emergence of the gay rights movement around the 1970s did not totally eradicate the negative tropes; however, mainstream media did begin to show more positive depictions of gay characters (Capsuto 2000, Dow 2001, Gross 2001, and Walters 2001, cited in Shugart 2003: 68). As Shugart (2003: 69) notes, it became almost fashionable and obligatory for mainstream media to represent gay men and lesbians. In film, movies such as *The Birdcage*, *In & Out*, *Julie Newman*, and *Philadelphia Thanks for Everything!*, along with *To Wong Fo*, included sympathetic gays in leading roles (Shugart 2003: 69).

In television, Shugart (2003: 69) finds television dramas and situation comedies such as *Chicago Hope*, *Roseanne*, *NYPD Blue*, and *Friends*, as well as *Spin City* and many others had gay characters in permanent and supporting roles. She further states this television trend influenced prime-time shows such as *Melrose Place* and *Dawson's Creek* and comedies including *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*, to feature lead homosexual protagonists.

While an increase in homosexual characters on television has been widely acknowledged, Brookey (1996), Dow (2001) and Walters (2001 cited, in Shugart 2003: 69) argue find there are dominant themes when gay characters are depicted; they are shown as lacking gay social and political settings. They are presented through the eyes of conventional heterosexual communities and settings, while their existence is used as a catalyst for the growth and understanding of heterosexual characters. Brookey (1996: 41) believes these representations are acceptable, because they depend on their support of the established economic and ethnic hierarchy.

Brookey and Westerfelhaus (2001, cited in Shugart 2003: 70) refer to what they call the problematic way the gay and cross-dressing characters in the film '*To Wong Foo*' are portrayed, as opposed to their heterosexual counterparts. These authors maintain these characters' problematic depiction jointly raises the awareness of the population of a small Midwestern town, where the movie is set. In their opinion, even though this culminates in some sort of understanding, it also reinforces their marginalisation. Walters (2001: 104) notes the same issue with the homosexual character of Carter in the popular situation comedy

Spin City. The author argues there is a centrality of heterosexuality to homosexuality. Gayness is understood through the eyes of heterosexuals who are disordered, and stressed with their own reactions and feelings. While Walters (2001: 104) applauds the efforts to reckon with heterosexual uncertainties and homophobia, he adds his fears this might further marginalise gay people, put them aside as channels for straight enlightenment, just as black people are used as vehicles for white understandings of race.

According to Hart (2000, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281), even though gay and lesbian characters are no longer portrayed as psychologically ill, most depictions continue to disseminate stereotypes regarding homosexuality. When homosexual people are represented, their depiction includes being promiscuous, undergoing HIV treatment, or unable to maintain relationships that are neither satisfying sexually, nor romantic. Similarly, researchers, note that even successful situational comedies with homosexual characters as leads, like *Will & Grace* and *Ellen*, might reinforce stereotypes. This happens by representing these characters as missing stable relationships and being self-centred, which fuels the perception of homosexual people as one-dimensional and absurd individuals (Cooper 2003, Fouts and Inch 2005, and Herman 2005, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281).

Calzo and Ward (2009: 281) assert these types of depictions are not only limited to electronic media but also to print media. They mention a 2002 study by Gadsen that found homosexual content in popular print media also marginalises and perpetuates stereotypes. In this study, published in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, Gadsen reports on his analysis of advice columns and articles of *New Women* and *Essence* magazines, over a period of 10 years, wherein only six percent of *New Women* and five percent of *Essence* magazine issues addressed homosexuality explicitly. The focus for these magazines is usually male sexual activity - the wicked husband or male lovers that have sexual relationships with other men, thus putting their wives or girlfriends at physical and emotional risk. Gadsen notes the absence of positive representations of erotic minority romantic and sexual relations, including discussing rights of gays and lesbians. Having discussed the visibility of the LGBTQ+ in television, a brief outline of primetime television and why it is important follows.

### **2.5.2 Primetime television and its influence**

Primetime television is considered the most popular timeslot on television, because this is the time when audience viewership is at its peak. Binder (2020: 1) states that, traditionally, primetime hours are between 20:00 and 23:00 in the USA. This is the same in SA, as

television channels air their biggest shows during this time, because everyone is at home and watching television. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: xvi) argue primetime television, which consists mostly of drama series and telenovelas, exposes us to a series of homogeneous, consistent messages, irrespective of the platform, or the channel or programme selected. The difference between SA and other countries, when it comes to soaps and telenovelas (Mkhwanazi 2015: 3) is that the soaps air in primetime viewing in the evening, whereas in the USA, they air during the day as they initially targeted stay-at-home spouses. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: xvi) argue the importance of questioning what messages we receive from television and how they impact us. Viewers often subconsciously believe and internalise the subtle and ideological messages they receive from television.

### **2.5.3 Primetime television and gay men**

Research undertaken in America on television's representations of gay people credits shows such as *Ellen*, *Will & Grace*, *Ugly Betty*, and *Morden Family*, as well as *Six Feet Under*, *Glee*, and *How to Get Away with Murder*, and many others. Even though these shows have aired on South African channels through syndication, they are based on perceptions and experiences of American people and may not necessarily resonate with the South African audience.

One example of this was when, in 2009, the SABC1 soap opera, *Generations*, introduced its second homosexual storyline, brought to life by Thami Mngqolo, who played the character of Senzo, and Zolani Xaluva, who portrayed Jason. Senzo was gay and Jason was bisexual, however, at the beginning, the two were in the closet regarding their sexuality. They started dating in secret, while continuing with the façade to others that they were heterosexual. The two were exposed in an explosive episode when Senzo's father, Sibusiso Dhlomo, walked in on them in bed together. Upon finding his son in bed with Jason, Sibusiso was so angry he beat them with a sjambok and disowned Senzo, saying he does not have a gay son. One of the episodes that caused shockwaves throughout the country, was the first kissing scene between Senzo and Jason.

At that time, *Generations* was the most watched show on South African television. City Press (2009: 2) reported the scene was so controversial, certain viewers of the show started a Facebook group called "We will stop watching *Generations* if Senzo and Jason continue kissing" and within a few days of its creation, the group had close to 10 000 members petitioning the producers to cancel the gay storyline.

According to the City Press (2009: 2), the homophobia in this group was so vile, members had nicknamed Generations, Gayérations and Gaynerations. Furthermore, the comments on the group were extremely homophobic, with many writing that they hate gays.

One commenter wrote,

“If you are gay it’s fine but don’t publicise it because it’s disgusting. It’s worse than animal behaviour. I hate gays. I get goosebumps every time I think of them. My days of watching Generations are numbered” (City Press 2009: 2).

Another commenter remarked,

“If people don’t wake up and see that the world is coming to an end they are real fools. Just because this filthy act is happening in night clubs, toilets and everywhere out there doesn’t make it right. If something is wrong it’ll always be wrong and it becomes a problem when it has to be shoved down our throats like that and be taught to the children we are raising” (City Press 2009: 2).

Even though this storyline was met with mixed reactions, it is worth noting, at the time, South African LGBTQ+ activists were happy, because homosexuality was given a face on television.

Wind (2010) points out that in 1999, M-net’s soap opera, *Egoli*, had a gay character named Braam, who left his family farm in Okavango to live in Johannesburg. He studied engineering and worked as a part-time bartender. Even though Braam was a heartthrob and many women showed interest in him, he came out of the closet and began a relationship with Krynaauw and they eventually moved in together. As Wind (2010) explains, the problem then is, the black gay character is beaten, whereas the white gay character lives happily ever after with his boyfriend. There are two schools of thought regarding this; one, you may say beating up your gay son and his bisexual boyfriend is a reaction a black father has, as opposed to accepting them. Second, you could say what was portrayed is not a lived experience of many gay people and *Generations* did that for dramatic effect to obtain more ratings.

On the one hand, it was great to see a popular show address the issue of homophobia and possible acceptance in a country that homophobia is still a major issue. On the other hand, Wind (2010) states what worries him about the Senzo and Jason storyline, is viewers watching *Generations* might think the only answer to finding out your child is homosexual is to beat them up.

“I guess it goes back to Chimamanda Adichie's idea of the danger of a single story. If this is the only representation of gay people on TV in South Africa, then how the storyline is dealt with has much greater weight - it speaks beyond just that story, because it becomes the only reference point for how gay people are treated there” (Wind 2010)

A comment on Wind's blog post, notes in the 1980s, shows such as *Dynasty* introduced gay characters but their story lines involved a lot of shame, and hatred by the family, or they would be the only gay in town and very lonely. The commenter also notes that representations of LGBTQ+ people in American soap operas has improved since the 80s. In Wind's opinion, SA is following the same direction as American soap operas of the 80s and it was unrealistic to expect the “struggling” country of SA to be ahead of the US in terms of portraying LGBTQ+ soap opera characters.

It must, nevertheless, be noted these observations and comments were made in 2010, when South African productions were still new in featuring homosexual representations in their shows. Since then, the country has progressed significantly in featuring gay and lesbian characters on television. Aside from *Generations* and *Egoli (Place of Gold)*, more South African soap operas such as *Isidingo (The Need)*, *Rhythm City*, *Skeem Saam*, and *Scandal* have featured homosexual storylines. More recently, this trend has also been seen with South African telenovelas, for example, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, which this study examines. Other telenovelas to feature LGBTQ+ characters and storylines include *The River* and *Imbewu (The Seed)*. Prime-time drama series in SA have not shied away from featuring gay characters in their shows, these include *Society*, *The Lab*, *Intersexions*, and *After 9*, along with *Zero Tolerance*, *Yizo Yizo*, *iKhaya*, as well as *Igazi* and many others.

In her article, Gallagher (2019) states, even though the presence of gay characters on popular TV shows may not sit well with homophobic or viewers that are conservatives, the significance of their existence in prevalent culture cannot be overstated. She concludes by pointing out visibility does not only play a role in shifting society's view on LGBTQ+ people, it also assists those struggling to come to terms with their sexuality to not feel alone in the world. It is important for sexual minorities to have role models or someone they can identify with on television, emphasising that being gay, lesbian or transgender is not a crime.

According to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 36), American television programmes in the 1990s, such as *Roseanne*, *Northern Exposure* and *Thirtysomething*, featured gay and lesbian

characters. However, these characters had minor roles and were recurring. The breakthrough came in 1996, when the sitcom *Ellen* aired; it showed the coming out of its key character, played by famed talk show host, Ellen DeGeneres, who is a lesbian in real life. Even though there was some small portrayal of gays and lesbians throughout most of primetime, they remained moderately invisible and by 1998, the *Ellen* sitcom was taken off air because of the show's poor rating and comments, wherein ABC network executives said the character was "too gay". Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 36) add the cancellation of *Ellen* meant gay and lesbian characters were underrepresented. The authors state this absence of pictures of queer characters in prime-time television emphasised a dominant ideology that characterises heterosexual couples and family as normal, while it marginalises other kinds of couples and families that do not fit in with what society considers ideal. Regardless of *Ellen*'s cancellation, the show is praised as having facilitated future programmes that incorporated gay characters and queer themes to successfully feature in mainstream and cable television (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014).

Representations are salient to people's lives and will be explored for how they link into popular culture and how they shape the world. Cultural studies is also used to explore how the world operates; how power and social dynamics influence the wellbeing and treatment of people. This extends to representations, power dynamics, as well as social and cultural beliefs, which impact how a particular group of people is represented. Rooted in the representations of black gay men is power, political dynamics and social beliefs, to mention a few. Through examining the ways in which LGBTQ+ people are represented, these beliefs can be dismantled.

## **2.6 Gender, Sex, and Sexual Orientation**

When discussing the representation of homosexuality on television, it is important to examine the difference between gender, sex and sexual orientation. Many people are confused by the three, which could explain the lack of understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

According to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 68), when a child is born, doctors inform its parents that it is a boy or a girl, based on its genitals; therefore, sex is biologically determined. They go on to say that later in life, other characteristics are determined by hormones, namely breasts, menstruation, bone and muscle structure, and so on. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 68) highlight the significance of other babies who are born with

ambiguous genitalia, with these children and their families having to make tough decisions and face a whole set of issues.

A distinction is made by Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 68), who maintain gender is different from sex, in that it is constructed socially, culturally and psychologically, adding that many studies argue the varying male and female roles in different cultures. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022) says gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of men, women, boys and girls; these includes norms, behaviours and roles that are linked to being a men, women or girl and boy, as well as relationships with each other. WHO (2022) notes that because gender is a social construct, it varies from society to society and over time can change. Newman (2022: 1) writes that people make the mistake of using the terms sex and gender interchangeably, however, they are different and it is crucial to understand why. Sex refers to the physical differences between people that are male, female or intersex, while gender refers to how a person identifies. Gender is a broad spectrum and unlike natal sex, gender is made up of binary forms (Newman 2022: 1).

A 1953 study by Anthropologist Margaret Mead (cited in Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 68) explored the roles of males and females in three different tribes in New Guinea. The study found both sexes in the first tribe were passive, nurturing, peaceful and deferential; which suggests they are traditionally feminine, according to American standards. The second tribe assumed gender roles thought of as traditional in America. The men were aggressive hunter-gatherers, while the women were peaceful nurturers who looked after the home and children. In the third tribe, the roles were reversed and the women assumed masculine roles, while the men were traditionally feminine. Similarly, WHO (2022) argues that gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. “Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others” (WHO 2022).

### **2.6.1 Gender Identity**

Gender identity and what influences it are briefly discussed below. This is important, because when we talk about how people view sexual orientation, gender identity is a huge influencer in the way homosexuality and heterosexuality are perceived and understood. Even though biology and interpersonal dynamics play a role in the impact on identity development, many academics state culture is the most important determinant (Holtzman

and Sharpe 2014: 84). Moreover, the authors are of the opinion that while biological research has made incredible progress in understanding the brain, efforts to link specific behavioural variances to gender differences in the brain anatomy are fraught with uncertainty.

According to psychologist Ute Habel, a specialist in hormonal influences in brain activation:

“Gender differences are strongly influenced by gender stereotypes, socialisation and learning, as well as genes and hormones and environmental factors. When we do research, it’s very difficult to disentangle the individual contributions of each of those factors; instead, we have to acknowledge and consider that there is complex interaction”.

(Larkin 2012, cited in Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 84)

However, researchers maintain this does not mean brain-based gender differences do not exist, with Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 84) highlighting the necessity of understanding that research in this area is not definite, therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the association of those differences with male and female behaviour. Since this study examines representations of gay men, it is important to look at masculinity and femininity in comprehending the various roles in telenovelas in this regard. There is a seemingly over-reliance on presenting gay men as feminine. In *Uzalo*, for instance, GC is feminine as are Kgosi and Prince in *The Queen*. Gay men are rarely portrayed as masculine; this is rooted in the stereotype that gays are not real men, therefore, feminine. Consequently, when gender, sex and sexual orientation are discussed, masculinity and femininity must be part of the discussion because, most of the time, they are all intertwined.

In his 2019 article for the NBC News, Fitzsimons reports that in its 127-year history, the American Psychological Association (APA), released guidelines to assist psychologists specifically address the problems of men and boys, with a featured warning with regard to masculinity ideology. Fitzsimons (2019: 1) draws attention to the report highlighting proof of traditional masculinity ideology hindering males’ psychological development, as well as constraining their behaviour. This results in strained gender roles, gender role conflict, and psychological and physical health being negatively influenced. The report titled, *Guidelines for the Psychological Practice with Boys and Men*, describes masculinity ideology as “a particular constellation of standards that have held sway over large segments of the population, including: anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the appearance of

weakness, and adventure, risk, and violence” (Fitzsimons 2019: 1). In addition, the report suggests this ideology can be linked to homophobia, bullying and sexual harassment.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 86) describe masculinity ideology as a set of views that personify the traditional cultural descriptions of what masculinity is - what it means to be what is considered a real man. The authors emphasise that, as with most ideologies, masculinity ideology is occasionally visible, but can sometimes be invisible, where people and groups who believe strongly in it do not see it as an ideology but as the truth. Therefore, masculinity ideology, according to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 86), does not only refer to cultural beliefs regarding masculinity but also to the way these beliefs are fundamentally rooted in major institutions such as education, employment, media, and politics, along with many more, and internalised by men.

Many people find it difficult to accept there are gay people who are masculine. This is because in their minds or beliefs, gay men are not real men but men that want to be women. When presented with a masculine gay man, it challenges their ideology of what a man is or should be. SA remains a very patriarchal society, where the masculine ideology held in this country is that a gay man must be feminine and a straight man must be masculine. Therefore, most representations of gay men in television border on this ideology.

### **2.6.2 Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is another confusing term not understood by many people, which means it is important to unpack its meaning and its connections to gender and sex, as explained above. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 405) aver that many people in the USA find sexual orientation and sexual identity more divisive and confusing than any other cultural diversity topic. They add that many religions teach that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is a sin, while some people believe it is a sickness one can be cured from. In this regard, many South Africans also hold this belief, in addition to having the conviction of homosexuality not being African but an influence from the west, from which one can be cured either by prayer or traditional methods.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 405) note many heterosexual people go through their lives without ever knowingly interacting with someone who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, with gay jokes remaining prevalent, similar to comedic portrayals of gay stereotypes in the media.

In recent times, the word gay was used by young people as a pejorative catch-all phrase for any statement or behaviour regarded as stupid or uncool, (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 405),

however, this has gradually changed. What makes sexual orientation a challenging topic, is the tacit cultural acceptance of anti-gay bias and that many people lack experience or information regarding those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (2014: 405). Moreover, the fact that many people's religious beliefs influence their attitudes towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual (LGBTQA+) persons presents another layer of challenge (2014: 405).

According to Dowshen (2018: 1), sexual orientation refers to the gender (male or female) an individual is attracted to, with three popular types of sexual orientation namely, homosexual (gay or lesbian), heterosexual (straight), and lastly, bisexual. The author explains heterosexual people are referred to as straight and are physically and romantically attracted to members of the differing sex: for instance, males are attracted to females, who in turn find attraction to males. Homosexual persons, also referred to as gay or lesbian, are romantically and physically attracted to people with the same sex as theirs; males are attracted to males and females are attracted to females. Dowshen (2018: 1) describes bisexuality as being romantically and physically attracted to both sexes (male or female). It is important to note some bisexual people are equally attracted to both sexes. "Some are more strongly attracted to members of the same sex or the opposite sex. Still others are attracted to a given individual with little regard for whether that person is of the same or opposite sex" (Woodhouse and Roberts 2013, cited in Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 419). Nazario (2020: 1) says sexuality is an important part of who human beings are and beyond the ability to reproduce, sexuality also defines how people see themselves and how they physically relate to others. According to Nazario (2020: 1) sexual orientation is a term that is used to describe a person's pattern of emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to people of a particular gender (male or female).

"Sexual orientation is usually divided into these categories: Heterosexual: Attracted to people of the opposite sex, Bisexual: Attracted to people of either sex, Homosexual: Attracted to people of one's own sex, Pansexual: Attracted to people of any gender identity, Asexual: Not sexually attracted to other people" (Nazario 2020: 1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Sexual orientation is usually divided into these categories: Heterosexual: Attracted to people of the opposite sex, Bisexual: Attracted to people of either sex, Homosexual: Attracted to people of one's own sex, Pansexual: Attracted to people of any gender identity, Asexual: Not sexually attracted to other people" (Nazario 2020: 1). In this project gay means being physically and romantically attracted to someone with the same sex as yours. This study takes the position that all the categories under sexual orientation are valid and should not be invalidated because of culture, patriarchy and misrepresentation.

Some lesbian feminists regard being bisexual as sexual confusion or individual unwillingness to commit. However, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 419) argue bisexual people are “not inherently hip, confused nor promiscuous”, and describes bisexuality as a distinctive sexual orientation type with no association to individual character or moral status.

When discussing sexual orientation, it is important to understand the history and policies of terms used, which Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 416) state can assist in the development of a shared lexicon that illustrates “how the limitations of the language and naming of sexual identities mirror the numerous ways discrimination and liberation have happened”. This concurs with findings by Miller (1995: xv) and Tamagne (2004: 7) that the terms homosexuality and heterosexuality were first used in public in 1869; in leaflets circulated to “challenge legal sanctions against same-sex erotic behaviour in Prussia”. Pickett (2011) explains the terms were made popular by Austro-Hungarian journalist and translator, Karoly Maria Kertbeny. She had corresponded with German theorist, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who was using different terminology and had originally proposed the notion of homosexuality as “a distinct category of social identity” a few years earlier. Pickett (2011) found that prior to this, same-sex attractions and relations occurred, but were not given a name or considered in the same manner as they are today. For instance, many early Greeks viewed one’s sexual interests - same-sex, opposite sex, or some combination of the two - as a matter of personal taste, as opposed to a reflection of morality, character, or even identity.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 419) remark that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word ‘gay’ was introduced as an alternative to ‘homosexual’. The authors add the word gay originally had a political meaning but was also used to denote a person’s sexual orientation.

As stated above, lesbian women can also be referred to as gay people. The term lesbian became popular around the 1970s, when women who identified as gay objected to being alienated and excluded from the gay liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 419) find that lesbian women saw most gay organisations were organised and run by gay men and excluded lesbian issues; they thus began to identify their own issues and established a women’s organisation to advocate for gay women. According to Blank (2011), the term lesbian comes from references to residents of Lesbos, an island in the Aegean Sea, where the poet Sappho lived during the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. Sappho wrote lyric poetry that celebrated love between women.

Other confusing terms when discussing homosexuality are transsexual and transgender. A brief discussion of these terms and their link to gender, sex and sexual orientation is offered below. As with gay and lesbian people, the transsexual and transgender community also faces widespread discrimination, often accompanied by violent acts. Transgender and transsexual individuals continue to not be fully understood and accepted in most communities, with their visibility and representation on television the subject of much discussion in the LGBTQA+ community.

In this regard, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 419) explain people who identify as transsexual or transgender can have a sexual orientation that is heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual. The authors emphasise that transsexual issues are situated more in the gender identity category, as opposed to sexual orientation. “Transgender and transsexual people are distinguished by their biological sex being separate and distinct from their sense of themselves as masculine or feminine. They often have a sense that their biological sex does not match their gender identification” (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 420). The authors further noted that an additional distinction between transgender and transsexual people, is that transgender people may use hormones but not have gender reassignment surgery. Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 420) add that transgender people live with the difficulties of their mismatched sex and gender identity, whereas transsexual people have undergone sex reassignment surgery.

Another popular term when talking about gay people is queer, with different meanings attributed to the term. According to Jagose (1996: 3), the word queer was previously used as a derogatory expression to deride gays and lesbians. However, more recently, the LGBT community has claimed it, in order to describe and dramatise the fact that biological sex, gender identity, and sexual desire do not always neatly match up. In the South African context, the terms gay and lesbian seem to be straight forward and understood that a gay person is a man who is sexually attracted to another men, and lesbian is a woman who is sexually and romantically attracted to another women. However, there is also the misconception that gay men are trying to be women or there is something lacking in their masculinity. Lesbians are also viewed as women who are not affectionate enough and therefore want to be men. It must be noted that these sentiments are mostly shared by ignorant people who are not familiar with sexual orientation and gender. This is why it is important for people to be educated on such matters. When it comes to KwaZulu-Natal which predominantly has isiZulu speaking people, these terms are understood. However,

there is contestation of whether these terms are insults or derogatory when translated into isiZulu language. Just like how the word queer, was first used a derogatory term against gay people, in isiZulu the word 'inkonkoni' is also considered an insult and often used to degrade someone who identifies as gay. The terms transsexual and transgender are not fully understood. Most people fail to grasp the meaning of these terms and therefore transsexual and transgender people are misunderstood in many parts of South Africa. This is rooted in the ideology that a person is either born a man or woman and anything outside of that is 'wrong'.

## **2.7 Reinforcing Heteronormativity**

Following the cancelation of *Ellen*, the sitcom hailed for breaking ground featuring being gay. *Will & Grace* featured two gay characters a lesbian character as its lead, in September 1998 NBC introduced another sitcom, *Will & Grace*. This sitcom also made history, with two of its lead characters being gay; Will Truman played by Eric McCormack and Jack McFarland portrayed by Sean Hayes. These two characters are so different from each other, from their first for example, when meeting Will it is not obvious that he is gay, because he does not fit the stereotypical gay man; while Jack is easily noticeable because of his femininity. In this section, the examples of the *Will & Grace* show and others will be used to discuss the representations of gay men in a way that neither offends heterosexual viewers nor can it be seen as challenging heterosexism which, in turn, reinforces heteronormativity.

In order to understand how television shows can reinforce heteronormativity, we first have to explore what heteronormativity means. Hsieh (2020: 1) describes heteronormativity as the view or perspective that heterosexuality is the only normal and dominant sexual orientation and everyone is straight, unless they state different. This echoes Cochrane (2016: 1) who defined heteronormativity as the idea of only two sexual orientations and genders, where binary gender and heterosexual orientation are the norm.

Heteronormativity is problematic in many ways, for instance, it boxes people, attaching labels they may not identify with. Should you not be heteronormative, you have to justify and explain yourself to people, while the same is not applicable to those who are heterosexual and cisgender. Cochrane (2016: 1) states when your identity does not adhere with heteronormativity, you are asked all sorts of insensitive and inappropriate questions, such as why is it you do not have a boyfriend or girlfriend and how you perform sex. According to Hsieh (2020: 1), heteronormativity is problematic because it disregards people who identify

as LGBTQ+, and heteronormative people discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, perceiving them as unusual. The author adds it is also problematic because of its view that gender is binary and fixed at birth.

Heteronormativity in pop culture is also discussed by Hsieh (2020: 1), noting when it comes to relationships, most shown heterosexual relationships are with cisgender people. Furthermore, sometimes a show might have LGBTQ+ characters but “otherizes their queer representation in such a way that does not normalize their sexuality as nuanced, and treats it more like a plot point” (Hsieh 2020: 1).

As highlighted by Battles and Hilton-Marrow (2002: 90), because of his appearance, the character of Will in the *Will & Grace* sitcom offers an unfamiliar model for homosexuality, therefore, he could be considered more threatening to heteronormativity ideology. “He fits well into a mainstream model of masculinity, being handsome, muscular and physically fit. Will provides a mainstream audience with a likable, well-assimilated gay character that is very different from the negative stereotypes of gay characters in early television” (Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 90).

Jacobs 1998 (cited in Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 90) notes while the character of Will has been praised as progressive, others have attacked it saying he was not gay enough. The character has been criticised for limiting the depiction of gay men to the white and upper-middle class. Will has been made more acceptable to mainstream heterosexual viewers, which alienates a large number of gay people (Gairola 2001, cited in Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 90). Jack is the opposite of how Will is portrayed; Jack fits the stereotypical gay man. He is noticeably feminine and is very comfortable with his sexuality. Other stereotypes associated with Jack’s character are that he cannot hold a relationship, does not have a stable job, and is witty.

Battles and Hilton-Marrow (2002: 87) maintain even though *Will & Grace* was praised by mainstream media for positively representing gay men, the show still “positions the potentially debated issue of homosexuality in safe and prevalent culture conventions, mainly those of the sitcom genre”. This theory has long been problematic in the depiction of gay men as mere ploys for comic relief, which is done so the underlying issues the gay character faces are overlooked and the character’s gayness is not presented as being too much in the face of the viewers. The audience knows the character is gay, however, every time they appear onscreen, they make jokes, which makes light of educating them about

homosexuality. When examining Uzalo, for instance, most scenes with GC are humorous as he cracks jokes, even coming up with humorous terms and facial expressions that leave social media abuzz. Yes, this has made his character popular with homosexual and heterosexual viewers, however, presents conflict, in that the message gets lost in the funny scenes.

On *Will & Grace*, the show “relies on these familiar situation comedy conventions, demonstrating how the programme equates gayness with lack of masculinity, relies on sexual tension and delayed consummation, infantilizes the programme’s relationships rather than the character’s connection to the larger social world” (Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 87). Additionally, the authors argue *Will & Grace* can be seen as heteronormative, because it invites mainstream viewers to read the show in familiar television settings comfortable to them. This is due to the way the characters are presented, as with Will being straight-looking, should you not be familiar with the show, you might mistake his friendship with Grace as if they were a married couple. This plays into the idea that only heterosexual relationships are normal and anything outside that is not the norm. Jack, who is the opposite of Will, is noticeably feminine, but Jack’s depiction is problematic, in that he is situated within a narrative space that relies on familiar comedic conventions to address homosexuality (Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 87).

In 1999-2000, when *Will & Grace* was on its second season, it ranked among the top 20 shows in America and the observation by The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation’s (GLAAD) (2000, cited in Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 88) notes the sitcom made history, as the first show in American television history to have gay leads; by the time *Will & Grace* was on its third season, there were 22 shows with gay and lesbian characters in leading, supporting and recurring roles. GLAAD also praised *Will & Grace* for portraying two different gay characters that are likable and for presenting sexuality. The show’s mainstream success is suggested by Gairola (2001, cited in Battles and Hilton-Marrow 2002: 89) to appeal to audiences who might not normally be persuaded to watch a show with queerness, which increased visibility and can be viewed as a sign of society accepting the gay community.

However, Battles and Hilton-Marrow (2002: 88) point out the show’s continued commercial success did not signal the end of homophobia in America, as the country remained embroiled in struggles indicating the contentiousness of homosexual people’s issues within the

heterosexist society. The large viewership of *Will & Grace*, as explained by Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002: 89), say comprised both gay and heterosexual viewers and shows a cultural acceptance of homosexuality is premature. Dow (2001, cited in Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002: 89) maintained, even though the coming out of Ellen as lesbian in her namesake sitcom made television history, it did not mean the end of prejudice against homosexual people and to say this, would be similar to saying the success of the 1980s black programmes, such as *The Cosby Show*, meant the end of racism.

Looking at the negative stereotypes of gay men presented on television in its early years, the queer characters on the *Will & Grace* sitcom can be thought of as being progressive (Fejes and Petrich 1993, cited in Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002: 89). The issue is, Will and Jack are positioned in a narrative that depends on familiar comedic dialogues for addressing homosexuality which, in turn, associates gayness with lacking masculinity. This has long been the way gay men have been portrayed in television.

“Comedic conventions of film and television have historically reinforced and poked fun at this stereotype of the gay man, by relying on this conventional representational strategy, *Will & Grace* fails to challenge heterosexist equation between homosexuality and that which is not masculine. And in the process allows enough space in the narrative for viewers to read Will’s character as straight”

(Fejes and Petrich 1993; Dow 2001, cited in Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002: 90).

For a long time, gay men have been shown as affectionate, with anything outside of that perceived as uncomfortable for viewers, while the affectionate gay men who are featured, are seemingly only there to make the audience laugh. They are never given serious storylines that show them in relationships or any other serious issues not for viewer amusement. According to Sedgwick (1990, cited in Battles and Hilton-Morrow 2002: 90), *Will & Grace* does not “force the audience to question heteronormative moulds of gender inversion”. This gender inversion refers to the frequently held credence that gays and lesbians are oppositely gendered; a gay man is thought to be more womanlike than a straight man and the same with a lesbian, in distinction to a heterosexual woman.

Characters threatening to heteronormativity ideology are not easily accepted in television. It is very rare to see a masculine gay man or an affectionate lesbian woman. When a character

is gay, they will be portrayed as being feminine and when there is a lesbian character, they will be shown as butch or masculine. This fits into the held belief that gays and lesbians are oppositely gendered; almost as if producers forget gender differs from sexual orientation.

## **2.8 The meaning of representation**

In the article, #OscarsSoWhite: How Stuart Hall clarifies why nothing changes in Hollywood and everything is changing, Molina-Guzmán (2016: 438) observes even though Hollywood has evolved over the years and more women have been included in television as writers, creators, and directors, racial and ethnic minorities nevertheless remain excluded in television and film. In addition, Molina-Guzmán (2016: 438) mentions the Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment (CARD) findings on the 2015's Hollywood film, TV programmes and digital series that states Hollywood still very much a heterosexual playground where you have to be white and straight, and women including ethnic and racial minorities are not allowed.

Molina-Guzmán (2016) engages Stuart Hall's work looking at representation, ideology, culture, and hegemony to place Hollywood as an institution of culture that is informed by and informative of US social principles and customs. According to Molina-Guzmán (2016: 440), Hall's work meaningfully contributed to the development of cultural studies, especially on media representations, viewers, and cultural and racial difference.

“In particular, Hall conceptualized cultural representations as a complex set of production and interpretative practices informed by a society's norms and values and thereby imbued with social meaning. Thus, Hollywood, as a globally dominant producer and purveyor of cultural representations, is a significant site for studying contemporary contestations over ethnic, racial, and gender difference and how those conflicts speak to changes in broader relationships of power”

(Molina-Guzmán 2016: 440)

Hall proposed a cultural method for studying ethnicity and race representations, which regards the media as an important cultural space to analyse socio-political power. “(W)hat cultural studies has helped me to understand is that the media play a part in the formation, in the constitution, of the things that they reflect. It is not that there is a world outside, ‘out there’, which exists free of the discourses of representations. What is ‘out there’ is, in part, constituted by how it is represented” (Hall 1992, cited in Molina-Guzmán 2016: 440).

When the media is constitutive of and created by society, studying Hollywood's structures and depictions of race and ethnic identity, as asserted by Molina-Guzmán (2016), reveals additional general conflicts over the social and cultural status of variance.

The lack of extensive representations of racialised groups in the media during the 1980s and 1990s permitted Hall (1992, cited in Molina-Guzmán 2016) to theorise regarding the complex ideological and power of the US and British contemporary society. Hall viewed the absence of representational change as being the result of a colonial ideological legacy which, according to Molina-Guzmán (2016: 441), Hall argued the historic reproduction of "Othering" through stereotypic binary ethnic and racial difference representations was indicative of the hegemonic struggle for balance of power.

This is similar to the representations of women and LGBTQ+ people in television, where gay people are seen to threaten the status quo that heterosexuality is the only and dominant sexuality, thus, their representations have been mostly loosely based on stereotypes. Even though Hall (1997) does not talk about sexuality, his theory can be used to address representations of homosexuality and what influences these representations.

Hall describes representation as the process whereby meaning is produced through language, adding that the representation concept has become an important inquiry in the study of culture, because representation links meaning and language to culture (Hall 1997: 15). Explaining further, Hall (1997: 15) states representation means "using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people". Representation comprises the use of language, signs and images in order to stand for or to represent things, where representation is a vital part of the process by which meaning is produced and swapped amongst members of a culture (Hall 1997: 15).

According to Hall (1997: 15) there are Various approaches to representation that exist and to understand the relationship between representation and language, the different theories or approaches must be examined to highlight how language is used to represent the world. These theories or approaches are; the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist.

- "Reflective - does language simply reflect a meaning that is already existent in the world of objects, people and events?
- Intentional - Does language express what the writer or speaker or painter wants to say, his or her personally intended meaning?
- Or is meaning constructed in and through language (construction)?"

(Hall 1997: 15)

Of these three approaches, Hall (1997) favours the constructionist approach to representation, emphasising this viewpoint has had the most important effect on cultural studies in contemporary years.

Making meaning of the concepts in our minds through language is representation; and representation is important because it is the link between concepts and language that “allows us to refer to either the real world of objects, people, or events, or the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” (Hall 1997: 17). There are thus two systems of representation; the first is the one by which most objects, people and events are connected with a set of concepts or psychological representations that are in our heads. The author points out that without these concepts or mental representations, we would not be able to meaningfully understand the world. Therefore, Hall believes meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts, in this case, which can represent the world, thus allowing us to refer to things both inside and outside our heads. “It is simple enough to see how we might form concepts for things we can perceive- people or material objects, like chairs, tables, and desks. But we also form concepts of rather obscure and abstract things, which we can’t in any simple way see, feel or touch” (Hall 1997: 17).

Further to this, Hall notes people also form philosophies about things they have never seen, and possibly cannot or will ever see, and about people and places we have simply made up, such as God, angels, the Devil, mermaids, Heaven and Hell, and so on. This is called the system of representation because, according to Hall (1997: 17), it does not consist of individual concepts, but of diverse ways of organising, grouping, arranging and categorising concepts, and creating complex links between them. The author makes an example of creating links between concepts or differentiating them from each other through principles of similarity and variance.

Language is also described by Hall (1997: 18) as being the second system of representation and it involves the overall process of constructing meaning. Hall points out that for our concepts and ideas to be correlated with certain written words, spoken sounds or visual signs, there must be a common conceptual map that is to be translated into a shared language. The author explains this by stating, “The general term we use for words, sounds or images which carry meaning is signs. These signs stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual

relations between them which we carry around in our heads and together they make the meaning systems of our culture” (Hall 1997: 18).

The link between signs and languages is that signs are grouped into languages and when there is an existence of mutual language, people are enabled to translate their thoughts (concepts) into words, sounds or images. People then make use of these operating as a language, to express meaning and communicating their thoughts to other people.

“Remember that the term ‘language’ is being used here in a very broad and inclusive way. The writing system or the spoken process of a particular language are both obviously ‘languages’. However, so are visual images, whether produced by hand, mechanically, electronically, digitally or some other means, when they are used to express meaning. So are other things, which are not linguistic in any ordinary sense: the ‘language of facial expressions or of gestures, for example, or the ‘language’ of fashion, of clothes, or of traffic lights”

(Hall 1997: 18)

Aspects such as words, sound, images or any object that functions as a sign and is organised through signs into a system capable of carrying and expressing meaning, is from Hall’s point of view, a language. “It is in this sense that the model of meaning which I have been analysing here is often described as a ‘linguistic’ one; and that all the theories of meaning which follow this basic model are described as belonging to the ‘linguistic turn’ in the social sciences and cultural studies” (Hall 1997: 19). Therefore, Hall (1997: 19) believes there are two connected ‘systems of representation’ at the core of the meaning process in culture.

The first system allows people to attribute meaning to the world by constructing a set of messages between things such as people, objects, events, abstract ideas, amongst others, - and their system of concepts, their conceptual maps. The second system depends on the construction of a set of correspondences between people’s conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organised into various languages that stand for or represent those concepts. According to Hall (1997: 19), the link between ‘things’, concepts and signs lies at the heart of meaning production in language and the process that links these three elements together, is what is referred to as ‘representation’.

In his 1973 essay titled “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse”, Stuart Hall discusses denotation and connotation. The author describes denotation as broadly associated with the exact meaning of a sign; since this exact meaning is almost commonly

recognised, particularly when visual discourse is being employed. For this study, connotation will be explored, which is very important in human cultures and communication, including television. Hall (1973: 133) describes connotation as referring to less fixed, more conventional and changeable associative meanings that differ from instance to instance and depend on the intervention of codes.

“We do not use the distinction – denotation/ connotation - in this way. From our point of view, the distinction is an analytic one only. It is useful, in analysis, to be able to apply a rough rule of thumb which distinguishes those aspects of a sign which appear to be taken, in any language community at any point in time, as its ‘literal’ meaning (denotation) from the more associative meanings for the sign which it is possible to generate (connotation)”

(Hall 1973: 133)

However, the author warns these analytic distinctions should must not be confused with differences in the real world.

Signs organised in a discourse rarely signify only their literal meaning, according to Hall (1973: 133), nonetheless, in discourses, signs tend to combine denotative and connotative aspects and it is important to distinguish between the two. Differentiating between the two is done, because:

“...signs appear to acquire their full ideological value - appear to be open to articulation with wider ideological discourses and meanings - at the level of their ‘associative’ meanings (that is, at the connotative level) - for here ‘meanings’ are not apparently fixed in natural perception (that is, they are not fully naturalized), and their fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed. So, it is at the connotative level of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification” (Hall 1973: 133).

It is at this level where that the intervention of ideologies is active and is visible on discourses. At this stage, the sign is open to new prominences and enters entirely into the struggle over meanings, which is class struggle in language (Hall 1973: 133). As Hall points out, this does not mean the denotative or literal meaning is outside ideology.

“Indeed, we could say that its ideological value is strongly fixed - because it has become so fully universal and ‘natural’. The terms ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’,

then, are merely useful analytic tools for distinguishing, in particular contexts, between not the presence/absence of ideology in language but the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect”

(Hall 1973: 133)

Therefore, the level of connotation of the visual sign, its contextual reference and standing in various discursive fields of meaning and association, becomes the point coded signs cross with the deep semantic codes of a culture and they take on more active ideological dimensions. Hall (1973: 133) uses the example of an advertising discourse, saying there is no purely denotative and natural representation with adverts; however, every visual sign in advertising connotes quality, condition, value or the inference is present as an insinuation or implied meaning, depending on the connotational standing.

### **2.8.1 Media Representation Theory as a Research Orientation**

According to Tawil (n.d), media representation is the way in which certain types of people or communities are portrayed by the media in film, television and literature. Similarly, Te Kete Ipurangi (n.d) agrees media representations have to do with how the media depicts certain groups of people and communities, even ideas and experiences or matters form a specific ideological or value viewpoint; New Zealand's bilingual education website is run by the Ministry of Education, According to Tawil (n.d.), many groups of people, such as people of colour, women, LBGTQA+ and many others, are poorly represented by the media, especially western media.

Having discussed Stuart Hall's definition of representation, his explanation of media representation is now the focus. Hall's (1997: 258) definition of media representation is that media representations do not simply reflect, but instead actively construct reality and its meaningfulness, and they do so within specific discourses. The author notes patriarchal discourses, for example, generate significations that reduce women and gay people to subaltern stereotypes. He also states representation is important, because it is the process whereby members of a culture produce and exchange meaning. According to Hall (2013: 1), where representation is concerned, signs, images and language can be used to represent phenomena.

There are many ways content creators may 'misrepresent' a certain group, perhaps under the facade of creating diversity. Some of the ways a community can be misrepresented includes tokenism, stereotyping and typecasting. Tawil (n.d) describes tokenism as a mere ploy of

creating an illusion that a minority group is represented, so that an environment or story may appear equal or varied. She states this happens in several ways in life, “from diversity hires at work, to the gay best friend in a television show” (Tawil n.d). Additionally, the author indicates stereotypes in the media may assume how an individual is supposed to behave because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. She warns seemingly harmless or positive stereotypes can deeply affect society, because they can create false expectations or assumptions that are frequently negative (Tawil n.d).

### **2.8.2 Media as a source of information**

The media is a very important source of information, which according to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 35, is used for interpreting, replicating and reinforcing a society’s dominant ideologies; and media consumers are often unaware of these ideologies. As Croteau and Hoynes (1997: 233) point out, it is possible for the media to have numerous meanings that can lead to the audience interpreting these connotations in a variety of ways. This broad scope permits the audience to create their own meanings by bringing their formal learning, what they have learned in social spaces together with critical thinking, to their media experience.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 37), drawing on the earlier work of Stuart Hall (1973), argue there are three ways media consumers can read the content they watch on television. The first is dominant reading, where the media consumer is said to be moderately passive and does not think about or process the messages consciously in the content; they simply take in the dominant message the media producer was intending. The second is negotiated reading, here the consumer partially takes in the dominant messages intended by the producer but also interprets the content using their own preferences and experience. Lastly, there is oppositional reading, where the media consumer takes a resistant stance, consciously interpreting the content based on their own anti-hegemonic worldview, preferences and experience. It must be noted these three readings depend enormously on viewer knowledge, experience and critical thinking (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 38).

### **2.8.3 Impact of gay representation in television**

Many factors inform attitudes towards homosexuality (Herek 2002, and Strand 1998, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 280) in the dimensions of gender or political orientation. However, the authors note not much is known about how these attitudes are formed.

Ballard and Morris (1998, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 280) note, similar to other sexual topics, attitudes regarding homosexuality are not inborn, but are socialised and several agents such as parents, religious institutions, and peers contribute to this socialization process. Scholars believe that prominent among these contributions is the media, which the youth frequently cite as their top source for sexual information (Brown, Halpern, and L'Engle 2005, and Ward 2003, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 280).

A 1991 study by Gross mentions media representations may be significant, because some parents may find it difficult to talk to their children with regard to sexual topics, while it may be controversial for peers to discuss sexuality or there may be no first-hand experience at all. Another 2003 study by the Pew Research Centre found media depictions may be the only source of information for the 40 percent of American adults who said they do not personally know a homosexual person. This may be the same for South African adults and teenagers who have never had interactions with a gay person.

Gerbner *et al.* (2002, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281) asserted that cultivation theory suggests exposing heterosexual people to media depictions of homosexuality might assist to cultivate audiences' own attitudes about homosexuality.

A 1996 study by researchers Riggle and Crawford, titled "The impact of media contact on attitudes toward gay men" examined the attitudes of 82 students towards homosexuality. The students were made to watch a documentary about a prominent gay politician, Harvey Milk, who was killed in a hate crime. Student attitudes were evaluated before and after watching the documentary, with the researchers finding that after watching the film, students had less prejudiced attitudes. Another study by Mazur and Emmers-Sommers (2002) encountered similar results after participants watched a movie about a non-traditional family featuring gay characters; it resulted in greater acceptance of homosexuality. Two other studies from Germany and America discovered people's attitudes towards homosexuality become positive after being exposed to gay characters on television.

In Germany, a 2001 study by Rossler and Brosius found teenagers who watched a talk show segment with discussions about homosexuality for a week, were later more accepting when compared to adolescents who had not watched the programme. Similarly, the study by Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2006) found the more undergraduate students watched the sitcom, *Will & Grace*, the more they had lower levels of prejudice towards homosexual men. This echoes findings by Gross (1991), who highlighted findings from this type of research

suggest exposing homosexual characters to heterosexual viewers appears to have an impact in the viewers' attitudes.

Ward (2003, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281) asks what the media can teach viewers about homosexuality and whether exposing heterosexual viewers to gays makes them more accepting or less? The author argues few have measured the media contribution to viewers' attitudes towards homosexuality, stating:

“This gap is addressed by examining whether multiple forms of media use correlate with viewers' attitudes towards homosexuality, and by examining which factors moderate these connections, focussing on the roles of social position (i.e. race and gender) and viewers' religious involvement”

## **2.9 Social Cognitive Theory as a Research Orientation**

Social cognitive theory is an extension of social learning theory and focusses on the different ways cognitive maneuvers on social experiences are believed to influence behaviour (Bandura 1986, cited in Prati 2012: 415). Therefore, social cognitive theory has been used in attempting to explain what influences human behaviour and reaction in many studies. Social cognitive theory has been chosen as one of the guiding theories for this study, because the research deals with human behaviour and reactions. It is hoped social cognitive theory may provide answers to the effects of LGBTQ+ representations on heterosexual viewers.

A 2012 study by Gabriele Prati, titled “A Social Cognitive Learning Theory of Homophobic Aggression Among Adolescents”, used social cognitive theory as a framework to explore self-reported homophobic hostile behaviour at school. The participants were 863 students from Italian public high schools, who had to answer a questionnaire that consisted of three scales: Homophobic language (The Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale), Homophobic bullying (The Homophobic Bullying Scale) and the Classroom homophobic attitudes (Italian Scale of Homophobia). Prati (2012: 413) reports that the results from the multilevel mediation model (1-2-1) revealed homophobic attitudes towards gay males at class-level mediated the relationship among student observations of peer homophobic hostility and self-reported engagement in homophobic aggression toward schoolmates alleged to be gay.

“However, although student observations of peer aggression toward perceived lesbians predicted self-reported engagement in homophobic aggression toward perceived lesbians, this appeared not to be mediated by class-level homophobic attitudes. Student observations of peer aggression toward perceived lesbians

predicted the self-reported engagement in homophobic aggression toward perceived lesbians” (Prati 2012: 413).

In concluding the study, Prati (2012: 413) relates that social cognitive perspective provided significant understandings into homophobic aggression at school and consistent with this viewpoint, social and cognitive aspects accounted for students’ homophobic aggression.

According to Psychologist and theorist, Albert Bandura, social cognitive theory offers an agentic framework that can be used to analyse the determinations and psychological mechanisms that through which communication that is symbolic influences human thought, affect and reaction (2001: 265). Bandura notes this is because there are two pathways that communications systems operate through; the direct and the mediated pathway (2001: 265). “In the direct pathway they promote changes by informing, enabling, motivating and guiding participants. In the socially mediated pathway, media influences link participants to social networks and community settings that provide natural incentives and continued personalised guidance, for desired change” Bandura (2001: 265).

The explanation LaMorte (2018: 1) offers of social cognitive theory is that learning happens “in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour”. In addition, the important aspect regarding social cognitive theory is its emphasis on social influence, as well as inner social reinforcement.

Bandura (2001: 265) is of the opinion human behaviour is often described in terms of unidirectional causation, in which behaviour is shaped and controlled by either environmental influences or internal dispositions; however, social cognitive theory explains psychological functioning in terms of “triadic reciprocal causation”. In this transactional view of self and society, Bandura (2001: 265) states personal influences, “in the form of cognitive, effect, and biological events, behavioural patterns, and environmental events, all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bi-directionally” (Bandura 2001: 265).

Since social cognitive theory is founded in an agentic standpoint that persons are not just reactive organisms that are shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces but are self-organising, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, Bandura (2001: 265) notes human self-development, adaptation, and change are embedded in social systems. The author explains that, “Personal agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences. In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social

systems. Personal agency and social structure operate as co-determinants in an integrated casual structure rather than as a disembodied duality” (Bandura 2001: 265).

Based on these contentions, it is important for television to do justice to gay characters in their storylines and not use them as comic relief or ploys to gain more viewers. Heterosexual audiences can acquire progressive intergroup behaviours from watching positive intergroup engagement of gay characters on television. Bandura’s 2002 study (cited in Ortiz and Harwood 2007: 617) argued that not only positive behaviours can be learned, people may also develop positive attitudes regarding others they are not familiar with through abstract modelling. This is when a person adopts rules learned in different experiences and uses them in different situations.

Allport (1954, cited in Ortiz and Harwood 2007: 615) asserted intergroup contact is a successful approach to fighting injustices, which can vary from discrimination to prejudice and negative stereotyping. The author suggested positive intergroup contact happens when individuals share an equal status, have the same goal and where institutional authorities support the contact.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 84) believe elements of gender development can also be explained by theories of interpersonal relationships and dynamics. The authors highlight these theories are concerned with the impact social learning and family dynamics may have on personal development and how they gender identify. According to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 84), people learn to be masculine or feminine based on what they see and observe. As such, Wood (2011: 37) posits, according to social cognitive theory, when children mimic behaviour they are told is fitting to their gender and receive reinforcement and palpable or intangible rewards, they are likely to continue with that behaviour.

Further to this, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 84) suggest social cognitive theory can also be useful in understanding the impact of media on people such as children, teenagers and young adults. The authors explain that audiences tend to mimic behaviour they watch on television that is being rewarded, regardless whether it is negative, positive or neutral. For example,

“...if adolescents view sexual activity on television repeatedly and the activity either is rewarded or lacks consequences, they will be much more likely to imitate this behaviour. The rewards can be obvious, such as if a television character is sexually active and as a result gets the long-term desired boyfriend or girlfriend. The results can also be subtler, such as the sexually active teen on television who is

attractive, popular and cool. Equally important to this theory is viewers' tendency to mimic characters' sexual behaviour that has no negative consequences. If these characters do not get pregnant, do not acquire sexually transmitted diseases, and do not lose status or popularity, audiences will be more likely to imitate their behaviour"

(Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 84)

## **2.10 Shift in LGBTQ+ rights around the world**

While most research and evidence emphasise that LGBTQ+ communities in many countries around the world remain oppressed, there is a glimmer of hope, with many countries recognising homosexuality. BBC News (2021) notes a global trend towards decriminalising same-sex acts, with 28 countries around the world recognising same-sex marriages, and 34 others that provide for some partnership recognition for homosexual couples. Further to this, as of December 2020, 81 countries had laws that protect against being discriminated in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation; a progressive step considering 20 years ago, only 15 countries offered this protection (BBC News 2021).

Rakhetsi (2021: 1) argues it is important to legalise same-sex relations, because it offers the LGBTQ+ community equality, and improves their psychological, physical and social wellbeing. In addition, friendly LGBTQ+ countries tend to see a boost in tourism, with queer travellers reportedly accounting for five to ten percent of global tourists (Rakhetsi 2021: 1).

In some countries there have been strides to decriminalise same-sex relationships. BBC News (2021) reports that in February 2021, Angola's President, Joao Lourenco, signed a revised penal code into law to allow same-sex relationships and ban discrimination on the basis on sexual orientation. The news report further notes other African countries that have recently made progress in gay rights are Gabon, Botswana and Mozambique. Last year in June, Gabon removed a law that had criminalised homosexuality and made same-sex relations punishable with six months in prison. In 2019, Botswana's High Court ruled in favour of decriminalising homosexuality. In addition, in recent years, Mozambique and the Seychelles have also abolished anti-homosexuality laws, while a court in Trinidad and Tobago ruled in 2018 that laws banning gay sex were unconstitutional. As Rakhetsi (2021: 1) points out, Lesotho is another African country that recently scrapped laws banning same-sex relationships, with the country having decriminalised homosexuality in its entirety in 2010, which had positive effects in the fight against HIV.

Britain, which colonised most African countries, has also discussed the implications of criminalising homosexuality and the benefits of lifting bans on same-sex relationships. According to Greenhalgh (2021: 1), Norman Fowler, who is the newly appointed United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) ambassador and former British health minister during Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership, recently said scrapping same sex bans around the world is vital to fighting the spread of HIV, as that would encourage more people to be tested. Fowler said many people in countries where homosexuality was banned were unwilling to come forward to test for HIV. During his term as Britain's secretary of state for health, between 1981 and 1987, Fowler oversaw the United Kingdom's first HIV/AIDS awareness programme, which he said was faced with widespread resistance, even from Margaret Thatcher (Greenhalgh (2021: 1). Fowler added that Thatcher was sceptic about adverts promoting safe sex, with this scepticism indicative of attitudes towards homosexual men and the broader LGBTQ+ community at the time.

Although gay sex was somewhat decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967, there was still an unequal male age of consent up until 2001. Greenhalgh (2021: 1) attributes this to the fact that Queen Victoria refused to believe that lesbians existed, which meant the age of consent for straight and gay women remained equal. Fowler also discussed how Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative administration passed a law in 1988 banning local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality. In 2003, this was overturned in England and Wales. In her State Opening of Parliament speech in May 2021, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II said her government will outlaw "ex-gay" conversion therapy, a dangerous psychological technique said to "cure" a person of homosexuality (Browning 2021: 1).

What is fascinating is that Britain introduced criminalisation of homosexuality to all its colonies, however, while Britain has now banned these laws, most of its former colonies are choosing to retain them.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

As this study is concerned with the representations of black gay men in South African primetime telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, it was important in this chapter to discuss literature relating to representations of gay men through the years. Furthermore, the researcher felt it was important to include explanations of words frequently used when discussing gender, sex, and sexual orientation, and of course, the effects of these words.

This chapter showed there is very little literature that speaks on representations of the LGBTQ+ community in SA, with the researcher struggling to find literature that speaks more to South African experiences. Additionally, the literature shows many heterosexual people have no knowledge of gay people or have never interacted with them before. Television is confirmed as a powerful tool for reaching and influencing people, therefore, it can be used in this case as an educational vessel. The literature highlighted that while the visibility of gay people on television has increased, much remains to be done in representing them fairly. However, the literature also pointed out that representation is complex and it is difficult to please everyone in your representation.

As mentioned above, this research study begins with the aim of exploring the importance of representations of black gay men on television and asks whether these representations play a role in shaping viewer attitudes towards homosexual men. Both media representation and social cognitive theories were discussed as theoretical frameworks for this study. The literature presented also touched on the role of the media and the impact of gay representations on television in relation to the two theories.

A brief discussion explaining the choice of CS as the approach for this study was presented, with CS discussed in detail in the next chapter; this approach is concerned with highlighting injustices towards the oppressed.

In the next chapter, the researcher will discuss the research design and methodology of the study and how these assist in the pursuit of achieving the objectives and research questions, while the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study will also be explained.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented literature relating to the representations of LGBTQ+ people over the years, along with a discussion on the rights of gay people in SA and the African continent. Chapter two also presented the two theories guiding this study, namely Representation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory.

Under the South African Constitution (RSA 1996: 8), sexual orientation-based discrimination is not allowed. However, many LGBTQ+ people in SA remain subjected to many forms of discrimination that sometimes lead to violence. Furthermore, while the visibility of gay people on television has increased over the years, these representations have been received with mixed opinion. Some have praised television for the increased inclusion of gay people, with others pointing out these representations are negative and perpetuate stereotypes about gay people.

Therefore, this chapter begins by presenting the study aims, objectives and the research questions that guided this study. An overview of CS as a research approach is provided, followed by participants, pilot study reflection, focus group participant sampling, and data collection, as well as data analysis, ethical and validity/ rigour issues, and the researcher's reflection.

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The aim of this study was to explore the importance of representations of black gay men on television and poses the question whether these representations play a role in shaping viewer attitudes towards homosexual men.

Key Research Objectives:

1. To unpack undergraduate media student perceptions on the representation of black gay men in South African prime-time telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*.
2. To determine what stereotypes undergraduate media students have on the representations of black gay men on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*.
3. To understand undergraduate media student perceptions on the creative process and dynamics of representing black gay men.

4. To investigate how undergraduate media students think new representations of black gay men are to be created and managed in telenovelas.

To achieve these objectives, the following questions were asked:

Main question:

- What are the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*?

Sub questions:

- What stereotypes are evident amongst the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*?
- How do undergraduate media students experience the creative process and the dynamics of representing black gay men?
- How can new representations be created or managed in the media industry?

### **3.3 Qualitative research method**

According to Patton (2002: 39), qualitative research uses a realistic method that seeks an understanding of phenomena in context-specific settings, in this case, “a real world setting where the researcher does not try to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton 2002: 39). Strauss and Corbin (1990: 17) explain qualitative research is unlike quantitative research, insofar as the qualitative study results are not arrived at using statistics or quantification. Further to this, Mohajan (2018: 2) describes qualitative research as a method of social action that reveals the way people understand and make sense of their experiences, in order to comprehend and act within their social reality.

This study, therefore, used a qualitative research method to explore undergraduate media student perceptions on the representation of black gay men in two of SA's telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The qualitative research method was selected as it provides an opportunity to gather rich and meaningful data and would let the participants freely tell their stories without fear, reflectively, and develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length (Smith, Larkin and Flowers 2009: 56). As Polkinghorne (2005: 137) points out, qualitative research is aimed at describing and clarifying subjective, lived human experience.

### **3.4 Research Approach**

The research followed a Cultural Studies approach to explore the role of telenovelas and the active audience paradigm to examine the dynamics of power in the representations of LGBTQ+ on television in South Africa. According to Buckingham (2008) what defines Cultural Studies is its concern with the relationships that exist between particular cultural practices and broader processes of social power. Cultural Studies examines how meanings and pleasures are created and distributed within society such as the manner in which individuals and social groups use and interpret cultural texts; and the role of cultural practices in the construction of people's social identities (Buckingham 2012: 94). Similarly, the University of Washington Bothell (n.d) describes cultural studies as a method for tracing relationships between aesthetic, anthropological, and political economic features of cultural construction and imitation. Researchers and practitioners of cultural studies query the joint understandings, principles and histories that shape the world. Furthermore, "This type of inquiry assumes that culture is not a fact to be understood and explained. What demands attention is how culture constitutes diverse worlds and how it can be mobilized to change those worlds" (UWB n.d).

Constructions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and more, are some aspects cultural scholars and practitioners explore. Therefore, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 36) state using cultural studies to analyse gay-themed shows may help us understand the impact of these representations. Below, the example of the sitcom that debuted on NBC in 1998, *Will & Grace*, is used. *Will & Grace* focuses on four friends, two of whom are gay men and the other are two heterosexual women. The two gay characters are Will and Jack and their heterosexual female best friends are Grace and Karin.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 36) note even though this sitcom has been hailed as one of the most successful gay-themed shows to follow *Ellen*, cultural studies analysis asks whether the financial success of *Will & Grace* and other queer-themed programmes, also means success in reducing stereotypes and shifting the idea of what is considered normal relationships and family. Cultural Studies offers another method to understanding the messages we receive through the media, since an important cultural studies element is understanding the philosophy present in numerous forms of entertainment media (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 36). Ideology can be explained as a "system of meaning that helps define and explain the world and that makes value judgements about the world" (Croteau and Hoynes 1997: 163).

In this regard, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 34) indicate that programmes, songs and movies can be scrutinized to see how they demonstrate multiple issues relating to culture and people's social order and things. The authors further note the significance of the capability and tools to distinct this ideology to the understanding of how cultural studies permits media scholars and media consumers to see outside the surface entertainment value. Furthermore, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 35) argue the main workings of cultural studies lie in the investigation of production and political economy as well as, media texts, and an understanding of viewers reception. The field of cultural studies includes examining media content within a context of media ownership, through analysis of how ownership and monetary self-interest in the industry itself influences decisions concerning media format, content, and distribution.

Interrogation of the Will & Grace sitcom by using cultural studies analysis, it is evident the gay characters of Will and Jack differ. While both are gay men, proud of their sexuality, they have distinctive personalities and express their masculinity differently (Holtzman and Sharpe 2014: 36). The analysis also questions whether, by pairing the two gay men with two heterosexual females as best friends, Will & Grace's ideology reinforces or challenges dominant cultural belief in which heterosexuality is regarded as the norm. The authors thus argue that Will & Grace are roommates in this sitcom, therefore, in the end, the show underpins the overriding ideology that heterosexual relations are normal. Moreover, by applying cultural studies analysis, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 36) maintain this dominant ideology is enforced through repetitive portrayals and themes, such as not showing the gay men in any physical interactions, while most visual images of sexuality are with Grace and her various love interests. At a glance, Will & Grace are presented as probably a heterosexual married couple, even though they are not romantically or sexually involved.

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 37) conclude by stating while the cultural studies analysis focuses on Will & Grace's dominant cultures, other researchers argue the mere existence of a show such as Will & Grace offers viewers the opportunity to understand the stories in a manner that challenges the norms of heterosexual romantic relationships and family.

This type of portrayal of gay people is still very much the norm, even today. Gay characters are rarely seen in romantic physical interactions. The first time SA saw two gay men kiss on primetime television, was with *Generation's* Senzo and Jason back in 2009, which caused an uproar with viewers. However, this is slowly changing, and viewers are increasingly used

to seeing two men kissing or being physical on television. On *Uzalo*, for instance, even though GC has had one relationship, the embrace between him and his boyfriend was shown. This is the same as with *The Queen*, where both Kgosi and Schumacher were shown in romantic physical interactions that might upset homophobic heterosexual viewers. What this points to is the dominant ideology in representations of homosexual people is that heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality is the 'other'. The cultural power and social dynamics associated with representations of LGBTQ+ people are that their sexuality is inferior, while heterosexuality is superior and normal.

This study also draws on feminism research because it deals with issues relating to oppressions of gay people. As stated by Robbins (1996, cited in Brayton *et al.* 2010: 1), the classic answer to what makes a research feminist, is that it is conducted by, for and about women. The authors argue there is no single definition for FR, however, there are certain key elements that help differentiate this type of research from traditional social sciences research, or research that studies women or gender, without seeking change.

Similarly, Fanow and Cook (2005, cited in Krause *et al.* 2017: 212) are of the opinion that embedded in the principles of FR methodology, is acknowledging "the centrality of gender, power, and opportunities for social change"; in doing this, researchers can empower women and other oppressed groups and transform existing patriarchal structures.

This makes it important to understand that FR does not only highlight injustices towards women; it can also be used to bring attention to issues of poverty, inequality, race, and LGBTQ+ issues, among others. FR has been chosen as the approach for this study, because it involves action towards social change and gender justice. Similar to women, gay men, black gay men in particular, have been oppressed in many ways and still are today. This may be because of patriarchal, heterosexist and homophobic reasons. Conducting research that will shed light on the way black gay men are portrayed in telenovelas, watched by millions of people daily, is thus important. By exploring perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, this study will build knowledge and promote social change in the way black gay men are viewed and treated.

Hesse-Biber (2012: 2) believes FR tests traditional researchers to engage gender vigorously, as a category of inquiry. Feminist researchers use qualitative and quantitative research methods and sometimes a mixture of both. Theoretical perspectives and research questions

that put women's issues, apprehensions, and lived experiences at the centre of inquiry in research, are what makes FR. Therefore, Hesse-Biber (2012: 2) points out the emphasis of FR on the importance of how gender interconnects with forms of women's oppression, based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, as well as nationality, and more. In addition, FR encourages social justice and works to implement social change in women's lives. The types of questions, methodologies, knowledge and purpose brought to the research process are the elements that make FR uniquely feminist (Brayton *et al.* 2010: 1).

FR has three defining principles. First, the double dimension is what characterises FR. In contrast to traditional research, FR objectives include constructing new knowledge and pursuing social change. Historically, it has been informed by struggles women endure against numerous forms of oppression. Second, feminist values and beliefs are what FR is grounded in (Ollivier and Tremblay 2000, cited in Brayton *et al.* 2010: 1). At all times, it seeks to include feminism in the process, to focus on the meanings women give to their world, while noting research must often be conducted within institutions that still harbour patriarchy. Third, diversity is what characterises FR, requiring that issues such as diversity, independent decision-making and the empowerment of women are addressed.

Ehrt (2019) observes that for more than a century, opposition has been voiced by the feminist movement to the belief that sex and gender should define societal roles, and the inherent gender-based discrimination and the violence that emanates from this idea. The author highlights the same root cause for societies' ill-treatment of women and LGBTQ people, suggesting the movements meet and fight this jointly. According to Ehrt (2019), protests against homo-, bi-, trans- and inter-phobia are supported by millions of LGBTI people who are opposed to and actively fight gender and other-based discrimination and violence so they can live a dignified and respectful life. The author further argues it is on the terrain of gender where the feminist and LGBTI movements meet. In addition, as Ehrt (2019) points out, the lack of knowledge on LGBTI issues is shocking and hard to eradicate; mostly though, communities perpetuate these ideas. It is, nevertheless, argued by Ehrt that society holds a view that the sex one is assigned at birth defines their gender, and both this sex and associated gendering are what inform one's gender role as social beings, in addition to one's sexual orientation. As explained by Ehrt (2019), anyone who deviates from this fixed pattern can experience severe consequences, such as violence, discrimination and ill-treatment of women and LGBTI people.

Methodology for FR differs from traditional research, in that it seeks to erase power imbalances between research and subject; it is also politically motivated, because of its nature to want to change social inequality (Brayton *et al.* 2010: 1). Hesse-Biber (2012: 2) states the praxis of FR is its emphasis on issues of power and authority between the researcher and respondents who participate in the research. This means it is important for researchers to practice reflexivity throughout the research process. According to Begoray and Banister (2012: 789), reflexivity is the process whereby the researcher becomes self-aware and reflects on own prejudices and assumptions and how these have had an influence in the different research process stages. “At its core, reflexivity is about reflecting on power. A researcher’s power to perceive, interpret, and communicate about others” (Reid 2004: 11). Reflexivity for this study will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

### 3.5 Participants

This study was conducted at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Faculty of Arts and Design in Durban, SA. Undergraduate media students from the Journalism programme and the Video Technology Department participated in the study. The decision to conduct this research within such an environment was based on the argument that once qualified in their respective fields, media university students become content creators of the shows we watch on television.

In total, 13 respondents took part in the two focus groups held. The first focus group had six participants, three females and three males, from the journalism programme and video technology department in the Faculty of Arts and Design, DUT. The second focus group consisted of seven participants, two male and five female, also from the journalism programme and video technology department in the Faculty of Arts and Design. Below is the representation of all participant demographics of the two focus groups held is tabled below (Table 2.2).

#### 3.5.1 Demographic of Participants

First focus group participant demographics:

**Table 2.2: Group 1 Participant demographics**

Names of Participants	Gender	Race	Field of Study
Sibusiso	M	Black	Journalism
Lucky	M	Black	Video Technology
Akhona	F	Black	Video Technology

Zimasa	F	Black	Video Technology
Nomonde	F	Black	Video Technology
Ayanda	M	Black	Journalism

Second focus group participant demographics:

**Table 2.3: Group 2 Participant demographics**

<b>Names of Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Field of Study</b>
Zandile	F	Black	Video Technology
Mandla	M	Black	Video Technology
Fisani	F	Black	Journalism
Phumzile	F	Black	Journalism
Thandi	F	Black	Journalism
Lindani	M	Black	Video Technology
Victoria	F	Black	Video Technology

### 3.6 Pilot Study Reflection

Hassan, Schattner, and Mazza (2006) describe a pilot study as a smaller study conducted by researchers, prior to embarking on a larger study. A pilot study is undertaken in order that researchers can test research, data collection instruments, sample recruitment strategies and other research techniques. It is an important stage of the study, because it helps identify potential problems and shortages in the research instruments and protocol before conducting the full study. Furthermore, it can also help researchers familiarise themselves with procedures in the protocol and assist in deciding between two competing study methods, such as interviews or questionnaires (Hassan *et al.* 2006).

A pilot study was conducted by sending out an online questionnaire to all journalism and video technology students via their email addresses, obtained through the secretaries of these two programmes. The main purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether students were aware of the two shows, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, which this study is investigating. This was also done to establish whether students understood representations and issues around homosexuality and sexual orientation. Of the more than 100 students the online pilot study questionnaire was emailed to, only five responded, which indicated students were either not accessing their emails or had no interest in responding to online studies. This also clarified that the data collection for this study had to be achieved through focus groups discussions.

As the students who responded to the questions asked in the online questionnaire showed an interest in the issues around homosexuality and had a bit of an understanding of representations, it affirmed the choice of study participants. The questions asked in the pilot study did not differ from those asked during the focus group discussions. However, the discussions provided the opportunity to ask further questions or to ask participants to elaborate on their responses, in addition to enabling participants to have a dialogue with one another. This proved the data collection method for the main study was useful, as opposed to the online questionnaire used in the pilot study. Moreover, responses from the study were very short to code, per thematic analysis, therefore, the pilot study was helpful in supporting the choice of participants, data collection and data analysis method for the main study.

### **3.7 Focus group participants sampling**

This study used purposive sampling. The students who participated were from the Journalism Programme and Video Technology Department in the Faculty of Arts and Design. These students were identified because when they graduate, they will most likely work in the media industry as content creators. They were invited to participate in the study, regardless of gender, race and sexual orientation. This was done so they could provide critical and varied viewpoints on representations, due to their diversity and different experiences.

According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016: 2), gathering data is crucial in research, with the data supposed to contribute to a better understanding of a theoretical framework. Therefore, the method of obtaining data and from whom the data will be collected is carried out with sound judgement. Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgment sampling, is the

“...deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses.

It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience”

(Etikan *et al.* 2016: 2)

Purposive sampling is typically used in qualitative research as a basis for identifying and selecting rich information cases that offer the most appropriate utilisation of available resources. Furthermore, this method means the researcher identifies and selects people or

groups of individuals who suit the phenomena by being proficient and well-informed (Etikan *et al.* 2016: 2). In addition to knowledge and experience, Etikan *et al.* (2016: 2) point out it is important for the selected individuals to have the willingness to participate. Participants must also have the ability to talk about their experiences and share their opinions in a clear, open, and reflective manner.

### **3.8 Data collection**

The data collection phase of the research involved the use of two focus groups as a means of gathering data from participants. The first focus group was made up of six participants and the second had seven participants. All participants were students from the Journalism Programme and Video Technology Department. Both focus group discussions were scheduled for an hour but ended up exceeding that by 20 or 30 minutes; this is because participants were relaxed and enjoyed the discussions. The venue used for both the discussions was the DUT, City Campus, Department of Media Language and Communication: Journalism lecture venue. This was a neutral, undisturbed venue and not a part of class activity. The focus groups observed all Coronavirus guidelines, as stated by the SA coronavirus website (2020) and the university, with participants sanitised, where seating was socially distanced and masks were worn throughout the discussions. All the ethical requirements were also observed, which will be discussed below.

### **3.9 Focus Groups**

Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011: 136) describe focus group discussions as part of a qualitative research tradition that is an interactive method involving six to eight pre-selected participants. Hennink *et al.* (2011: 136) point out the goal of a focus group discussion is to gain wide-ranging views on the research topic and participants must feel relaxed and comfortable so they can express their opinions.

After the participants had responded to the call for participants letter, another email was sent to them confirming the date, time and venue for the focus group discussions. These were conducted within two weeks of the initial contact and at a time and location best suited to participants. Two focus group discussions were held on 31 April 2021 and 2 June 2021, respectively, and lasted approximately an hour each.

The first focus group consisted of six participants, three females and three males, from the journalism programme and video technology department in the Faculty of Arts and Design. The second focus group comprised seven participants, two males and five females, also from

the journalism programme and video technology department in the Faculty of Arts and Design.

Each focus group started with the researcher introducing himself and explaining more about the study to the participants, in addition to their rights as participants and guidelines for the discussions. Even though the researcher is an employee of the university where the study was conducted, students were not coerced to take part.

Participants were relaxed and comfortable with sharing, answering all the questions posed to them and, in some cases, challenged each other's responses. For the sake of honouring participant confidentiality, it was decided to not use their real names but use pseudonyms instead. According to Allen and Wiles (2016: 151), the use of pseudonyms is a well-established test of good research practice, with researchers held accountable for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Creswell (2013, cited in Allen and Wiles 2016: 150) states it is the researcher's responsibility to protect participant anonymity: "A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants, for example, by assigning numbers or an alias to individuals" (Creswell 2013, cited in Allen and Wiles 2016: 150).

It must be mentioned that a fellow master's student and part-time lecturer in the journalism programme, Mrs Khumbuzile Mbuqe, joined the first focus group discussion 10 minutes before it ended. She was not a participant but sat at the back and listened briefly. She was merely there for moral support to the researcher. Even though Mrs Mbuqe is familiar with some of the students who were part of the focus group, her presence neither alarmed the participants, nor make them uncomfortable in any way.

### **3.10 Data analysis**

The data generated were analysed using thematic analysis, detailed below. After the two-focus groups were held, the researcher transcribed the data, then used Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step thematic analysis process to analyse the data. This is a process whereby the researcher identifies patterns or themes that arise from the data collected in qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2013, cited in Maguire and Delahunt 2017: 3353) highlight that a thematic analysis aims to find important or interesting themes such as patterns in the data, used to address the research or point out something about a problem. According to Braun and Clark (2006: 16), thematic analysis involves a framework split into six phases, "familiarising yourself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report".

### **3.10.1 Thematic Analysis**

As stated, Braun and Clark's (2006) six-steps were used as a foundation for thematic analysis. The researcher followed all six steps, which are: familiarise yourself with data, generate initial codes, search for themes, and review themes, as well as define and name themes, and produce the report.

Phase one: Becoming familiar with the data, "Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas" (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). To ensure this phase of analysis, the researcher immersed himself in the transcribed data from the two focus group discussion recordings. The researcher reread the transcripts at least twice to identify patterns and meaning.

Phase two: Generating initial codes, "Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code" (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). In this phase, the aim was to produce initial codes. Thus, to achieve this, the data had to be coded into "meaningful and manageable chunks of text, such as passages, quotations, single words..." (Attride-Stirling 2001: 391). According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 87), this phase starts once the researcher has read and become familiar with the data, and generated a list of initial codes made up of related ideas with regard to what emerges from the data that may be of interest.

Phase three: Searching for themes, "Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme" (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). In this phase, the codes had to be analysed and sorted to identify themes. During this phase, some codes were combined to form one theme as they were similar.

Phase four: Reviewing themes, "Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis" (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). This phase meant the draft themes identified in phase three had to be refined, with some themes eventually not being themes, because there are not enough data in support, in addition, other themes might collapse into one, while others need to be separated into different themes (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). During this phase, two-level analysis of the codes was used. The first level meant reading the coded data extracts to determine whether they form a coherent pattern. Where a coherent theme appeared, the researcher moved on to the second level of analysis. In places where codes were not suitable the origin of the problem had to be determined, as the theme itself could be the problem or

the codes or data extracts for that specific theme. In order to complete this level, the data had to be re-examined thoroughly to ensure the themes and data were a fit. This also provided an opportunity to verify whether all the data had been coded (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91).

Phase Five: Defining and naming themes, “Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). This meant the researcher had to re-examine the themes to identify what each theme means and represents. Further to this, the themes had to be examined in relation to the research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 92), the goal of this phase is to identify the essence of each theme and what aspect of the data each theme captures.

Phase six: Producing the report, “The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). This is the final phase and begins once fully worked-out themes are identified. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006: 93), in this phase the researcher has to analyse and write a narrative about the data that goes beyond its description and makes an argument in relation to the research questions.

### **3.11 Ethical and Validity/ Rigour Issues**

Simon and Goes (n.d) argue validity in a qualitative study is referred to as trustworthiness and reliability as consistency and these are often referred to as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, reliability and validity were achieved through the design and use of methodological strategies that ensure trustworthiness in the findings. These strategies include the use of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Below is an explanation of how these were employed.

#### **3.11.1 Credibility**

To ensure credibility in this study the triangulation method was used. This meant using pilot questions in the form of an online questionnaire, which was circulated to the email addresses of all journalism and video technology students. This was done before the actual focus group discussions took place, with the results of the pilot study not featured in this study, as it was meant to gauge student understanding of representations, homosexuality and to guide the researcher in the preparation of questions for the focus group discussions.

#### **3.11.2 Transferability**

In order to increase the transferability of this study, two strategies have been applied, namely, thick descriptions and variation in participant selections. Given (2012) points out transferability is the process whereby a qualitative researcher ensures participants represent the entire population.

“To increase transferability, qualitative researchers should focus on two key considerations: (a) how closely the participants are linked to the context being studied, and (b) the contextual boundaries of the findings. In the first consideration, the participants need to be relevant members of the community related to the study”.  
(Jensen 2012)

As this study examines undergraduate media university student perceptions on the representation of black gay men on television, participants had to be students from the journalism programme and video technology department. These students represent the population of content creators and viewers of television.

### **3.11.3 Dependability and confirmability**

Achieving dependability and confirmability was made possible by the researcher keeping all the research notes. However, the recording from the focus group interviews is with the supervisor, while the transcripts are available to participants should they wish to check them.

### **3.11.4 Ethics**

To ensure ethics were complied with during this study, the researcher applied various techniques, including informed consent and ethical clearance. Participants were provided with a letter of information and a consent form that they signed prior to the focus group discussions. Before the focus groups started, participants were told of their rights: anonymity and confidentiality, right to withdraw, that the research posed no harm to them, and gate keeper permission. They were additionally informed their identity would remain completely anonymous throughout the research process, with participant names not required during the focus group discussions. Participants were not coerced to participate in the study and were informed that they could withdraw from participating in the study at any stage of the research, without any repercussions. The study poses no harm to participants, however, participants were advised of the student health and counselling services offered at the university, should they feel they need to access these because of having participated in the study. Gate Keeping permission was obtained through the DUT research office.

### **3.11.5 Ethical Clearance**

The researcher was granted ethical clearance by the university to conduct the study. The ethics protocol number is IREC 160/20 (Appendix B).

### **3.12 Reflexivity**

Since this study uses FR as its approach, it is important to include researcher reflexivity, as required by this kind of research approach. According to Hesse-Biber (2012: 2) the praxis of FR is its emphasis on the issues of power and authority between the researcher and the participants, who are the research, making it important that researchers practice reflexivity throughout the research process. Reflexivity is the process whereby the researcher becomes self-aware, reflects on his prejudices and assumptions, and how these have had an influence in the different stages of the research process (Begoray and Banister 2012: 789).

As the researcher is a black gay man in SA, conducting this study was very important, in addition to which the researcher is also a qualified journalist and enthusiastic as regards issues affecting women and the LGBTQ+ community. As stated in chapter two, gay people in SA remain victims of vicious homophobic attacks that even lead to death. The researcher believes television is a powerful source of information and can be used to spread positivity when used correctly. Therefore, it is important to investigate the images of the marginalised that we are presented with on television.

To avoid bias, the researcher had to ensure his social position and beliefs do not influence the study or participants, while also confirming participant voices were heard and they could freely express themselves and their experiences. The steps taken to ensure this was obtaining ethical clearance from the university to collect the data with the students. In addition, before the focus group discussions started, participants were briefed of their rights and signed an informed consent form prior to participating, confirming their participation was not coerced.

The study supervisors have been involved in all stages of the research process and offered advice to ensure the study is not biased and all ethical requirements are met. Further to this, the researcher was given guidance by his supervisor prior to the focus group discussions, on how to conduct these conversations; which assisted the researcher to understand his role as moderator. Even though the researcher is a staff member at the university where the research was conducted, this did not intimidate or scare participants from sharing their honest opinions regarding the issues being investigated. Moreover, conducting the pilot study did assist with preparation of the focus group discussion research questions. The pilot study

proved the data collection method was the most appropriate for this kind of study, because it would allow for a relaxed dialogue with follow up questions.

Anxiety existed with regard to study participants because they were invited, regardless of their sexuality, and were not asked to declare their sexual orientation. Therefore, the researcher thought most students would not want to participate in the research, as they would be exposing themselves or the topic of homosexuality would be uncomfortable for them. This was not found to be the case, instead, the students who were part of the focus group discussions were comfortable to share their perceptions and experiences. In the case where they did not know how to respond to a question, they would state this, but still provided their thoughts on the matter. During the focus group discussions, the researcher was sometimes taken aback at how open the participants were, in particular, the participants from the first focus group.

The use of Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis guide for analysing data was very helpful in ensuring all data were transcribed, with proper coding to ensure the voices and opinions expressed by participants were not omitted. The two theories selected for this study, Representation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, have been instrumental in question formulation for the focus groups and selection of participants. The researcher chose these two theories, because the study deals with representations and their impact.

The decision to approach this study as cultural studies project drawing on feminism not easy but is justifiable because women and gay people are the most marginalised people in society. In the last two years (2020-2021), SA has seen a surge in gender-based violence, femicide, homophobic hate crimes, and killings. This points to the amalgamation of issues affecting women and the LGBTQ+ community. The focus group discussions also highlighted that, most of the time, when black women are represented on television, they are shown as struggling to make ends meet. This means as with gay people, who are represented in a certain way, the media sets an agenda on how they represent different groups, based on their stereotypes.

### **3.13 Delimitations**

Baron (2009) explains delimitations as factors that affect the study over which the researcher generally has some degree of control. Furthermore, delimitations describe the scope of the study or establish its parameters or limits (Baron 2009). Participants in this study were male and female media undergraduate students from the journalism programme and video

technology department in the Faculty of Arts and Design at a South African university. The following delimitations were utilized in guiding selection of the participants:

- Participants must be enrolled in the DUT Faculty of Arts and Design.
- Participants must be in their second- or third-year level of study in the journalism programme or video technology departments.
- Participants must have an interest in the study.
- Participants were invited irrespective of race, gender, and sexuality.

Students from the journalism programme and video technology department who met these criteria were invited to participate via their official university email, which outlined the study topic and participant rights. Once potential participants had expressed interest in the study, the researcher emailed them a letter of consent that outlines the study purpose and their role as participants. The consent form was signed on the days of the focus group discussions.

### **3.14 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the objectives of the study as well as the methodological approach. Further, CS as an approach for this study was discussed in detail, along with an explanation of the data collection and data analysis methods. This chapter also featured more information on the participants, sampling method and the researcher's reflexivity. The next chapter will discuss the data gathered in the focus groups, analysed using thematic analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Whereas the previous chapter discussed the research methodology employed in the study, this chapter will provide a narrative of the data obtained from the two focus group discussions conducted with the 13 study participants. Of the 13 participants, five are from the Journalism Programme and eight from the Video Technology Department. There were five male and eight female students in all.

The aim of this study was to explore the importance of representations of black gay men on television and asks whether these representations play a role in shaping viewer attitudes towards homosexual men. The study seeks to understand the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in the South African telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*.

This chapter will answer the key research questions posed in Chapter One and Two, which are: (1) What are the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*? (2) What stereotypes are evident amongst the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*? (3) How do undergraduate media students experience the creative process and the dynamics of representing black gay men? (4) How can new representations be created or managed in the media industry?

#### **4.2 Themes**

The themes below were discovered within the dataset during analysis; Negative Perceptions, Positive Perceptions and Suggestions for Improvement.

**Table 4.1: Identified Themes**

Themes	Sub-themes
Negative Perceptions	Portrayal relies on stereotypes Gays are shown as accessories to straight people Shows bisexuals as promiscuous Lack of career ambition
Positive Perceptions	Helps to create identity for gays Influences audiences on gay people Shows gays in townships
Suggestions for Improvement	Include gay people in the writing process Have varied representations of gays Cast gay actors in homosexual roles

#### 4.2.1 Themes Overview

The themes are organised into three main sections specific to the research questions: Negative Perceptions of gays on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, Positive Perceptions of gays on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, and Suggestions for improvement in representing gay men in media. The data gathered show the majority view held by participants is that representations of black gay people in television are negative and exaggerated. Participants pointed out representation is important, not only for educational purposes, but also because it helps minority or marginalised groups form identity. Further to this, participants felt there were instances where the depictions of black gay men were positive, however, these were very few in comparison to the negative ones. It was also viewed as important to acknowledge the increase in representation of homosexual people on television, but participants said this representation is often one-sided and relies on mostly false stereotypes. Last, participants offered suggestions on how they feel representations of gay black people ought to be improved. Among these suggestions were the casting of gay actors to play homosexual storylines, hiring of gay writers to write scripts relating to homosexuality, and more.

#### 4.3 Negative Perceptions

The sub-themes under Negative Perceptions answered the research questions centred on the way students perceive the representations of gay people on the two telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, investigated by this study. Upon analysing the data, it became evident student perceptions on the portrayals of gay people in these two telenovelas were very negative. When the initial codes (Appendix D) are examined, the majority of the perceptions are seen to be negative, resulting in the label Negative Perceptions. The sub-themes that emerged

under negative perceptions are; Portrayal relies on stereotypes, Gays are shown as accessories to straight people, Shows bisexuals as promiscuous, and Lack of career ambition.

#### **4.3.1 Portrayal relies on stereotypes**

A study by Fisher, Hill and Grube (2007) examined television content relating to gay, lesbian and bisexual people for a period of two seasons. This study found while there has been an increase in the visibility of gay men on television, their portrayal reinforces problematic stereotypes about gay men. Fisher *et al.* (2007: 11) note some of these stereotypes are that gay men are promiscuous and most of the content related to gay people is presented in a variety of comedic ways.

The participants also felt most representations of gay men relied on stereotypes and assumptions. The often-exaggerated portrayal is highlighted by the participants, including that gay men are always presented as flamboyant.

Mandla (group 2, page 151) stated:

*“I do also feel like there are times when they tend to exaggerate the characters just a bit. It’s like, you can kind of tell it feels a bit too unrealistic. Even though like I don’t know a lot of gay people but there are a few that I do know and personality wise they aren’t too hyper.”*

The exaggeration view was widely shared by participants, as many pointed to the problem with only showing feminine gay men being problematic, as people who have not had interactions with gays before, might not be accepting or understanding of other types of gays, particularly those who are masculine.

Fisani (group 2, page 151) shared:

*“I have seen from Uzalo’s GC and he is the most prominent. With The Queen it is Kgosi, Prince and Schumacher. These are characters that are very feminine within their homosexuality but there are also masculine gay people. It’s not a one size fits all type of thing and that is what I feel these telenovelas are showing us. So, us as the viewers and people who do not understand sexuality who only learn about it through watching these shows on television we may be more accepting of these feminine characters but in real life when we meet a masculine gay person it’s going to be like I’ve never seen this before”.*

Gross (1994, cited in Shugart 2003: 68) observed that until quite recently, when presented in mainstream film or television, gay men were portrayed negatively. They were shown as either victims or villains and, in both capacities, appeared as problems to be solved, mostly reflecting gender stereotypes that characterise gay men as feminine and lesbians as manly.

These stereotypes persist in LGBTQ+ representations today. When portrayed, homosexual people are shown as issues that need to be addressed by the community. They are shown as displaced, needing the help of their heterosexual counterparts to come to terms with their sexuality. Gay men are seemingly always feminine, while lesbian women are apparently all masculine. Perhaps this can be attributed to society's view that gay men want to be women and lesbian women want to be men. On Uzalo GC is feminine, and there is nothing wrong with that but because his character does not have a strong storyline, people fail to understand he is a gay man who is comfortable wearing women's clothing. He could be a gay man who is also a cross-dresser, although cross-dressing has nothing to do with sexuality, however, it appears the creators of Uzalo decided to present GC as a gay cross-dresser because, in their thinking, gay men are feminine and enjoy wearing women's clothes.

Thandi (group 2: page 153) also spoke on the issue of feminine gay men stereotyping on Uzalo and The Queen:

*"Uzalo and The Queen do not represent gay men in South Africa. Sometimes you come across a very nice guy where you think ow this guy is hitting on me, he is my type, he is manly and masculine but to find out he is gay. The issue is that they only show us flamboyant gays only".*

As society mostly perceives gay men as feminine, the only images of gay men that we see on television are feminine, with no variety that reflects the diversity of gay men. This means, it is easier for society to accept a feminine gay man than a masculine gay man. These representations are found suitable, as Brookey (1996: 41) believes they depend on their support of the established economic and ethnic hierarchy. Feminine gay men are seen to not challenge the status quo where, in order to be a 'real' man, you must be masculine, because masculinity is regarded as being strong and tough.

Phumzile (group 2: page 153) agreed with Thandi, saying: *"It's like if you are going to be on TV you have to be flamboyant and out there".*

The word flamboyant was used quite frequently by participants, with Thandi and Phumzile both mentioning it above. According to the Cambridge dictionary (n.d), a flamboyant person is someone confident in behaviour, who enjoys being noticed by other people, as a result of how they present themselves; the way they dress and talk. This word has become synonymous with feminine gay people because of their colourfulness. In most of the shows where gay men feature, almost all are feminine. When examining the 1990s sitcom, Streaks which aired on SABC1, the gay character there was a flamboyant and colourful gay man who worked at the salon. Years later, we are still seeing the very same images. GC is flamboyant and works at a salon, as with the character on Streaks.

Akhona (group 1: page 144) stated:

*“That is where representation becomes shaky because when you are used to a certain type of gay man and all of a sudden you are presented with a masculine gay man you do not understand”.*

The above statements indicate the general feeling by participants that there are no varied portrayals of gay people, with feminine gay men the only who are given a face on television. Representations such as these are not new, television portrayals of gay men have, for the longest time, played on the feminine gay man, forgetting there are masculine gay men as well and, sometimes, a person's appearance does not have anything to do with their sexuality. Hart (2000, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281) notes that in the past, gay and lesbian characters were represented as mentally ill on television. While this has changed, most representations continue to perpetuate stereotypes about homosexuality. Generally, the representation of homosexual people shows them as promiscuous, HIV infected, or in unfulfilling relationships (Hart 2000, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281).

The data from the focus group discussions highlight current representations of gay men that continue to be problematic and rely on stereotypes. Similarly, Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 405) note many heterosexual people go through their lives without ever knowingly interacting with someone who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, and gay jokes remain very prevalent, as do comedic portrayals of gay stereotypes in the media. According to Hall (1997: 258), media representations do not simply reflect, instead, they actively construct reality and its meaningfulness, and do so within specific discourses. One particular discourse Hall (1997: 258) mentions, is patriarchal discourse, highlighting that these discourses generate significations that reduce women and gay people to subaltern/secondary

stereotypes, which invalidate experiences of gay people and women. It also makes them unimportant in society because of their sexuality and sex; this is where gay issues and feminism meet, with both gay men and women continuing to be abused and marginalised. Ehrt (2019) notes the feminist movement has been opposed to the belief sex and gender should define societal roles, and have been fighting against the inherent gender-based discrimination and violence emanating from that notion, for more than a century.

#### **4.3.2 Gays are shown as accessories to straight people**

Students were adamant there is seemingly very little to no quality in the content regarding gay characters in *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The students in both the focus groups felt the gay characters in these shows were portrayed as inferior to their heterosexual counterparts. They were in supportive roles and mostly came across as accessories to straight people. Participants felt gay people were merely on these shows for the sake of numbers, in order that production houses or channels can say they have diversity in their programmes.

Sibusiso (group 1: page 139) shared that he is a gay man and since he was little, his identity was shaped by watching portrayals of queer people on television, adding that for him, representations of minority groups such as the LGBTQ+ community mainly depend on politics.

*“I’m a queer person and I’m 28 years old this year. And since I was about five, I knew exactly what time it was with my life. Where I was headed, what I liked and what I didn’t like. So, my experience of the media and queer images and presentations of queerness, I’ve been aware of that for a very long time. And they shaped my entire journey in as far as how I was going to self-actualize, how I was eventually going to self-identify, the roles I was going to try or not, the things I was going to portray or not, how I was going to try and hide things. Like there has been recurring problematic images like that across time. And I think the main issue is it always boils down to politics versus quality for me”.*

He continued, adding there is usually an influx of gay images on television, not because shows are trying to represent gay people, they are merely ticking the box to be “on the right side of history”, as he put it.

*“I find that there will be a year when there’s a huge influx of every media company trying to throw in something gay just because there was a grave injustice to gays or maybe there was gay pride where riots happened and so for the next 12 months*

*everyone is going to try and get on the right side of history. So, they want to say, “we are pro-gay, we’ve got a gay person on our show.” And the minute we do that, we lose quality in a sense that we start to incorrectly represent the community by just trying to get as many images like that out. When I think of Ses’Top for example, right? That’s a slapstick comic product. Everything is exaggerated, nobody believes the image of the grandmother on that show, no one believes the image of a girlfriend on that show. But they want to talk about the gay person on that show in contexts that are serious! How can that be? So, it’s the issue of quantity versus quality”.*

Representations are important because they can help form someone’s identity, similar to Sibusiso’s explanation, where his earliest realisation that he was gay, was shaped by the images of gay characters he saw on television. According to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 405), in the USA many people find sexual orientation and sexual identity more divisive and confusing than any other cultural diversity topic. The authors further point out that many religions teach being gay, lesbian or bisexual is a sin, while some people believe it is a sickness that can be cured. In presenting positive images of gay people on television, communities can be educated and young gay men will not fear coming out to their families or society.

Another point Sibusiso raises is the issue of tokenism. According to Tawil (n.d), tokenism is when productions feature a gay character on a show as a ploy in creating the illusion that the show is inclusive, while it is not. When tokenism happens, we sacrifice quality for quantity, as Sibusiso argues above.

In response to what participants thought of the gay characters on Uzalo and the Queen, Nomonde (group 1: page 140) stated:

*“I don’t think it’s wrong because personally I can’t say how gay people should be represented but I do think the representation on these shows is one sided. It’s always a supportive role, it’s always the gay best friend or the gay men is the secretary. We don’t get to see a different perspective of the gay man’s life besides them being flamboyant, loving people and being friendly. It’s not enough for me because I have many gay friends personally. In as much as they can be flamboyant, that is not all that there is to them, there is so much more”.*

While the acknowledgement of gay people’s existence became unavoidable, Russo (1981: xii) notes they were reflected as “dirty secrets” on television and in real-life. In concurring,

Fejes and Petrich (1993: 397) argue that American television in the 1990s used gays as comic devices, with cross dressing and role reversal behaviour, as well as homoerotic images shown merely as a comic relief ploy. This includes showing them in a sexual context (Fejes and Petrich 1993: 397). Nomonde makes a valid point that gay people on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* serve as comedic relief gimmicks. They are hardly shown in romantic relationships and when they are, the storyline is usually surrounded by the controversy of stealing someone's man or a relationship with a closeted or sexually confused man. As Shugart (2003: 69) points out, these portrayals "skirt the realities and insinuations of homosexuality by desexualising the characters", almost never showing them in romantic or sexual circumstances.

Akhona (group 1: page 140) stated:

*"With storytelling there is not enough people writing the scripts. It's people assuming that someone dresses like this and they write the script on something they know nothing about and when you meet a gay guy who is quiet and dresses masculine, you question it so much- like why is he gay? It's because the media is not showing all forms of gay people".*

Flamboyance and femininity have generally been associated with being homosexual, especially in television images. This constant portrayal of gay men as affectionate, borders on problematic stereotyping of the gay community, because not all gay people are flamboyant and not are feminine. Usually, when gay people are portrayed as feminine, it is for the comic relief of the show; in other words, they are not shown as flamboyant because they genuinely are but to mock and make fun of their sexuality to not be seen as challenging heterosexuality which is considered the norm. As Fisher *et al.* (2007: 11) indicate, a large portion of content related to gays, lesbians and bisexuals happens in various forms of comedy, where content is presented in a humorous manner and can also include portrayals that are both stereotypical and negative.

Zandile (group 2: page 151) shared:

*"I feel like they are always portrayed as flamboyant and they are all over the place, and that is not always the case. They are treated as accessories to straight people because they are like "I'm just gonna call my gay friend and be like hey, do you wanna go shopping".*

Above, the word flamboyant was explained, because participants discussed it repeatedly and extensively. The general feeling from the data suggests participants had an issue with gay people being shown as flamboyant. The word flamboyant is associated with being feminine or extravagant in appearance and manner, which makes flamboyant gay characters look frivolous and their existence on shows becomes a comedic ploy, rather than an educational moment. Furthermore, the issue of not casting gay men in leading roles was a huge issue for the participants, as they felt it limits their storyline. In *Uzalo* and *The Queen*, gayness is mostly seen through the eyes of heterosexuals, who are confused and struggling with their own feelings. Attempts to reckon with heterosexual fears and homophobia were applauded by Walters (2001: 104), expressing his fears this might further marginalise gay people, “set them aside as vehicles for straight enlightenment”, similar to black people serving as opportunities for understandings of race by white people.

#### **4.3.3 Shows bisexuals as promiscuous**

The Queen’s Schumacher is probably the second openly bisexual character on television in SA. The first was Senzo from *Generations* in the early 2000s. Many people do not understand Schumacher’s sexual orientation, with viewers perceiving him as promiscuous or gay but in denial about his sexuality. This stems from bisexuality not being understood. When people think of sexual orientation, they think of heterosexuality and homosexuality only. Moreover, when someone presents something outside of these two sexualities, they are seen as promiscuous or mentally ill.

In the discussions with the students from the second focus group it was evident they felt The Queen’s Schumacher was portrayed as promiscuous, because he is bisexual. This is a negative representation that borders on dangerous stereotypes and contributes to the rebuking of bisexuality as a valid sexual orientation. As Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: 419) argue, bisexual people are neither inherently hip, confused nor promiscuous; bisexuality is a distinct type of sexual orientation and has nothing to do with one’s character or moral status. The below conversation took place between the students and the researcher.

Fisani (group 2: page 152): *“He is also very confusing because the next minute he is gay and the next he is married to this girl. They are making him out to be a confused person”.*

Thandi (group 2: page 152): *“He is bisexual”.*

Phumzile (group 2: page 152): *“But he doesn’t want to admit it”.*

Mod: *“So, does being bisexual mean you can be promiscuous?”*

Thandi (group 2: page 152): *“No, it doesn’t give you the red card to sleep around with people just because you can have anyone”.*

Phumzile (group 2: page 152): *“But if you look at his relationships with other men, it wasn’t actually love. It was more about getting something in return like money whereas with the girls it was about love but some he was also using them”.*

Mandla (group 2: page 152):

*“I think another issue is that there isn’t much representation. Like on The Queen, Moshe Ndiki has left and there is only Schumacher. If you are someone who is also gay or bisexual, the only representation that you would see is that of Schumacher. He is always portrayed in a negative way that bisexual people are cheaters and cannot have a stable relationship. So, the representation of bisexuality is only Schumacher that they show enforces the stereotype that you can’t date a bisexual person because they will cheat with another man”.*

In the extract above, participants were discussing The Queen’s Schumacher, played by Vuyo Ngcukana. As briefly stated in chapter one, Schumacher has had various relationships with both men and women on the show, first dating Kgosi who is gay, then when Kgosi left, he dated Gracious Mabuza, portrayed by Rami Chuene. While dating Gracious he cheated on her with a gay man, Prince, played by Moshe Ndiki. When Prince became attached and wanted Schumacher to leave Gracious for him, he refused and opted to stay with Gracious. Both the characters of Gracious and Prince were written out of The Queen but Schumacher stayed. He went on to date Mpho Sebata, played by Ntando Duma and would eventually marry her, however, he also cheated on her with another gay man, Sipho, played by Unathi Matu.

Schumacher has been portrayed as a gold digger and a serial cheater on the show, where his relationship with Kgosi was based on Kgosi being rich and could take care of Schumacher financially. This was also the case with Gracious Mabuza and Mpho Sebata. In both relationships with Gracious and Mpho, Schumacher cheats on these two women with gay men and when they force him to choose, he always chooses the women over the gay men. This suggests Schumacher is merely using these gay men for sex and the women for financial gain. It leaves one to ask, is he bisexual and does being bisexual mean you can merely use

people and not have meaningful relationships? This is what the students debated in the preceding conversation.

As stated in the earlier extract, being bisexual does not mean one cannot date and be happy with a man or woman if they so choose. Schumacher's portrayal is damaging, in that people will associate being bisexual with promiscuity, using people and confusion. In whatever way the character of Schumacher is viewed or received by the audience, it is evident it starts people talking and to a certain extent, people are exposed to LGBTQI+ relationship dynamics they might not have thought of. Vuyo Ngcukana, the actor who played Schumacher, is straight in real life but is an advocate for gay rights in his own right. As mentioned in chapter one, the actor once called out production companies for using gay storylines in gaining high viewership numbers and not telling stories of their reality.

Naidoo (2021: 1) reported Ngcukana has taken an interest in issues facing the LGBTQI+ community and has, in the past, called out people who use this community for profit but fail to tell their realities. Ngcukana tweeted to his thousand followers, "Stop treating people like sub humans for your own benefit, you use gay slang and their fashion only to discard them after you've received your clicks and likes, respect them, respect me and what I portray, I'm tired of being polite and nice about this, stop it!" (Naidoo 2021: 1).

Recently, Ngcukana again took to Twitter, this time to praise The Queen's storyline for tackling homophobia. In June the show had a storyline where Schumacher's brother comes to live with him in Thembisa, because he is running away from his abusive father in the village. The father comes to Thembisa to take his son back home (Schumacher's brother), the brother refuses to leave with his father and an argument ensues. During the heated confrontation between Schumacher and his father, his father starts hurling homophobic insults at him, with Schumacher responding by punching his father. This storyline aired during June, with the assumption it was done to coincide with International Pride Month, which is June.

On this particular storyline, Ngcukana tweeted, "Big Up to The Queen for this storyline, I'm honoured and blessed to be a conduit that shapes history by telling stories that help us overcome the darkness that lingers around and within us, homophobia kills, Queer Lives Matter" (Naidoo 2021: 1).

#### 4.3.4 Lack of career ambition

Participants pointed out the gays on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* seemed to not have career ambitious or were portrayed as not educated or career achievers as individuals. On *Uzalo*, GC works at a salon as a hairstylist and on *The Queen*, Kgosi's profession was never known but his family owns a truck business and runs a drug business, while Prince is a secretary to Harriet Khoza (Kgosi's sister) and Schumacher works at a truck depot. The depiction of GC as a hairstylist and Prince as a secretary plays into the stereotype that has long existed in the portrayal of gay people as having a preference for doing hair and other things commonly associated with femininity. At the Salon, GC is shown as a gossip who knows everyone's business, while Prince, as Harriet's secretary is her right-hand man, who brings her gossip.

Akhona (group 1: page 141) shared she has a gay brother but fails to see her brother in the portrayals of gay men on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. She added that this may be because they are never given deeper or meaningful storylines.

She stated:

*"I have a gay brother and I don't feel like any of these shows have proper representation of gays. The character of Prince on The Queen is just there as a secretary. We don't know his back story. My brother went through so much bullying like throughout his journey and it has influenced him. He is flamboyant but I do not see any of the representation. They are all the same, one after the other. Even if it's a lesbian couple they are all energetically the same storyline. You never know anything about their lives. On the Queen, we know Harriet's story, we know that she was abused as a child but her brother Kgosi, we don't know his story. He is just there to support. Like there is never a full story".*

On *Uzalo*, GC works at the salon, he is just there at the salon but what happens afterwards is an unknown as everyone else is followed but what about him? By implication, everyone but gays have a full story, they are just there to support; as if the shows are saying they are playing their part in featuring a gay character and that is the extent of it.

Akhona's statement is testament to Brookey (1996), Dow (2001), and Walters (2001, cited in Shugart 2003: 69) that the dominant themes when gay characters are depicted, are that they are shown as devoid of gay social and political settings. They are presented through the eyes of established heterosexual communities and contexts and their presence is used as a catalyst for the growth and understanding of heterosexual characters. As Akhona states

above, when you examine Uzalo's GC for instance, for most of the show he was portrayed as not having a life of his own outside of his friends, Thobile and Sma. The two girls had relationships and families while GC did not. We only saw him at the salon providing comic relief. Fejes and Petrich (1993: 397) argue that in the 1990s, gays were used as comic devices in American television, with a comic relief ploy employing homoerotic images and cross dressing and role reversal behaviour shown as representative. This includes portraying gay people in a context that is sexual (Fejes and Petrich 1993: 397).

Zandile (group 2: page 152) reflected:

*"I have many gay friends and none of them work at a salon. Most of them have their own businesses because recently we were shooting a production with my friend and we invited one of my gay friends, Junior, he is an entrepreneur, he has his own business in the beauty industry. But in these shows they are never portrayed as business owners. I have another gay friend, he works at a law firm, he is a lawyer. So gay guys in television are never shown as career driven people, they just work at the salon doing hair and gossip".*

Thandi (group 2: page 153) also spoke about the lack of achievements or rather career ambitions of the gays on Uzalo and The Queen. She mentioned that gay people are known to be successful and creative, referring to South African media personality Somizi Mhlongo-Motaung, who is perhaps one of the most known openly gay men in the country. Mhlongo-Motaung is known as a choreographer, actor and television presenter.

Thandi (group 2: page 153) stated:

*"Also, if you look at the gay celebrities in South Africa, there is Somizi- he is one of the most powerful gay men in the country and we don't get to see people in the gay community being powerful or shining in these shows. On The Queen, Kgosi was always under Harriet's shadow, Prince was a PA (personal assistant), and on Uzalo GC works at a salon. Gay people are very creative and, on these shows, they are not given that platform. So, I think they need to be given more shine to slay".*

According to Kushnarenko (2019), feminism and LGBT issues are combined because the root of homophobia and transphobia is the inequality between men and women. As with women, gay men have always been viewed as inferior to heterosexual men. Perhaps their

depiction as secondary leads who always play a secondary role to heterosexuals stems from there.

“In our society, men and women are still depicted as Venus and Mars, black and white, two polar opposites that may complement one another but are not equal. Even though we see women getting more opportunities in various sectors now, can they truly use them as easily as men do? How hard do women have to work just to reach the starting point that men already have?”

(Kushnarenko 2019).

Representations of sexuality, when included at all, worsen gender norms and stereotypes in the media, which means it is significant to determine how LGBTIQ+ representations are understood and approached by the producers of these representations.

Sub-themes grouped under Negative Perceptions were: Relies on stereotypes, Gays are shown as accessories to straight people, Showing bisexuals as promiscuous, and Lack of career ambition. This section focused on the research questions centred on the perceptions of undergraduate students' understanding and interpretation of the portrayal of gay men on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. Participants discussed the evident stereotypes in the representations of black gay men in these two shows, as well as the creative and dynamics of representing black gay men.

The general feeling from the students in these sub-themes was the common impression that homosexuality is not a valid sexual orientation and anyone who identifies as homosexual threatens heterosexuality, which is regarded as superior and normal. In their opinion, this is why gay people are negatively represented. This stance can be described as heteronormativity, which Hsieh (2020: 1) says is the view or perspective that heterosexuality is the only normal and dominant sexual orientation and everyone is straight, unless they state different. According to Cochrane (2016: 1), heteronormativity is the idea of only two sexual orientations and genders, and that binary gender and heterosexual orientation are the norm. Hsieh (2020: 1) notes heteronormativity is problematic, because it disregards the LGBTQ+ community, where heteronormative people discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, in that they see them as unusual.

The following section continues exploring participant perceptions on representations of the LGBTQ+ community on these two shows and other programmes with gay storylines.

#### **4.4 Positive Perceptions**

As mentioned in chapter two, there are many negative ways that gay people are portrayed in the media. There have however been portrayals said to be positive or that represent the LGBTQ+ community in a progressive and favourable manner.

Representations of gay men are important, because they can influence the audience ideologically on how to be sympathetic and respond to gay men and their lived realities (Hart 2004: 241). These representations have added significance, educating those who have never interacted with or know a member of the LGBTQ+ community with regard to how to treat them should the opportunity present.

The sub-themes under Positive Perceptions answered the questions focused on the types of representations of black gay men in *Uzalo* and *The Queen* and other South African produced television shows. The questions asked provided participants the opportunity to reflect on images of the LGBTQ+ community portrayed by television and the impact of these on audiences. While most student perceptions were negative, they did point out a few they found to be positive. These help to create identity for gays, influence audiences on gay people and portray gays in townships. The positive sub-themes are expanded on below.

##### **4.4.1 Helps to create identity for gays**

In this section, the students felt that representations are important because they help create identity. In this context it is important to see yourself represented or it is important to see someone that looks like you on television. One of the participants, Sibusiso spoke openly about his sexuality and shared that he is a gay man. Sibusiso said for him, representation matters because parts of his identity as a gay man have been shaped by the images of gay men that he watched on television while growing up.

Sibusiso (group 1: page 139) stated:

*“I’m a queer person and I’m 28 years old this year. And since I was about five, I knew exactly what time it was with my life. Where I was headed, what I liked and what I didn’t like. So, my experience of the media and queer images and presentations of queerness, I’ve been aware of that for a very long time. And they shaped my entire journey in as far as how I was going to self-actualize, how I was eventually going to self-identify, the roles I was going to try or not, the things I was going to portray or not, how I was going to try and hide things”.*

The statement above proves that televisions depictions of the LGBTQ+ community do not only influence heterosexual audiences but homosexual viewers can see that they are not alone and that there are people like them out there. This is helpful it helps to create identity to know that you are not alone and that you are a normal human being just like everybody else.

Zimasa (group 1: page 140) shared:

*“I think gay characters on both these soaps are of great significance because they help people to better understand gay people and to be less judgmental towards their sexuality after all we are all human beings irrespective of gender, sexuality and skin colour”.*

She continued, noting there are other television shows with positive LGBTQ+ community depictions. Zimasa then mentioned *The River*, another telenovela that airs on DStv’s 1Magic. She said:

*“More recently I have seen another telenovela, The River which is giving different aspects of gay people. The River’s current storyline revolves around a lesbian who is disowned by her mother because of her sexuality and has to move in with her friend’s family. What I like about that storyline is that they were teaching people more about gay people. It was actually very educational”.*

*The River* the participant refers to above premiered in 2018 and has had various gay storylines since the beginning. One of the prominent characters on the show is gay and has had numerous gay relationships. When first introduced to Andile Dikana, the son of Lindiwe and Zweli Dikana, he was engaged to be married to a woman. Before the wedding took place, he tried to commit suicide, because he knew he was gay and did not want to marry a female. After learning the truth, the wedding was called off and the relationship ended. Andile’s parents then accept their son is gay and from then he begins dating one of his colleagues, Njabulo. Recently, *The River* introduced a lesbian storyline that the study participants mentioned, which they felt was educational.

Students emphasised representation is important not only because it creates a sense of belonging, because you are seeing someone like you reflected in television, it also creates pride. This may be interpreted as seeing someone of the same sexual orientation as yours, skin colour, tribe, and so forth.

Lucky (group 1: page 143) referred to the 2018 film, Black Panther, which has an all-black cast and director. He said black people, particularly black children would have been very proud when the film was released and of the achievements it has received. This shows representations matter, since they also help create identity, especially for under-represented minorities.

He said:

*“Take a movie like Black Panther for instance, it is directed by a black person, the whole cast is black. If I were a young black kid watching that I would feel really good about myself that there were super heroes like me out there. Even if you look at the cartoons, there are very few cartoons that are black. Majority of them are white”.*

Participants mentioned the reality TV show, Becoming, which follows four South African transgender people on their journey as they transition to the gender they identify with. Becoming first aired on Mzansi Magic in March 2021 and features Gina Sokoyi, Ramazan Ngobese, Yaya Mavundla and Gugu Kumalo.

Mzansi Magic (2021: 1) states the 13-part reality show will be “without judgment, delve deeper into the psyche of being a transgender person, as well as the barriers they need to overcome in order to live as their true selves”. The channel also pointed out that many South Africans often encounter challenges when they affirm their true gender and this process does not only affect the subjects but also their family and friends.

Nomsa Philiso, the Director of Local Entertainment Channels at M-Net said,

*“The most compelling aspect about our content offering is that we give viewers content that is relevant to their lived experiences. Our reality shows have grown in popularity over the past few years and this compelling series will not only entertain, it will inform and educate. It will hopefully help viewers understand how trans South Africans navigate through prejudice in their respective communities”.*

(Mzansi Magic 2021: 1)

During the focus group discussion, Akhona (group 1: page 145) said:

*“There’s also another show called Becoming. It’s basically a reality show with different kinds of trans queer people who are in the process of transitioning into the gender that they are comfortable with. I think it does show the reality of how the*

*family kind of treats trans people. But I also think that it's scripted in a sense, because you can kind of tell that the families are reacting in a way that they were kind of briefed that don't be too judgements because you can see them holding back their comments or trying to correct themselves when they say something. In the show you get to see them having their testosterone shots and the counselling as well. I think that's very important in that they are trying to crash the narrative that families aren't supportive of trans people”.*

Nomonde (group 1: page 145) shared:

*“I'm not sure if we talking about the same show, but there was also an episode I saw where a boy was coming out to his mother. He wasn't really coming out because I feel that the family knew but they were just in denial but he wanted to ask if he can wear female clothing to church”.*

So that then sparked a conversation like why can't other gay men wear female clothing because he was wearing female clothing. So why is it an issue now when he has to go to church but the church says come as you are?

Phumzile (group 2: page 154) also praised the showing for being informative:

*“There is another reality show called Becoming. It shows people transitioning from one sex to another. So that show is very informative”.*

Participants felt this show was informative and represented the LGBTQ+ community well. It must be noted that Become is a reality show, based on the real lives and experiences of the individuals it features, unlike Uzalo and The Queen or any other scripted telenovela.

#### **4.4.2 Influences audiences on gay people**

Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: xvi) assert that even smart and conscious television viewers can experience television in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, viewers know and can articulate the fact that the programmes they watch on television are fictional, on the other hand, they simultaneously and frequently internalise the subtle and often subliminal messages they are receiving. This means as viewers, even though we know the shows we are watching on television are not real, we tend to internalise and believe them.

According to Hart (2004: 241), representations of gay men are important because they offer ideological guidance to audiences with regard to how they can be sympathetic and respond

to homosexual men and their lived realities. As Hart points out, these representations can help influence people who have never interacted with gay men.

Hart (2004: 241) points out that throughout most of America's television history, gay men have always been explicitly and implicitly represented as inferior to heterosexual people. The author adds that the first representation of gay men in America to a national audience was in March 1967. This was a documentary titled, *The Homosexuals*, which aired on Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS). He notes this documentary was filled with many harmful stereotypes regarding gay men, ranging from the average gay man being characteristically promiscuous to incapable of being in a lasting relationship. Another observation he makes about the documentary is that the subjects, which included a "sexually needy sailor and female impersonator", were featured with their faces hidden, suggesting they were either shameful, unhappy or sick.

Hart (2004: 243) states that this influential representation in the late 1960s set the stage for how homosexual men were represented going forward, mainly as subjects of mockery.

"During this era, it was considered taboo for writers and producers to include any content in their scripts that appeared to condone homosexuality or to present gay men in positive ways, for fear that doing so would drive away both viewers and advertisers. In contrast, jokes and derogatory comments about gay men were encouraged as appropriate and entertaining forms of content"

(Alwood 1996, cited in Hart 2004: 243).

Participants made reference to representations of LGBTQ+ people that can have an effect on the audience that watches television. This effect can either be positive or negative.

Zimasa (group 1: page 140):

*"I think gay characters on both these soapies (Uzalo and The Queen) are of great significance because they help people to better understand gay people and to be less judgmental towards their sexuality after all we are all human beings irrespective of gender, sexuality and skin colour".*

As stated above under the Lack of career ambition sub-theme, Akhona (group 1: page 141) shared she has a gay brother and does not feel as if Uzalo and The Queen represent her brother's story. In addition, her parents had a difficult time understanding her brother's

sexuality and maybe, had they seen more positive representations of gay men on television, they would have been more understanding towards him. She said:

*“I just want to clarify that not when they are really young because my brother was gay growing up. We grew up together and growing up I never thought of him as my brother. We were just sisters. And he was beaten up all the time because of the way he behaved and the things we used to do. So, I feel like maybe if my parents saw it on TV they would see that it’s normal for kids to be gay from a young age”.*

Akhona’s statement attests that television can be used as an educational tool. When parents see on television that having a gay child is normal, they might begin to accept their children and support them, instead of creating feelings of guilt related to their sexuality. Many gay people stay in the closet and even marry as they fear family rejection. Parents and others must be shown that families have evolved and times have changed to where today, families are no longer comprised of the traditional mother and father with children, it can be two men or two women raising children.

Sibusiso (group 1: page 149) shared:

*“In as far as the writing of the characters in the stories, I think everything can be degendered and diversified. Not only gay men like to dress well, heterosexual men can dress well. Heterosexual women can play hooky and can be athletic or shave off their hair. Heterosexual men can have long hair. We just need to degender the way we portray things on TV because I feel like particularly in our society we live among people who look to the box to dictate how they ought to be. And the reality is they could be whatever they want to be without being forced to tick several other”.*

He also stated:

*“Diversity can’t consistently be the struggle of queer people or people in marginalized spaces who bear presence in the media space in diversification or in activism, no no. Everybody just be themselves”.*

Mod: *“Don’t you think the constant portrayal of the gay men being flamboyant like Somizi for instance, sparks conversation that people might not necessarily have if they didn’t know that the person is gay?”*

Sibusiso (group 1: page 149) replied:

*“Just as it is problematic the concept of a single story, even as a conversation starter a single catalyst can also become problematic. So, it’s not that there is anything wrong with his presence in the media space. I just think it needs to be balanced out with other true ones so that when we are discussing it at home and there is a son who is like, I think I might be gay. The reality is if he doesn’t feel that his personality matches that of Somizi, he is lesser inclined to discuss that in that space because as much as this space is now being accepting of “queerness” what it really is, is accepting Somizi and if I’m queer and not like him I go back into my hole of asking myself what is going on with me”.*

Zimasa (group 1: page 150) shared:

*“More people watch TV so if they are shown more often the public will get used to them (gays) and understand their sexuality. They should show them as warm-hearted people and caring or maybe show them with their families and boyfriends so that we can be exposed to same sex marriage”.*

Mod: *“Do you think representations of black gay men in telenovelas can help educate the public about sexual orientation?”*

Mandla (group 2: page 155):

*“Yes, I think so as long they are not put there to be smokescreen just so that productions can say we also have a gay character on the show. They should be written in these shows because they want to share information”.*

From the conversation above it is clear participants felt very strongly that depictions of queer men on television can be positive and can influence the way people understand and treat homosexual men in their lives or those they come across. The single and often one-sided representation is problematic, because it does not challenge societal norms or ideas of what homosexuality looks like. It constantly reinforces the notion that all gay people are the same, which could not be further from the truth. Gay people are different and representations need to reflect this, as opposed to constantly subjected to representations that border on stereotypes mixed with unfounded ideologies.

#### **4.4.3 Shows gay life in townships**

The topic of gays living in townships is a complex and complicated one. On the one hand it is acknowledged that gays have existed in townships for years and are visible members of

township communities. On the other hand, the majority of the LGBTQ+ community members who have been murdered in SA in the last few months took place in townships. As DeBarros (2021: 1) points out, close to 20 gay and lesbian people were murdered in the country between February and June 2021. This number keeps on increasing. Almost every month a member of the LGBTQ+ community is reported to have been gruesomely murdered, with mostly black queer people on the receiving end.

Participants felt that were viewers to be exposed to gay people living in townships they might be less homophobic towards them and treat them better. The depiction of LGBTQ+ people living in townships can educate audiences to homosexual people being members of societies and that heterosexual township communities need to learn to coexist with them.

The following conversation took place between the moderator and the participants.

Phumzile (group 2: page 151): *“I also don’t watch much of Uzalo at the moment but I watched it at the beginning when it was popular and they had GC. I was amazed to see GC who is a very flamboyant black gay guy living in a township”.*

Mod: *“Since Uzalo’s setup is in KwaMashu township, do you think a gay guy can be that flamboyant in a township?”*

Phumzile (group 2: page 151): *“Of course, you can. There are many gay guys in the township. Some do hair and other things. So, for me it wasn’t unusual seeing it on television because I’ve seen it before”.*

Fisani (group 2: page 151) responded: *“Even in townships like Umlazi there is always that one gay guy who is popular and gets along with everyone, even the gangsters in the township. He just softens them”.*

Thandi (group 2: page 151) shared: *“I like how fearless GC is on Uzalo. He is not scared of anyone. He speaks his mind and for him living in a township I’d say it’s not safe but he stands up for his sexuality”.*

In the first five months of 2021, DeBarros (2021: 1) reports 16 confirmed gay and lesbian members killed and two unconfirmed. These individuals died in various gruesome ways, including stabbing, being slashed, disembowelled, and dismembered, as well as burned. The majority of these killings took place in townships.

In Durban, 23-year-old LGBTQ+ activist and openly gay man, Lindokuhle Cele was gruesomely murdered in uMlazi Township and the body of Nonhlanhla Kunene, found half naked in the township of Edendale, Pietermaritzburg on 5 March. These are just two of the many killings reported. Much discrimination is endured by gay people living in townships; this goes as far as ‘corrective rapes’ on lesbian women, which is part of the stories that need to be highlighted on television as participants felt should these stories be shown, they might help fight homophobia. In the section below, participant suggestions are offered that can be employed in order to ensure fair and balanced representations of gay people.

#### **4.5 Suggestions for Improvement**

Participants also conveyed suggestions on how content creators can improve their representation of LGBTQ+ people. This answered the question of how undergraduate media students think new representations can be created or managed in the media industry. The sub-themes that emerged under Suggestions for Improvement are, Include gay people in the writing process, Have varied representations of gays, and Cast gay actors in homosexual roles. The participants are of the opinion the storylines do not capture the lives of gay people and relied on assumptions by heterosexual content creators. They also believed thorough research was not done when conceiving of these characters.

##### **4.5.1 Include gay people in the writing process**

Participants felt if content creators of gay-themed shows or programmes with gay storylines included gay people in the writing process, the representations would be more believable. They also emphasised research has to be carried out when gay storylines are created. Presently, participants said they feel the representations are based on stereotypes and assumptions of content creators.

Akhona (group 1: page 140) stated:

*“With storytelling there is not enough people writing the scripts. It’s people assuming that someone dresses like this and they write the script on something they know nothing about and when you meet a gay guy who is quiet and dresses masculine, you question it so much- like why is he gay? It’s because the media is not showing all forms of gay people”.*

This reverts to participants stating most representations are based on stereotypes and assumptions of the creators, which highlights the lack of research prior to creating the characters. Researching the subject beforehand could be very useful, should content creators

be serious about representing gay people and educating viewers about homosexuality. The trouble could be that South African productions do not have budgets to hire researchers or are not interested in educating audiences.

Nomonde (group 1: page 148) said she feels stories would be more authentic when they come from people with lived experiences. She shared:

*“I think directors and generally the people in the media should allow gay men to write their own stories just like how they allow women who have been abused or men who have gone through certain experiences to tell their stories. I feel like the stories will be more authentic if it comes from you. And obviously the type of things that we don’t know, you would be able to tell them better to us. It’s time for us to open up the industry. So not only to women because right now the media industry is fluctuated with men. So, it’s time for women to take up space but also for the LGBTQ+ community. Let’s not let our sexuality or gender define our work”.*

The suggestion of involving gay people in the writing process was widely supported by the participants. Surprisingly, the entertainment industry is filled with gay people behind the scenes who are, however, not involved in the writing aspect and are mainly active in the wardrobe or make-up departments; nonetheless, they could be interviewed on their experiences.

Akhona (group 1: page 148) stated:

*“Going back to what was said earlier, as producers, directors and writers if you are going to write a story about gay people, include gay people. Don’t just grab anyone and make them gay according to your assumption of what gay is, include them. If you want to do research about them, do the research but include the gay person because I feel there is a certain disconnect to authenticity when it comes to you just casting who you think would be perfect for the role whereas you could cast someone who is gay. Also, I don’t think telenovelas do enough to educate. It doesn’t have to be too detailed but it should be human. It shouldn’t just be about having a gay person there. If you are going to have a black woman in your show and show that she worked hard to get where she is, do the same for the gay men and I don’t think that’s being done. All we see is just supporting gay actor and that’s that. It doesn’t do enough to include the gay community. I feel like there is too much of there is us and then there is the gay community”.*

Akhona's point returns to the earlier mention of no research with regards to homosexual storylines. She makes mention it would be beneficial for research to be done prior to writing gay storylines. She also touches on the issue of authenticity, saying there is disconnect to the storylines. As highlighted by Hart (2000, cited in Calzo and Ward 2009: 281), the portrayal of gay and lesbian characters has evolved over time, from being portrayed as mentally ill, although most representations still retain stereotypes. The general depiction of homosexual people shows them to in unsatisfying romantic relationships, promiscuous, and HIV infected. This is a western way of representing gay people. In SA, gay people seem to always be portrayed as struggling with their sexuality and needing family affirmation, while also lacking intimate and fulfilling relationships. The depiction creates the impression that they are never in romantic relationships and have no homosexual friends, with only their heterosexual counterparts as friends. This is not true, not every gay person in the country is in the closet or looking for acceptance from their family, and gay people do not exist in silos. They have friends and do normal things like everyone else. This notion of always having just one gay person who does not have a life outside heterosexual people is misleading.

Phumzile (group 2: page 156) pointed out the significance in telling the struggles of gay people. She said:

*"Tell us their story. Even if you make them feminine but tell us their real story. The struggles they go through when they are alone and not in front of people".*

Another point mentioned by some participants was the casting of gay actors in gay roles, as participant Victoria stated below. This will be further discussed in the last sub-theme of this section.

Victoria (group 2: page 155) stated:

*"I think it is about involving gay people in the writing process and stop using straight people to play gay roles".*

The suggestion that gay people could be included in the writing process featured very strongly in participant suggestions. They felt there would be some level of 'authenticity' should gay people be involved in the writing process. This could be a great way to challenge stereotypes, because gay people would be talking from their lived experiences, instead of assumptions by straight content creators. Another point made was to cast gay actors to play gay roles because they would know how to capture the essence of the story. This is a bit

tricky, because not everyone can act and when an actor is good at portraying a certain character, they deserve to play that role. Yes, there are gay actors but are we saying by this suggestion they should not be cast in heterosexual storylines? When the script is well-written, it does not matter who plays the character, not unless we are complaining about gay actors not having jobs because of their sexuality; they should be given first preference where gay roles are concerned; however, aside from that, anyone who can play the character well should get the job.

Mandla (group 2: page 155) noted gay people can bring more depth and insight when they are allowed to tell their own stories. He shared:

*“As a content creator, I can write a story about homosexuality but there are things I won’t know so that is why a lot of these stories do not have depth in them. A gay person can bring more insight about gay life”.*

On the above, participants were adamant that if gay people were included in the writing process this could improve the manner in which gay people are represented as they would be writing from a lived-experience point of view as opposed to assumptions. Furthermore, productions need to invest in research departments and hire people able to conduct thorough research on sensitive storylines such as capturing the experiences of gay people.

#### **4.5.2 Have varied representations of gays**

Another point made by participants was the seeming lack of variety in the images of gay people depicted on television, particularly *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The students found the characters similar to each other, since they were the gay guy that was stereotypically feminine. In addition, they questioned the absence of images depicting masculine gay men and gay men with disabilities. Below is a presentation of what participants suggested could be done to ensure varied representations of gay men on television.

Lucky (group 1: page 148) stated:

*“Stop lying. Just be honest and stuff. It's the whole thing of feeding us the generic thing, like I said earlier, but we all know this, you know what I mean? Like from a more straight-forward sort of thing. you know what I mean? And also saying this for me is hard because I don't really know much about the gay community and stuff. We need a more honest and realistic picture, not this hyper flamboyant representation”.*

Lucky's use of the word generic means he feels the representations are too similar. A point raised several times above. Almost all participants shared the same sentiments that the representations are generic, not realistic, and the gay men are always depicted as a hyper flamboyant person. As Lucky mentioned, he does not know much about homosexuality and his only interaction with homosexuality is watching it on television. Lucky is not the only one who does not have a relationship with a gay person in real-life, other than watching them on television. Thus, by having these representations on television, they play a role in educating people.

Fisani (group 2: page 153) said when you cannot relate to images that are supposed to represent you, then you are not represented. She shared:

*"We are all different and we do not want to see the same thing all the time. And when you do not see yourself or someone that you know in something, it means you are not represented. So being represented means, someone else is also telling your story, also goes through what you are going through".*

Hall (1997: 15) draws attention to representation meaning the use of language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people. Representation involves the use of language, of signs and images in order to stand for or to represent things and representation is a vital part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged among members of a culture (Hall 1997: 15). Therefore, when Fisani says "when you do not see yourself in something or someone that is supposed to represent you", it means there is a disconnect in the production of representation that Hall (1997) talks about above. This disconnect indicates that meaning is no longer produced and exchanged among members of a culture.

Lucky (group 1: page 146) also spoke of representing gays with disabilities:

*"I like what was said earlier about the overall representation of the gay man, like I said, it's the blueprint, like you are facing ABC so you'll be like this, that should be like this, so now I feel this way so I'm gay and now that I feel this way I have to play this character. There was something ignorant that someone asked, that have you ever seen a gay blind person? And it's like of course you can be gay and blind but a huge part of how you portray yourself comes from the stuff you see. The blind person, that's the perfect example because you are just gay regardless of your disability".*

The point with regard to diverse representations of gay people is to also include gay people with disabilities. For instance, there has never been a disabled gay character on television. Indeed, there is very little representation of disability on television. There are gay people living with different disabilities, yet, they have never been given a face on television. Lucky is right that it is ignorant of people to not acknowledge there are disabled gay persons.

Thandi (group 2: page 153) mentioned the importance of diversity when gays are represented on television, making reference to Somizi Mhlongo, mentioned earlier.

*“Going back to gays on television, there are different kinds of gays so in television they only represent a Somizi and not all gay men want to be Somizi. When people think gay, they think Somizi and we want to see more diverse representation”.*

Phumzile (group 2: page 154) noted content creators must not have a one-size-fits-all approach to representing gays. She shared:

*“Include all gay men. Do not have a one size fits all approach. Show us different shades of gay. I mean we have classmates that are gay but you wouldn’t tell that they are just by looking at them. We have programmes that focus on girls, why can’t we have shows that focus on gay men, that show gay men succeeding and shows what they go through in life”.*

She was not the only participant who felt there was no variety where representations of gay people are concerned. The main factors that emerged during the discussions were variety, authenticity, and tokenism. Participants agreed when a gay character is presented on a show, they are feminine and in a supporting role that does not allow the writers to fully explore the homosexual storyline. This, the participants felt, borders on the stereotypes that gay people are feminine, and are just there for the amusement of straight people.

#### **4.5.3 Cast gay actors in homosexual roles**

The final suggestion made by the participants was that casting directors should cast gay actors to play gay characters. This is an interesting suggestion as Khaya Dladla, who plays GC in *Uzalo*, is gay in real life and so is Moshe Ndiki, who plays Prince on *The Queen*. Sean Hayes from *Will & Grace* is also gay in real life and so is Ellen DeGeneres from the *Ellen* show, both of whom were mentioned in chapter two. The students believed by using homosexual actors to portray gay characters onscreen, they would bring authenticity and play the roles with integrity.

Sibusiso (group 1: page 139), who shared he is gay and a part-time actor, was of the view that The Queen should have cast a gay actor to play the part of Kgosi, which was portrayed by straight actor, Sello Maake Ka-Ncube:

*“On The Queen for me, I have two problems. In the past when they cast Sello Maake Ka-Ncube as a gay character the performance was sketchy but it was weird because at the time I was also a practicing actor. There was such a big pool of queer people who are performers, who are out of work and could have told the story with integrity. They also said gay actors should be cast in leading roles instead of supporting roles”.*

Sibusiso raises the point mentioned earlier that gay actors could be cast to play gay roles, suggesting The Queen could have hired a gay actor to play the role of Kgosi. Sello Maake Ka-Ncube is a heterosexual male and a legendary actor. One might argue the decision to cast him in this role had more to do with his popularity, rather than his sexuality. There have previously been gay actors cast in gay roles, namely Khaya Dladla on Uzalo and Moshe Ndiki on The Queen. However, it must be noted when interviewed, both these actors said they had nothing in common with the roles they played. If they are saying they have nothing in common with their characters, then one would say these characters did not represent them.

Zandile (group 2: page 155) felt the same way:

*“Also, this thing of casting the same people every time. There are a lot of gay people that can play these roles much better because playing a gay role will come naturally to them”.*

Zandile made the same point as the other participants that gay actors need to be cast in gay roles. She noted they would play these characters with ease, because they would be portraying something they are familiar with.

Participants were asked why they think it would be better if gay characters are only played by gay people.

Zandile (group 2: page 155) replied:

*“Yes, in as much as you will be in character but you will be playing something that you understand more about. Like I am a female and I would play a female character way better than a man would”.*

Mandla (group 2: page 156) also replied:

*“I agree with her to a certain extend but if we say only gay men should play gay character there are people that won’t have work because they are in the closet now for them to get these roles they would have to come out. It is tricky because at the same time a gay man would know which line to cross and which not to cross with their character”.*

Another interesting conversation emerged when participants said they would like to see gay men in leading roles. Below is an extract of that conversation:

Lucky (group 1: page 145): *“I think it would be cool to have a show where you have a gay man who is a lead but is also successful in other aspects”.*

Mod: *“When you say other aspects, what do you mean?”*

Lucky (group 1: page 145): *“Where his sexuality doesn’t matter as much or that it isn’t the focus of the show. A black gay man who is just doing his thing”.*

Lucky (group 1: page 147): *“I also want to see more love especially among gay people”.*

Mod: *“When you say love, what do you mean?”*

Lucky (group 1: page 148):

*“I mean, my mother’s brother is gay and his getting married to a man. My uncle and his fiancé were telling me about a gay love story they want to tell because they feel like a lot of the gay love stories in television are misrepresented. It is always about someone being gay and having a problem with that whereas it should be about being gay and finding love”.*

He continued:

*“So, I want to see more positive things that do not highlight the fact that this one is gay but highlights that he is human being trying to find another human being to love”.*

Zimasa (group 1: page 148) shared:

*“I would like to see more content with black gay people and the way they are portrayed must change because it is the main reason why people often misunderstand gays”.*

Zimasa argues there is little content with black gay characters, pointing out that she would like to see more of it. In SA, as mentioned in chapters one and two, there has been an increase in the visibility of gay-themed programmes. However, as mentioned, this increase has been met with mixed reactions, with some who say it is a good thing gay people are represented, while others are questioning these representations. Zimasa furthermore notes the way black men is portrayed must change, because this contributes to them being misunderstood.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, some of these representations rely on stereotypes and assumptions. Both could be dangerous as they create false narratives and impressions, thus contributing to and reinforcing stereotypes that already exist about gay people or sexual orientation in general.

Phumzile (group 2: page 156) stated:

*“Tell us their story. Even if you make them feminine but tell us their real story. The struggles they go through when they are alone and not in front of people”.*

Phumzile did not mind even if the characters are feminine, as long as their ‘real’ story is told. As mentioned above, when represented, gay people are portrayed through the eyes of their heterosexual colleagues. They seem to not have a substantial storyline that explores their lives as individuals with life struggles similar to the other characters. The representations are superficial and mostly it is a support role for comic relief purposes. There are gay feminine people, which is why most on television are modelled after them, nevertheless, their femininity or sexuality is not the only thing about them. They have lives, families, friends, and lovers, as well as careers, and so forth, all that needs to be explored fully.

Zandile (group 2: page 154) said she would prefer the representation to be more realistic and gay characters must be shown to have careers. She said:

*“I would like them to be more realistic. They mustn’t always be flamboyant and all that. They must just be “normal” beings. They should have businesses, be teachers etc. I have never seen a gay teacher on a show, lawyers and so on”.*

Fisani agreed with Zandile (group 2: page 154) stating:

*“Like she is saying, I think their representations should stop being for entertainment reasons because most gay men in telenovelas are only put there to make us laugh. I feel like they use gay men for humour in these dramas. So, it would*

*be great if they had leading roles as protagonists and antagonists with proper storylines. Something serious, something that we could believe is real”.*

It has been established that over the years the number of gay people on television has increased. Almost every show on television features one or two gay characters. In the context of SA, this was addressed in chapters one and two. However, the issue the participants seemed to have, as they mention in the extract above, is this portrayal is not believable and they find it hard to resonate or identify with it. Participants pointed out they have family and friends who are gay and they do not see them reflected in these television programmes.

Representation and identity are important, especially to the marginalised or minority groups that are subjects of mistruths and discrimination. While the increase in the visibility of gay men or lesbian storylines on television is applauded, this visibility needs to mirror the reality of homosexual people. It needs to capture their lived experiences so they can identify with it and have their story told. Social cognitive theory posits that cognitive operations on social experiences are thought to influence behaviour (Bandura (1986, cited in Prati 2012: 415). Therefore, by conducting social cognitive theory studies such as this one, researchers may begin to understand or explain the impact and influence of human behaviour and reaction on minority groups or the marginalised, based on how they are represented on television.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provided the study analysis from which the main themes and their sub-themes were presented, with themes organised under three main sections: Negative Perceptions, Positive Perceptions and Suggestions for Improvement. Four themes were identified from participants opinions on how gay people are portrayed on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* under these themes. Thus, under Negative Perceptions, Portrayal relies on stereotypes, Gays are shown as accessories to straight people, Shows bisexuals as promiscuous, and Lack of career ambition, were mentioned. Three sub-themes, namely Helps to create identity for gays, Influences audiences on gay people, and Shows gays in townships, emerged as the factors grouped under Positive Perceptions. Participants offered solutions, where; Include gay people in the writing process, Have varied representations of gays, and Cast gay actors in homosexual roles, were the main sub-themes under Suggestions for Improvement. The chapter also discussed the key findings under the themes in relation to the research questions

on representation and media influence. The final chapter will provide a summary of the key study findings, the delimitations and limitations, and the conclusions.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the themes and analysis of the findings of this study were presented and discussed. The discussion was supported by the data extracts gathered from the focus group discussions with the participants. The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representation of black gay men on two South African telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The study focused on participant experiences with regard to the representations of the LGBTQ+ community and the role television can play in educating communities regarding homosexuality. The study sought to examine whether representations of gay men on television can play a role in fighting homophobia and create better understandings of sexual minorities and better treatment of LGBTQ+ people. This last chapter will present a reflection on the importance of representation and the social cognitive impact of representations, reflection on the themes, and limitations of the study. The chapter ends with recommendations for further research and the conclusion.

### **5.2 Reflection on representation and social cognitive impact**

Discussions on the importance of representations of marginalised communities are an ongoing process. These discussions are important since they assist in ensuring that whether marginalised or not, a community is well-represented in all spheres of society. At present, SA and many parts of the African continent are experiencing widespread homophobia and discrimination against homosexual people. As detailed in the literature review, a staggering number of LGBTQ+ people have been murdered in SA. The number of gay, lesbian and transsexual persons killed in homophobic hate crimes in this country is shocking and unfortunately, law enforcement agencies have not protected gay people as stipulated in SA's Constitution.

Many homosexual people in this country have experienced homophobia in one form or the other but do not report these incidences, because time-and-time-again police do not take them seriously. While the Constitution of SA protects the rights of LGBTQ+ people, they remain one of the most marginalised, vulnerable and discriminated people in this country, along with women and children. The harsh and sometimes deadly treatment of LGBTQ+

people has impacted the self-acceptance of homosexual people, where numerous people live their lives in the closet in fear of being victimised. Many gay people are also afraid to seek medical help due to being victimised by healthcare professionals. Victimisation of LGBTQ+ people does not only happen in the communities where they live but also in institutions such as schools, universities, workplaces, and clinics, as well as police stations, and more.

Representations are crucial in providing a sense of belonging for marginalised people. Through representations, marginalised people know that they are not alone. In the gay community, representations are not only important because of self-identity and awareness, they can assist in ending homophobia and marginalisation. Television is a powerful source of disseminating information, with representations of gay men on television important because they can teach the heterosexual community how to be more understanding and accepting.

This research establishes that the conceptual framework offers potential for improved representations of black LGBTQ+ people in television. The study found participant experiences with gay people played a major role in their perceptions of the representations of black gay men on the South African telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. As per the participant responses, while there are positive representations of black gay men on television, particularly in the two telenovelas that were the subject of inquiry in this study, the majority of the representations are negative and found to largely rely on stereotypes. However, there is a possibility of improvement in the manner black gay men are represented on television. Therefore, the themes that emerged from analysed interview data were grouped into three main sections specific to the research questions, namely: Negative Perceptions, Positive Perceptions and Suggestions for Improvement.

Under Negative Perceptions the following sub-themes emerged: Portrayal relies on stereotypes, Gays are shown as accessories to straight people, Shows bisexuals as promiscuous, and Lack of career ambition from participant feedback with regard to their perceptions on how gay people are portrayed on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. Participants expressed that although there are instances where queer men are depicted positively, the majority of the portrayals are negative and could be improved. Here, participants said gay people are depicted as accessories to straight people, attributing this to the lack of storyline quality. They also pointed out that gay characters are mostly not cast in leading roles but in supportive roles, which makes their storylines weak. Most of the time when a character is

gay, participants found they seem to be presented as flamboyant, usually with an exaggerated appearance. The students also pointed out that gay characters are always seen presented in heterosexual settings. This makes them appear less important and as problems that need to be solved or understood by heterosexual people. Participants also spoke on the bisexual character on *The Queen*, saying he is portrayed as promiscuous, confused about his sexuality and a gold digger. They felt this type of representation of bisexual people is wrong and misleading, as it plays into the ideology that bisexuality is not a valid sexual orientation but a passing phase. Another point made by the participants, was that gay people in these telenovelas are shown as feminine gays who work in salons who do nothing but gossip all day. This presents gay people as lacking in career ambition, which is not the case in real life. Participants emphasised they know many well-accomplished members of the LGBTQ+ community who are successful in their chosen careers.

Sibusiso (group 1: page 140) shared that politics and patriarchy is the reason the LGBTQ+ community is portrayed so negatively. He said:

*“I think these particular shows and the characters that are queer on them just speak to the sort of chauvinist misogyny that is behind the creation of the shows that we're receiving, not just because of the handling of the queer story but also just reducing queer stories on TV to being a black man issue. There are so many different kinds of queer as well that we are not seeing because once again it's all about men, it's all about the male deviance... we are not really here for that. Where are the trans people, where are the lesbians, where are the bisexuals, where are the asexuals?”*

He also noted the media industry has many LGBTQ+ people working behind the scenes and openly gay men have worked as writers on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* before.

Sibusiso (group 1: page 142) shared:

*“The media industry is filled with queer people behind the scenes but they don't control the money. So, they don't control the narratives. They are there just for box ticking. Even on *The River*, Phathu Makwerela who is the writer of *The River* has been writing all of these TV shows with problematic gays in them. He wrote for all of them before he was given a chance, even then he had to collaborate with a white person in order to get that contract. It was never going to happen for Phathu by himself but he obviously writes amazing stories. Bonga Percy, I'm sure still writes for both of these shows and like Phathu he is openly gay”.*

Helps to create identity for gays, Influences audiences on gay people and Shows gays in townships emerged as the sub-themes grouped under Positive Perceptions. This section continued participant perceptions of the way black gay men are represented on telenovelas. They noted it is important for gay people to be represented on television, primarily as this helps with identity and potentially encouraging others to reveal their sexuality. Participants also felt representations of gay people on television could influence acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. However, they stressed these representations have to be real and tell the stories of LGBTQ+ people. It was further highlighted that gay people have been living in townships since the beginning of time, however, they still face discrimination and harsh homophobia that sometimes leads to their death. Participants felt that by showing that gay people lived in townships this might have a positive effect in the way they are treated.

Include gay people in the writing process, Have varied representations of gays and Cast gay actors in homosexual roles were the main sub-themes under Suggestions for Improvement. Participants are future content creators as well as viewers of the shows that we watch on television. It must also be noted participants were made up of males and females and were not asked to share their sexuality; nonetheless, one male participant did share he is an openly gay man. This section answered the question on how undergraduate media students think new representations can be created or managed in the media industry.

Participants suggested that going forward, gay men should be included in the writing process of their stories. This included doing thorough research when generating storylines and that script writers should stop relying on stereotypes or their own assumptions. They also suggested the need for varied representations of the LGBTQ+ community on television, particularly of gay men and to stop promoting the flamboyant gay image. Lastly, participants said casting gay actors to play gay characters may also be a solution, as well as writing strong stories for homosexual characters. This included casting gay characters in the lead, so they are prominent in the programmes. Participants are of the view that the above suggestions could yield positive results should they be put to use by content creators. It is also evident that there are many negative portrayals of gay men that rely on stereotypes and assumptions, however, positive aspects can also be found in the depictions of black gay men, even though these are few.

The study was designed to explore what stereotypes are evident in participant perceptions on the representations of black gay men on SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*.

Furthermore, the study wanted to document participants' experience of the creative process and the dynamics of representing black gay men. Lastly, the researcher wanted to explore how students think new representations of gay people can be created and managed in the media in general. The following key questions guided the study: (1) What are the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*? (2) What stereotypes are evident amongst the perceptions of undergraduate media students on the representations of black gay men in two of SA's leading telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*? (3) How do undergraduate media students experience the creative process and the dynamics of representing black gay men? (4) How can new representations be created or managed in the media industry? Below is a presentation of the thematic patterns constructed from the data.

### **5.3 Reflection on the themes**

Based on the data from the participants who are media students, three themes emerged, Negative Perceptions, Positive Perceptions and Suggestions for Improvement. The sub-themes under Negative Perceptions answered the main research question, as well as some of the sub-questions that centred on the way students perceive the representations of gay people on the two telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen* that this study is investigating. When analysing the data, it became evident the student perceptions on the portrayals of gay people in these two telenovelas were very negative, as shown by the initial codes, which is why this theme was labelled, Negative Perceptions.

Among the many issues raised by the students were the issues of quality, over-exaggeration, no variety in the type of portrayals, and so on. Almost all the students felt the representations of black gay men on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* relied on stereotypes and assumptions, noting the portrayal is mostly exaggerated and gays are usually portrayed as flamboyant. Stereotyping is one of the ways content creators may misrepresent a certain group, especially a minority. As explained by Tawil (n.d), stereotypes in the media may be identified by assuming how an individual is supposed to behave because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. She warns stereotypes that may seem harmless or positive can deeply affect society, since they can create frequently negative and false expectations or assumptions.

Participants were of the opinion that content creators placed quantity over quality where representations of gay characters on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* are concerned. They pointed out the gay characters on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* did not have strong storylines but were simply

in these shows for the sake of ticking a box so the producers could say they are inclusive. Participants in both the focus groups felt the gay characters in these shows were portrayed as inferior to their heterosexual counterparts, as they were in supportive roles and mostly came across as accessories to straight people.

In this regard, Tawil (n.d) states pretending to represent a member of a marginalised group is described as tokenism; a ploy of creating an illusion that a minority group is represented, so that an environment or story may appear equal or varied. The author states this happens in several ways in life. Tawil (n.d) says in the work place it is 'diversity hire' and in television, it is often the gay best friend. Tokenism can be found in many television programmes with LGBTQ+ people. Usually on a show there would be one homosexual person or a person of a different sexual orientation to the rest of the cast. Often, this 'outsider' seems to have a problem with their sexuality or needs to be validated by their heterosexual counterparts. Tokenism deprives gay people of the opportunity to be fully represented, due to the character always being seen through the lens of heterosexual people.

Another thorny issue for the participants was how bisexual people were represented. Participants emphasised that though bisexuality was featured on *The Queen*, the problem is the bisexual character in the show is presented as promiscuous and confused. As stated in the literature review, representations of the LGBTQ+ community have, in the past, shown them as bewildered and shameless. This is exactly what the students felt about the character of *The Queen's* Schumacher, who is bisexual and probably the second bisexual character on SA's television, since that of Jason on *Generations*. Participants were of the view that sexual orientation was not understood and that is why homosexual and bisexual people are misrepresented.

According to Dowshen (2018: 1), sexual orientation refers to the gender (male or female) an individual is attracted to, with three popular types of sexual orientation, heterosexual (straight), homosexual (gay or lesbian) and lastly, bisexual. Homosexual people, which are also referred to as gay or lesbian, are romantically and physically attracted to people of the same sex; females are attracted to other females; males are attracted to other males. Dowshen (2018: 1) says bisexuality is to be romantically and physically attracted to both sexes (male or female). It is important to note that some people who are bisexual are attracted to both sexes equally. Woodhouse and Roberts (2013) write that some bisexual people have a strong

attraction to members of the same sex or the opposite sex, while others are attracted to an individual regardless of whether that individual is of the same or opposite sex.

Ambition was mentioned by participants as lacking in representations of gay people in South African shows. The participants were quick to mention that all the gay characters on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* did not seem to have professional careers or were shown as lacking in career ambition. As example, *Uzalo*'s GC works at a salon as a hairstylist and on *The Queen*, Kgosi's profession was never known but his family owns a truck business and runs a drug business, while Prince is a secretary to Harriet Khoza (Kgosi's sister) and Schumacher works at a truck depot. The depiction of GC as a hairstylist and Prince as a secretary, plays into the longstanding stereotype in the portrayal of gay people, of their preference for doing hair and other aspects commonly associated with femininity. At the Salon, GC is shown as a gossip who knows everyone's business and Prince as Harriet's secretary is her right-hand man who brings her gossip. Students pointed out that representation is not a one-size-fits-all and there must be varied representations for people to identify with. The section above answered the main research question and sub-questions that centred on student perceptions of the representations of black gay men on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The section also drew on student experiences and knowledge regarding sexuality. The sub-themes that emerged here were: Lack of quality portrayal relies on stereotypes, showing bisexuals as promiscuous, and lack of career ambition.

The sub-themes under the Positive Perceptions theme answered the questions that focused on the types of representations of black gay men in *Uzalo* and *The Queen* and other South African produced television shows. The questions asked provided participants the opportunity to reflect on images of the LGBTQ+ community in television and the impact of these on audiences. While the majority of student' perceptions were negative, they did point out a few they found to be positive. Sub-themes under Positive Perceptions were: Helps to create identity for gays, Influences audiences on gay people and Shows gay life in townships. According to Hart (2004: 241), representations of gay men are important because they can influence the audience ideologically on how to be sympathetic and respond to gay men and their lived realities. These representations are important as anyone who has not interacted with or know a member of the LGBTQ+ community is able to learn how to treat them when encountered.

Participants expressed those representations of gay people in the media are important, since they help create identity for those homosexual people who may be hiding their sexuality or confused by it. Therefore, in a way, these representations can be educational. One participant shared he is a gay man and his identity was shaped by images of gay men on television. In addition, participants felt by having images of homosexual people on television, heterosexual viewers who do not know gay people in their lives might watch, and be influenced by these portrayals on how to treat gay people when they come across them. Participants were adamant viewers can be influenced by what they watched on television, highlighting that these shows have the power to influence people's attitudes towards gay people and how to treat them.

According to Holtzman and Sharpe (2014: xvi), even smart and conscious television viewers can experience television in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, viewers know and can articulate that the programmes they watch on television are fictional, yet, at the same time, they frequently believe and internalise the subtle and often subliminal messages they are receiving. This means as viewers, even though we know the shows we are watching on television are not real, we tend to adopt and trust them. This means when balanced images are seen of how people can live together in harmony, without sexual orientation being an issue, we might start to see change in the manner gay people are treated in communities.

Participants said they appreciated *Uzalo* and *The Queen* showing gay people living in townships. On *Uzalo*, GC is from KwaMashu township in the KZN province and on *The Queen*, Schumacher is from Thembisa township in the Gauteng province. The issue is, even though the setting of these gay character storylines revolves around the township, we are not shown the complexities of gay people living in a township. For instance, in chapter one, the shocking number of gay people that have been killed in SA in recent times was mentioned. It was also highlighted that most of these murders took place in townships. However, participants felt these township settings were positive and progressive, as people would be able to identify with them. It was felt that when viewers are exposed to gay people living in townships, they might be less homophobic towards them and treat them better. The depiction of LGBTQ+ people living in townships can educate audiences that homosexual people are members of societies and co-existence needs to be learned by heterosexual township communities.

The sub-themes under Suggestions for Improvement answered the research question that sought to explore how new representations of gay people can be created and managed in the media. Participants also gave suggestions on how content creators can improve on their representation of LGBTQ+ people. The sub-themes that emerged under Suggestions for Improvement are, Include gay people in the writing process, Have varied representations of gays and Cast gay actors in homosexual roles. Participants were of the view the lives of gay people were not captured by the storylines and relied on heterosexual content creators' assumptions. They also felt that thorough research was not undertaken when these characters were created. Participants believed should writers or producers of shows that feature gay people include gay people in the writing process, representations would improve and be more positive. They also pointed out the necessity for research to be carried out when gay storylines are created.

At present, participants said they considered the representations are based on content creator conjecture. They said all the characters on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* resembled each other, in that they were the stereotypical feminine gay guy. They also questioned why no images are shown of masculine gay men or those with disabilities. Participants stressed the importance of varied representations of gay people, as not all gay people are identical, expressing the wish to see masculine gay men being represented. Some even said they would like to see disabled homosexual people shown on television, which would show the different kinds of gay people in the world. Most of the gay characters on television are feminine, nevertheless, as pointed out earlier this is not a universal portrayal, since gay people come in all sizes and shapes.

It was also suggested by the participants that to truthfully portray gay characters, casting directors should cast gay actors. This is an interesting point, as the actor who plays GC in *Uzalo*, Khaya Dladla, is gay in real life and so is the actor who portrays Prince on *The Queen*, Moshe Ndiki, as are Sean Hayes from *Will & Grace*, who is also gay in real life and Ellen DeGeneres from the *Ellen* show. By using homosexual actors to portray gay characters onscreen, participants felt they would bring authenticity and play the roles with integrity. Presently there is an ongoing debate in America with regard to representation and the casting of actors.

The example that sparked this is the recent upset caused by actress Renée Zellweger, who was photographed on the set of her new movie carrying a fat bodysuit. This was highlighted

as fat shaming and raised the question why a fat person was not cast to play the role, instead of having Zellweger wear a fat bodysuit. Biggs (2021: 1) writes that Jess Megan, a plus-size content creator's use of a fat suit by Zellweger, was another grim message to talented fat actors that even though they have lived experiences of having the required type of body, a slimmer actress would still somehow play the role better.

Megan is quoted as saying,

“There are some brilliant fat actresses out there, and even if none of them were suitable, they could have found a new star for the limited amount of representation fat people already have. We don't show enough love and support towards people in larger bodies, partially because we don't see them represented within the media. That's because directors and producers aren't seeking them out and casting them for these roles, choosing people like Renee Zellweger, a famously slim actress, to play them instead. It's a vicious cycle” (Biggs 2021: 1).

It is possible the suggestions of casting LGBTQ+ in these roles might work, such as the show *Pose*, which has been hailed for its representation of black and Latina gay and transsexual people, because the cast and writers are from the LGBTQ+ community.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

In making the following recommendations for future research, the researcher considered participant suggestions as well as a review of the literature to determine existing gaps for further exploration. Below are the four areas the researcher believes might, going forward, add value to the way LGBTQ+ people are represented on television.

One of the suggestions made by the participants under the theme Suggestions for Improvement is the casting of gay actors in homosexual roles. Their belief is that gay actors would be able to portray these roles better and bring a certain amount of authenticity in their depictions than straight actors would not. Although there have been gay actors that have played gay roles before, their impact seems to not have been researched before. As mentioned in chapter one, Moshe Ndiki of *The Queen* and Khaya Dladla are gay in real life and both have been quoted that there are very few similarities between themselves and the characters they portray in these shows. Sean Hayes of *Will & Grace* is also gay in real life and so is Ellen DeGeneres of the sitcom, *Ellen*. There is one show presently hailed for its representation of the LGBTQ+ community, namely *Pose*, an American television series set in New York City in the 1980s and early 1990s. *Pose* tells the story of African-American

and Latino LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming drag ball culture scene. The characters in the show are dancers and models who compete for trophies and recognition. Most characters in this show have been disowned by their blood families because of their sexuality. Through their involvement in this underground ballroom culture, they support each other in a network of their chosen families known as Houses.

Aside from its storyline, one of the major factors Pose has been praised for is that the cast features an ensemble of LGBTQ actors portraying LGBTQ characters. Legendary actor, Billy Porter, who is one of the lead actors in the show has won numerous awards for his portrayal. In 2019, Porter was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and won the 2019 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series, making him the first black gay man to be nominated and win in any lead acting category at the Primetime Emmy Awards. Furthermore, in 2020, Porter was named as one of Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People.

Turchiano (2021: 1) says Pose's co-creator and executive producer, Steven Canals, wrote the show when he was a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) student at UCLA after his professors stressed to him the importance of creating a 'calling card' through which he would show the industry stories he was passionate about telling. According to Turchiano (2021: 1) Canals who had a decade-long career in higher education, was trained to identify gaps in programmes and policies. At the time Pose came on air in 2018, transgender characters were not represented on television and there were no queer people of colour in major roles. "Those few years later when Canals and Murphy were working on Pose together, on-screen representation for trans characters, let alone characters living with HIV/AIDS, was still low" (Turchiano 2021: 1).

Turchiano (2021: 1) points to the 2017-18 television report by GLAAD titled, 'Where We Are on TV', which notes that across broadcast, cable, and streaming platforms, there were only 17 regular or recurring transgender characters.

"Even more notably, there were only two HIV-positive characters across these three platform types. Pose then premiered in June 2018 and increased the amount of such transgender characters on television (to 26), while doubling the number of HIV-positive characters (to four), as reported in the 2018-19 Where We Are on TV report. The report credited Pose with having more than half of the trans representation on cable at the time and printed that they encourage other series to

follow Pose's example. (The most recent report shows that there are 29 regular or recurring transgender characters across platforms, again primarily from Pose, and three with HIV/AIDS — all on Pose.)” (Turchiano 2021: 1).

The above statement shows Pose increased the representations of LGBTQ+ characters on the small screen. The show did not only tell the stories of the marginalised, it also cast LGBTQ+ actors to play these roles, notably Mj Rodriguez, Indya Moore and Dominique Jackson, who are transgender, and Billy Porter who is gay. It must also be noted that behind the scenes, Pose creators are members of the LGBTQ+ community. It would thus be worth exploring the impact of casting LGBTQ+ artists in homosexual storylines.

Another suggestion made by participants was that gay people should be included in the writing process. As stated above, the creators of Pose are members of the LGBTQ+ community. It is also worth pointing out that *Uzalo* and *The Queen* has had gay writers before; Phatu Makwarela and Bonga Percy Vilakazi. Therefore, should we research whether there is any impact in representations of gay people when the writers are also gay, it may help improve the representations. Most of what participants pointed out highlighted their feelings of the writers being cisgender men, who write based on their assumptions of what or how an LGBTQ+ person is or experiences life. Participants noted by including gay people in the writing process they would be able to tell their experiences. Perhaps the success of Pose is based on the fact that in front and behind the camera there are LGBTQ+ people.

Researching whether having LGBTQ+ media personalities come out and declare their sexuality has any impact or influence in the acceptance or treatment of homosexual people may also be helpful, while at the same time encouraging more influential gay people to talk about their experiences. Another scenario if where LGBTQ+ celebrities as role models for other LGBTQ+ people are researched whether this plays a role in acceptance of their sexuality. Celebrities are sometimes viewed as role models and many people look up to them and, to a certain degree, they do hold influence. For example, how Billy Porter was named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people of 2020. There are many LGBTQ+ media personalities in SA, such as Somizi, Moshe Ndiki, Khaya Dladla, Simphiwe Dana, Thami Dish and more. These celebrities have been embraced by the South African community, thus, were they to speak out more frequently on homophobia and acceptance, a shift may become noticeable in the way gay people are treated in this country.

n their study, Francis and Msibi (2011: 160) state while post-apartheid SA encourages the language of inclusivity and tolerance, institutions such as education and many others continue to reproduce patterns of heterosexism. Perhaps teaching high school learners about sexual orientation, gender, and so forth, through the subject of Life Orientation, will have an impact in the fight against homophobia. In addition, through modules such as Cornerstone or other general modules, university students ought to be taught about sexual orientation and gender. This will not only impact media students, but students in other fields as well. Homophobia does not only occur in media settings but in many establishments. Graduates would thus learn to treat their colleagues better and with understanding when they become aware while at high school or university.

SA also needs to pass the Hate Crimes Bill currently with parliament. This bill would assist in the fight against homophobia and the alarming hate crime killings the country is currently experiencing. A reform of our law enforcement agencies is also crucial, with Police personnel that need to be educated on hate crimes, sexual orientation, gender, and more, so that they act quickly and with sympathy when a crime of this nature is reported. Moreover, people who have experienced homophobia are fearful of opening cases as they are ridiculed by police officers. Therefore, a reform of the education system, constitution and police would send a strong message that SA accepts everyone, regardless of their sexuality and does not tolerate homophobia or discrimination.

## **5.5 Limitations**

The study focused on the perceptions of undergraduate media students on *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The results were limited to participant perceptions and experiences. Due to the large number of potential participants in the study population (audience across SA), the population selected in this study focused only on undergraduate media students from the journalism programme and video technology department at a Faculty of Arts and Design in a university in SA in Durban, KZN province. Thus, we can assert this study only represents portions of selected participants. The study does not claim to have captured or related the entire perceptions of television audiences across SA. In addition, because of the Coronavirus pandemic and remote learning, most students were not on campus at the time the focus groups were convened. Had they been on campus, the number of participants would have been higher.

Consequently, as is typical with case studies, caution should be exercised in generalising from the study findings. Nevertheless, given the in-depth descriptions of the cases treated in this study, it is hoped most results obtained in the research will resonate in similar contexts. What they lack in representivity, they make up for in illuminating the key issues. It is also important to be aware of the limitation of potential researcher bias. At the time of this study, the researcher worked in the Faculty of Arts and Design as Information and Communications Officer; he has also hosted a few seminars on LGBTQ+ Hate Crimes.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In this dissertation, the researcher has sought to explore undergraduate media student perceptions on representations of black gay men in two South African telenovelas, *Uzalo* and *The Queen*. The researcher's outlook was based on the belief that the media has much influence and when representations are created and managed properly, they can be used as a tool to fight homophobia and create acceptance of gay people. The aim of this study was to explore the importance of representations of black gay men on television and whether these representations play a role in shaping viewers' attitudes towards homosexual men. Participants provided rich and valuable data that content creators may use when representing gay people. The study showed representations of oppressed people in societies are important, since they provide opportunities for better understanding and treatment. Further to this, it is evidenced from this study that the media, television in particular, is influential and can shape audience attitudes.

From the literature review and the data from the participants, it is evident the representations of gay people have increased in television over the years, as more and more programmes feature homosexual characters or storylines. However, while this increase is applauded, concern remains that it borders on negative stereotypes that leave gay people vulnerable to more prejudice. It was also discovered that representation is complex and as one of the students stated in the focus group discussions, 'not a one-size-fits-all'. It is important to have varied images of gay people on television and it is equally important to tell stories that reflect the realities of gay people. Representations must be quality before quantity for the sake of ticking the box of tokenism.

Through the data from participants, it is apparent there are moderately positive representations of gay people and there is hope for improvement. As participants pointed out, it is important for content creators to include gay people in the telling of their stories

and not rely on stereotypes and assumptions. The students spoke about suggestions for improvements, where they mentioned the inclusion of gay people in the writing process, having varied representations of gays, and casting gay actors in homosexual roles. These suggestions could potentially assist in improving LGBTQ+ community representations. Using a qualitative method for this study proved to be successful, as it allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of participant views and experiences.

When created and managed properly, representations of marginalised people can be a vessel for change. Representations matter because they help to tell stories of misunderstood and oppressed people. For a long time, gay people have been the subject of homophobia and discrimination, making the need to tell their stories vital for communities to be more affectionate towards them. Television is not only a platform for entertainment but education as well, therefore, media content creators need to do due diligence in their telling of stories of marginalised persons. By involving media students in this study, it is hoped that as future content creators they will understand the dynamics and importance of representations. Television offers the platform to advocate for gay rights and the rights of those who are mistreated. Many people do not understand sexual orientation and their first encounter with a person of a different sexual preference to theirs would be through television. Therefore, images of gay men on television need to be carefully curated to tell lived experiences of all LGBTQ+ people.

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## **Appendix A: INITIAL EMAIL INVITE**

**From:** Andile Samuel Dube

**Sent:** Tuesday, 18 May 2021 15:43

**Subject:** INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Dear Journalism and Video Technology students,

My name is Andile Dube and I am the Information and Communications Officer at the Durban University of Technology's (DUT) Faculty of Arts and Design. I am currently undertaking research in order to meet the requirements for my master's degree in Journalism at DUT.

The title of my research is, A Feminist Research (FR) project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, Uzalo and The Queen.

This study is aimed at exploring the representations of black gay men television and if these representations influence the way society treats gay people in real life. The study will explore perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men on Uzalo and The Queen. The focus group will take place on Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 20 May 2021. Please see further details below.

**Please note the following important information:**

- You have been selected to participate in this study as a media student because upon graduating you will be responsible for content viewers watch on television.
- participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study anytime you wish without any consequences.
- The study was formally reviewed and approved by the Durban University of Technology and will be conducted in accordance with the ethical conditions that they stipulated.
- The information received during the project will only be used for research purposes.
- Please sign the consent form and send it back to me electronically or submit to me on campus.

**Date: Thursday, 20 May 2021**

**Time: 12PM-1PM**

**Platform: Microsoft Teams**

**Link to join:**

[https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting\\_M2RmZDcxNiYtMmQ1My00YjVjLWI5YTUtMmJhZDcyNTNmNmFh%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%224b1930d1-12f4-40b5-b48c-bd86117429d8%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2209b7cc38-2edc-4ea3-b000-fa8856b2e751%22%7d](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_M2RmZDcxNiYtMmQ1My00YjVjLWI5YTUtMmJhZDcyNTNmNmFh%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%224b1930d1-12f4-40b5-b48c-bd86117429d8%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2209b7cc38-2edc-4ea3-b000-fa8856b2e751%22%7d)

## Appendix B: LETTER OF CONSENT: MODEL

### Appendix B



### LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Title of the Research Study:** A Feminist Research project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, Uzalo and The Queen.

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Mr Andile Dube (BTech Journalism).

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Ms Tarryn Franksih (M.SocSc. (Psychology) Summa Cum Laude) and Professor Jean Philippe Wade (PhD).

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:** This study is a Feminist Research project and is aimed at finding out the representations of black gay men television and if these representations influence the way society treats gay people in real life. The study will explore perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men on Uzalo and The Queen.

Good Day,

I am a student at DUT doing research for my Masters degree in Journalism. I would like to invite you to participate in the research.

#### **Outline of the Procedures:**

The study will look at the representations of black men in South African television, particularly two telenovelas, Uzalo and The Queen. As an undergraduate media university student, your role will be to form part of two focus group discussions where perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men on Uzalo and The Queen will be discussed. Prior to the focus group discussions an online questionnaire will be sent out to you in order to gauge if you are familiar with these two shows or representations of black gay men in television. This will help guide the questions for the focus group discussions.

The group discussions will take place at the Durban University of Technology City Campus in one of the journalism programme's lecture rooms. However, if gatherings are still prohibited because of the Coronavirus, by the time of the focus group discussions, these will take place on Microsoft Teams. I am anticipating that 6 to 8 students from the Journalism programme and Video Technology department will form part of the focus group discussions. The data generated from the focus group discussions will be analyzed using Thematic Analysis.

You may, at any stage of the research process, choose to withdraw from the study without any adverse consequences.

The study does not present any risks or discomforts. The focus group discussions will be led by a trained moderator who will ensure that you are comfortable and relaxed.

Since this is a Feminist Participatory Action Research, I am anticipated that the study may contribute to your understanding of the importance of realistic representations of gay people on television.

**Remuneration:**

There is no remuneration for participating in this study.

**Costs of the Study:**

You will not be expected to cover any costs towards this study.

**Confidentiality:**

All participants will remain completely anonymous throughout the research process. Names of all the participants will not be required during the focus group discussions. Only I and the supervisor will have access to the data.

**Results:**

The results of the study will be made available via DUT's Institutional Repository.

**Research-related Injury:**

It is anticipated that there won't be any research-related injury or adverse reaction. However, if someone needs medical attention or counselling they will be referred to the DUT Clinic and the counselling centre at City Campus.

**Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings:**

The data generated will be kept by the main supervisor, Ms Tarryn Frankish in her office. After the examination process is completed, all the data will be destroyed. The results of the study will be made available via DUT's Institutional Repository.

**Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:** Please contact the researcher, Andile Dube (082 833 0414/ 031 373 6455), my supervisor, Tarryn Frankish (031 373 6619) or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Liganiso on 031 373 2577 or [researchdirector@dut.ac.za](mailto:researchdirector@dut.ac.za).

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Participation in this study is completely voluntary.



## CONSENT

**Full Title of the Study:** A Feminist Research project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, Uzalo and The Queen.

**Names of Researcher/s:** Andile Dube

### Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Andile Dube, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: \_\_\_\_\_,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____	_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b> /	<b>Time</b> <b>Right</b>	<b>Signature</b>
<b>Thumbprint</b>			

I, \_\_\_\_ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Researcher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Witness (If applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
_____	_____	_____
<b>Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

## Appendix C: IREC APPROVAL



**Institutional Research Ethics Committee**  
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Berwyn Court  
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus  
Durban University of Technology  
P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001  
Tel: 031 373 2375  
Email: [lavishad@dut.ac.za](mailto:lavishad@dut.ac.za)  
[http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional\\_research\\_ethics](http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics)  
[www.dut.ac.za](http://www.dut.ac.za)

11 March 2021

Mr A S Dube  
35 Chestan  
1 Philip Avenue  
Glenwood  
4001

Dear Mr Dube

**A Feminist Research (FR) project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, Uzalo and The Queen**  
**Ethical Clearance number IREC 160/20**

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

---

Prof J K Adam  
Chairperson: IREC

## **Appendix D: FOCUS GROUP 1 TRANSCRIPT**

### **1. Your thoughts on the representations of Queer man in the media?**

**Sibusiso:** um, and steer it back to the representation that I taught the queer men in the media. I'm a queer person. I'm 28 years old this year. And since I was about five, I knew exactly what time it was with my life. Where I was headed, what I liked, what I didn't like. So, my experience of the media and queer images and presentations off queerness, I've been aware that for a very long time. And they shaped my entire journey and in as far as how I was going to self-actualise, how I was eventually going to self-identify, the roles I Was going to try or not, the things I was going to portray or not, how I was going to try and hide things. Like there has been recurring images like that across time. And I think the main issues is it always boils down to politics versus quantity for me.

I find that there will be a year when there's a huge influx of every media company trying to throw in something gay just because there was a grave injustice to gays or maybe there was gay pride where riots happened and so for the next 12 months everyone I going to try and get on the right side of history.

So, they want to say, "we are pro-gay, we've got a gay person on our show." And the minute we do that we lose quality in a sense that we start to incorrectly represent the community by just trying to get as many images like that out. When I think of Ses'Top for example, right? That's a slapstick comic product. Everything is exaggerated, nobody believes the image of the grandmother on that show, no one believes the image of image of a girlfriend on that show. But they want to talk about the gay person on that show in contexts that are serious! How can that be? So, it's the issue of quantity versus quality.

On The Queen for me, I have two problems. In the past when they cast Sello Maake Ka-Ncube as a gay character the performance was sketchy but it was weird because at the time I was also a practicing actor. There was such a big pool of queer people who are performers, who are out of work and could have told the story with integrity.

**Mod:** So, are you saying should gay characters be played by gay actors?

**Lucky:** I disagree on that. I will be honest, because of my background I don't know much about gays and trans so I am still learning.

Akhona: With story telling there is not enough people writing the scripts. It's people assuming that someone dresses like this and they write the script on something they know nothing about and when you meet a gay guy who is quiet and dresses masculine, you question it so much- like why is he gay? It's because the media is not showing all forms of gay people.

Zimasa: I think gay characters on both these soapies are of great significance because they help people to better understand gay people. and to be less judgemental towards their sexuality after all we are all human beings irrespective of gender, sexuality and skin colour.

## **2. What are your thoughts on the gay characters on Uzalo and The Queen?**

Nomonde: I don't think it's wrong because personally I can't say how gay people should be represented but I do think the representation on these shows is one sided. It's always a supportive role, it's always the gay best friend or the gay men is the secretary. we don't get to see a different perspective of the gay men's life besides them being flamboyant, loving people and being friendly. It's not enough for me because I have many gay friends personally. In as much as they can be flamboyant, that is not all that there is to them, there is so much more.

**Lucky:** Also, with these shows are corny and they show us the same thing.

**Sibusiso:** I think these particular shows and the characters that are queer on them just speak to the sort of chauvinist misogyny that is behind the creation of the shows that we're receiving, not just because of the handling of the queer story but also just reducing queer stories on TV to being a black man issue. There are so many different kinds of queer as well that we are not seeing because once again it's all about men, its all about the male deviance... we are not really here for that. Where are the trans people, where are the lesbians, where are the bisexuals, where are the asexual?

Ayanda: Firstly, Uzalo is too generic, it's just GC and he is all alone in there. I don't see too many gay people on Uzalo. But The Queen, has Schumacher and the other people. More recently I have seen another telenovela, The River which is giving different aspects of gay

people. The River's current storyline revolves around a lesbian who is disowned by her mother because of her sexuality and has to move in with her friend's family. What I like about that storyline is that they were teaching people more about gay people. It was actually very educational.

Akhona:

I have a gay brother and I don't feel like any of these shows have proper representation of gays. The character of Prince on *The Queen* is just there as a secretary. We don't know his back story. My brother went through so much bullying like throughout his journey and it has influenced him. He is flamboyant but I do not see any of the representation. They are all the same, one after the other. Even if it's a lesbian couple they are all energetically the same storyline. You never know anything about their lives. On *the Queen*, we know Harriet's story, we know that she was abused as a child but her brother Kgosi, we don't know his story. He is just there to support. Like there is never a full story.

On *Uzalo*, GC works at the salon, he is just there at the salon but what happens afterwards. We follow everyone else but what about him? Everyone else has a full story but gays are just there to support. It's like the shows are saying we have a gay character and that's it.

3. Do you think the characters on *Uzalo* and *The Queen* represent most black men in South Africa?

**Sibusiso:** They don't. Initially they come into the space as some straight writers' perception of gay people. But the minds they affect and touch and the boxes they form imaginary in society of how to be conventionally gay, turn other people into that and then it ends up being true. I see how young queers behave, not all of them want to be Somizi, not all of them want Bujy, not all of them want to look and behave like gays on TV.

Akhona: I think that these shows representation is very problematic.

**Lucky:** I was saying it's like social point thing and that is where the problem started. That representations forces people to conform to a certain way of being just because that is what they see on television.

Ayanda: Don't you guys think the writers of *Uzalo* are having these conversations as well?

Akhona: Well, if they are it's definitely not showing in the work.

**Sibusiso:** The media industry is filled with queer people behind the scenes but they don't control the money. So, they don't control the narratives. They are there just for box ticking. Even on The River, Phathu Makwerela who is the writer of The River has been writing all of these TV shows with problematic gays in them. He wrote for all of them before he was given a chance, even then he had to collaborate with a white person in order to get that contract. It was never going to happen for Phathu by himself but he obviously writes amazing stories. Bonga Percy, I'm sure still writes for both of these shows and like Phathu he is openly gay.

I feel like male participant 2 is talking about an over exaggeration of queer culture on TV, that why do people need to be celebrated for being themselves but do you not see a big chunk of media as an over exaggeration and celebration of male things. What is sports media, let's be realistic, let's talk about what it means to have five channels of sports. One after the other. Even problematic or chauvinistic sports that males like but one season of RuPaul's Drag Race can be categorised as an over celebration of queer culture.

Nomonde: My thing is quality because when you look at gay people and the way they are portrayed on the show Pose it is pure quality. The show shows you different sides of gay people and what they go through.

#### 4. What do you guys understand about representations?

Akhona: I think that representations are a perpetuation of a story or a history of people. And I personally have a problem with how black lives are represented. There is just always struggle involved. But when you look at the way white people are represented; their lives are much easier and less complicated. So, I think representation is. It affects us psychologically, especially that we don't even realize. And it needs to be broad. And at the moment, it's not that it's too structural, especially for black people in all spheres.

Ayanda: Because of media representation I have had to present myself in a certain way.

**Lucky:** The theory that they say on reality is something about what it would be beyond. So I, for instance, always say to my friends, depending on how we look at something, it might not be that.

Nomonde: Take me, for example, I dress like how I feel at that particular moment. And there was a period of time where we were doing well as females, you have your own money or whatever you used to call yourself a slay queen and when you were called a slay queen there was no negative connotation associated to it. But the media's portrayal of slay queen is that they live the fast life and have blessers who sponsor their lifestyle in exchange for sex.

**Sibusiso:** Um, for me the term representation, I don't know why it disturbs me just because it feels like we haven't changed a word that was used in effectively in the past, when Apartheid came down SA television was sort of opening up its doors and they were dropping in one black person every way, just for numbers, that was called presentation.

And then we don't change the word. I think that we're going to do exactly the same thing. Every time, every time we try to balance this out, just by calling it representation we diminish its meaning just by having someone there for the stats not for telling stories.

Mod: So, if we don't call it representation, what word would you suggest we use?

**Sibusiso:** Inclusion, transformation. Anything but representation because that just feels like ticking a box to say there was one there so it's cool.

**Lucky:** Take a movie like Black Panther for instance, it is directed by a black person, the whole cast is black. If I were a young black kid watching that I would feel really good about myself that there were super heroes like me out there. Even if you look at the cartoons, there are very few cartoons that are black. Majority of them are white.

Zimasa: representation is all about portraying or acting on behalf of someone else.

**5. Are you aware of other South African produced shows with gay characters and what are your thoughts on the way these shows' portray gay people?**

Ayanda: Can I just ask if anyone has seen the movie Moonlight?

Mod: Oh yes, I remember Moonlight.

Ayanda: It's about this guy who grows up in the Ghetto in America. He is gay but because of where he grew up he grows up to be macho that you can't tell he is gay. The movie won so many awards at the Oscars that year.

Akhona: That is where representation becomes shaky because when you are used to a certain type of gay man and all of a sudden you are presented with a masculine gay man you do not understand.

Mod: Okay guys let's move on.

Ayanda: Currently all shows have a gay character in them. If you think about all the shows that are on television now, majority of them have one or two gay people or gay couple.

Nomonde: I know Isono which is currently airing on BET, there is a guy who has just come out and he's actually not flamboyant. He's just a normal guy, he's very masculine presenting. I haven't watched the show that much but from what I could gather is that his current problem now is living his life. Now he's come out, living his life as a gay man because before he had a girlfriend, he was trying to marry the girl and he had a man on the side. The side boyfriend was openly gay but also very masculine representing.

What I can say about the show is that it is not very informative at the moment but I do think it is introducing a different aspect of when you do come out as a gay person, now you should be living a life free, but she's still having problems with doing that, even though people around you are aware of where you are in terms of your sexuality.

**Sibusiso:** There is a show that on Mzansi Magic that has a trans woman. She's the lead as well and is trans which is amazing but her storyline is she is white, South African trans from like the Bluff falling in love with a guy from Umlazi township, and they move to Umlazi to live together in his backroom that he is renting. She sort of passes as a woman but for the most part people can tell that "no no you are trans."

And none of that story was focusing on the treatment by the community outside of their home. It wasn't focusing on where she works or why. It was just an investigation of their relationship. And I thought that unpacking their romance without super sexualising, without trying to exaggerate, everything just focusing on their romance was such a truthful way to explore gayness in TV that I haven't seen before. For the first time I realised that until then all the coupling I've seen Queer people do on TV has either been about the sex or about how the community or their families respond. To just see two people, relate to each other in a healthy, functional way was quite refreshing.

Akhona: There's also another show called Becoming. It's basically a reality show with different kinds of trans queer people who are in the process of transitioning into the gender that they are comfortable with.

I think it shows, it does show the reality of how the family kind of treats trans people. But I also think that it's scripted in a sense, because you can kind of tell that the families are reacting in a way that they were kind of briefed that don't be too judgements because you can see holding back their comments or trying to current themselves when they say something. In the show you get to see them having their testosterone shots and the counselling as well.

I think that's very important in that they are trying to crash the narrative that families aren't supportive of trans people.

Nomonde: I'm not sure if we talking about the same show, but there was also an episode I saw where a boy was coming out to his mother. He wasn't really coming out because I feel that the family knew but they were just in denial but he wanted to ask if he can wear female clothing to church.

So that then sparked a conversation like why can't other gay men wear female clothing because he was wearing female clothing. So why is it an issue now when he has to go to church but the church says come as you are?

Zimasa: Dinner at somizi's ses'top la rhythm city Scandal. They only portray one side of gay people e.g people who are into fashion, likes partying and talkative of which is wrong because what we see on TV affects our perception towards others.

## **6. What would you like to see change in the way black gay men are represented in telenovelas in South Africa?**

**Lucky:** I think it would be cool to have a show where you have a gay man who is a lead but is also successful in other aspects.

**Mod:** When you say other aspects, what do you mean?

**Lucky:** Where his sexuality doesn't matter as much or that it isn't the focus of the show. A black gay man who is just doing his thing.

Nomonde: Um, I would like to have, um, more stories where you see young kids, you know, being gay. Cause it's like from I think six or seven, a boy child or female child can tell that

I'm not into dresses or I'm not into pants. Because we watch television with our young siblings and parents with their young kids. That is where we literally find ourselves most of the time. So, showing that you can be young and still know that I never want to get married to a woman. I feel myself with a guy.

**Sibusiso:** I do agree with starting young but there are problematic parameters to the discussion. I think maybe not in the fiction world where the story is always fixed and decided as sort of when we throw in too many fictional characters into the programming, just because they're static, this starts to also cultivate and rigidity, that's similar to the one that we saw on these adult shows. But definitely an openness to discuss it. And then openness for it to be explored more in this space so that we have educational TV and maybe in curriculums.

**Lucky:** I like what was said earlier about the overall representation of the gay man, like I said, it's the blueprint, like you are facing ABC so you'll be like this, that should be like this, so now I feel this way so I'm gay and now that I feel this way I have to play this character. There was something ignorant that someone asked, that have you ever seen a gay blind person? And it's like of course you can be gay and blind but a huge part of how you portray yourself comes from the stuff you see.

The blind person, that's the perfect example because you are just gay regardless of your disability.

Nomonde: I just want to clarify that not when they are really young because my brother was gay growing up. We grew up together and growing up I never thought of him as my brother. We were just sisters. And he was beaten up all the time because of the way he behaved and the things we used to do. So, I feel like maybe if my parents saw it on TV they would see that it's normal for kids to be gay from a young age.

Imagine being miserable at home and being miserable at school. So, I just feel like there is more that could be done in a child friendly manner.

It could be a discussion, like, those that they have on DSTV. They have like those learning programs where you bring in kids and talk to them. So, this could be something similar to assure the kids that it's okay to be who you are.

Also get parents aware because I feel like our parents take only what they learned from Life Orientation at High School and Life Orientation was not really informative on most things. So it would be great for our parents to also know this.

**Sibusiso:** I was just going to say that I do feel it's an age milestone. It is fine but until to a certain age. I feel huge gender neutrality, young kids programming. And it's in this pre-transitional phase. Where we creating content for them, then we start to split it into strictly blue or pink.

And it's that split? That's the first point of problematisation in shaping how kids gender, themselves, and see their world in terms of gender. Before that, I'm not too worried, things are neutral. Winnie-the-Pooh is naked and wearing a crop top. Like Bunny is a purple dinosaur. There is huge gender neutrality there and its not problematic, you learn your ABC and you go home.

Akhona: I think what I would like to see is more inclusion of gay characters but don't make it obvious that you are just including them for the sake of numbers. Just represent them as part of society as they are.

Nobody, no straight women or straight men and has to disclose their identity, so why should a gay person have to disclose that they are gay or lesbian.

Speaking from a female perspective, I haven't been uncomfortable around men generally, but I also feel like that's, that's because of representation as well.

So I would like it to be normal, when you are watching Generations you don't class people according to their sexuality. You just see a person who is trying to live their life.

So now I'm starting to access it and re oh, she must've tried anything. Or, you know, I'm glad to see that being killed because it's not a thing, you know, you don't get onto all these other people and domestically you feel like they want you because they've disclosed all. You can see, you can tell your sexual preferences or whatever.

**Lucky:** I want to see more love especially among gay people.

Mod: When you say love, what do you mean?

**Lucky:** I mean, my mother's brother is gay and his getting married to a man. My uncle and his fiancé were telling me about a gay love story they want to tell because they feel like a lot of the gay love stories in television are misrepresent. It is always about someone being gay and having a problem with that whereas it should be about being gay and finding love.

So, I want to see more positive things that do not highlight the fact that this one is gay but highlights that he is human being trying to find another human being to love.

Mod: It goes back to what was said at the beginning that gay storylines have to always be associated with hardships.

Zimasa: I would like to see more content with black gay people and the way they are portrayed must change because it is the main reason why people often misunderstand gays.

**7. Do you think representations of black gay men in telenovelas can help educate the public about sexual orientation and how can content creators better represent black men in television?**

**Lucky:**

Stop lying. Just be honest and stuff. It's the whole thing of feeding us for the generic thing, like I said earlier, but we all know this, you know what I mean? Like from a more straight forward sort of thing. you know what I mean? And also saying this for me is hard because I don't really know much about the gay community and stuff. We need a more honest and realistic picture, not this hyper flamboyant representation.

Nomonde: I think directors and generally the people in the media should that we did should allow gay men to write their own stories just like how they allow women who have been abused or men who have gone through certain experiences to tell their stories.

I feel like the stories will be more authentic if it comes from you. And obviously the type of things that we don't know, you would be able to tell them better to us. It's time for us to open up the industry. So not only to women because right now the media industry is fluctuating with men. So, it's time for women to take up space but also for the LGBTQ+ community. Let's not let our sexuality or gender define our work.

Akhona: Going back to what was said earlier, as producers, directors and writers if you are going to write a story about gay people, include gay people. Don't just grab anyone and make them gay according to your assumption of what gay is, include them. If you want to do research about them, do the research but include the gay person because I feel there is a certain disconnect to authenticity when it comes to you just casting who you think would be perfect for the role whereas you could cast someone who is gay.

Also, I don't think telenovelas do enough to educate. It doesn't have to be too detailed but it should be human. It should just be about having a gay person there. If you are going to have a black woman in your show and show that she worked hard to get where she is, do the same for the gay men and I don't think that's being done.

All we see is just supporting gay actor cancer and that's that that's that. It doesn't do enough to include the gay community. I feel like there is too much of there is us and then there is the gay community

**Sibusiso:** In as far as the writing of the characters in the stories, I think everything can be degendered and diversified. Not only gay men like to dress well, heterosexual men can dress well. Heterosexual women can play hooky and can be athletic or shave off their hair. Heterosexual men can have long hair. We just need to degender the way we portray things on TV because I feel like particularly in our society we live among people who look to the box to dictate how they ought to be. And the reality is they could be whatever they want to be without being forced to tick several other.

Diversity can't consistently be the struggle of queer people or people in marginalized spaces who bear presence in the media space is diversification or is activism, no no. Everybody just be themselves.

Mod: Don't you think the constant portrayal of the gay men being flamboyant like Somizi for instance, sparks conversation that people might not necessarily have if they didn't know that the person is gay?

**Sibusiso:** Just as it is problematic the concept of a single story, even as a conversation starter a single catalyst can also become problematic. So, it's not that there is anything wrong with his presence in the media space. I just think it needs to be balanced out with other true ones so that when we are discussing it at hoe and there is a son who is like, I think I might be gay. The reality is if he doesn't feel that his personality matches that of Somizi, he is lesser inclined to discuss that in that space because as much as this space is now being accepting of "queerness" what it really is is accepting Somizi and if I'm queer and not like him I go back into my hole of asking myself what is going on with me.

Zimasa: yes. more people watch TV so if they are shown more often the public will get used to them(gays) and understand their sexuality. they should show them as warm-hearted people and caring or maybe show them with their families and boyfriends so that we can be exposed to same sex marriage.

## **Appendix E: FOCUS GROUP 2 TRANSCRIPT**

### **1. What are your thoughts on the gay characters on Uzalo and The Queen?**

Zandile: I feel like they are always portrayed as flamboyant and they are all over the place, and that is not always the case. They are treated as accessories to straight people because they are like “I’m just gonna call my gay friend and be like hey, do you wanna go shopping.”

Mandla: Just to add on hat she said, I do also feel like there are times when they tend to exaggerate the characters just a bit. It’s like, you can kind of tell it feels a bit too unrealistic. Even though like I don’t know a lot of gay people but there are a few that I do know and personality wise they aren’t too hyper.

Fisani: I haven’t watched Uzalo that much but I watched The Queen the time there was Schumacher and Kgosi ho were a gay couple on the show. For me personally I don’t like how Schumacher was portrayed. They made him out to be a gold digger of a gay man. He was using his sexuality to make money. Right now we are living in a time where people are coming out and want acceptance from the community, so they should have made his role to be more masculine but open about his sexuality instead of hiding. So I don’t like people who hide... Own it and we’ll accept you and love you as you are.

Phumzile: I also don’t watch much of Uzalo at the moment but I watched it at the beginning when it was popular and they had GC. I was amazed to see GC who is a very flamboyant black gay guy living in a township.

Mod: Since Uzalo’s setup is in KwaMashu township, do you think a gay guy can be that flamboyant in a township?

Phumzile: Of course, you can. There are many gay guys in the township. Some do hair and other things. So, me it wasn’t unusual seeing it on television because I’ve seen it.

Fisani: Even in townships like Umlazi there is always that one gay guy who is popular and gets along with everyone, even the gangsters in the township. He just softens them.

Thandi: I like how fearless GC is on Uzalo. He is not scared of anyone. He speaks his mind and for him living in a township I’d say it’s not safe but he stands up for his sexuality. As for Schumacher on The Queen, he is very promiscuous, I don’t like him.

Fisani: He is also very confusing because the next minute he is gay and the next he is married to this girl. They are making him out to be a confused person.

Thandi: He is bisexual.

Phumzile: But he doesn't want to admit it.

Mod: So, does being bisexual mean, you can be promiscuous?

Thandi: No, it doesn't give you the red card to sleep around with people just because you can have anyone.

Phumzile: But if you look at his relationships with other men, it wasn't actually love. It was more about getting something in return like money whereas with the girls it was about love but some he was also using them.

## **2. Do you think the characters on Uzalo and The Queen represent most black men in South Africa?**

Zandile: I have many gay friends and none of them work at a salon. Most of them have their own businesses because recently we were shooting a production with my friend and we invited one of my gay friends, Junior, he is an entrepreneur, he has his own business in the beauty industry. But in these shows they are never portrayed as business owners. I have another gay friend, he works at a law firm, he is a lawyer. So gay guys in television are never shown as career driven people, they just work at the salon doing hair and gossip.

\*Mandla: I think another issue is that there isn't much representation. Like on The Queen, Moshe Ndiki has left and there is only Schumacher. If you are someone who is also gay or bisexual, the only representation that you would see is that of Schumacher. He is always portrayed in a negative way that bisexual people are cheaters and cannot have a stable relationship. So the representation of bisexuality is only Schumacher that they show enforces the stereotype that you can't date a bisexual person because they will cheat with another man.

MoD: I think a lot of people do not understand what being bisexual mean. They simply think it is one being promiscuous. But a bisexual person can be in a long and committed relationship.

Fisani: No, and I am saying no because what I have seen from Uzalo is GC and he is the most prominent. With The Queen it is Kgosi, Prince and Schumacher. These are characters

that are very feminine within their homosexuality but there are also masculine gay people. It's not a one size fits all type of thing and that is what I feel these telenovelas are showing us. So us as the viewers and people who do not understand sexuality who only learn about it through watch these shows on television they may be more accepting of these feminine characters but in real life when they meet a masculine gay person it's going to be like "I've never seen this before."

Thandi: Definitely not. They do not represent gay men in South Africa. Sometimes you come across a very nice guy where you think "ow this guy is hitting on me, he is my type, he is manly and masculine but to find out he is gay" The issue is that they only show us flamboyant gays only.

Phumzile: It's like if you are going to be on TV you have to be flamboyant and out there.

Thandi: Also, if you look at the gay celebrities in South Africa, there is Somizi- he is one of the most powerful gay men in the country and we don't get to see people in the gay community being powerful or shining in these shows. On The Queen, Kgosi was always under Harriet's shadow, Prince was a PA (Personal assistant), and on Uzalo GC works at a salon. Gay people are very creative and, on the show, they are not given that platform so I think they need to be given more shine to slay.

### **3. What do you guys understand about representations?**

Mandla: In terms of media, I feel like representations are the standby of a majority of a certain group of people.

Fisani: I think it means showing different people. We are all different and we do not want to see the same thing all the time. And when you do not see yourself or someone that you know in something, it means you are not represented. So being represented means, someone else is also telling your story, else also goes through what you are going through.

Thandi: Going back to gays on television, there are different kinds of gays so in television they only represent a Somizi and not all gay men want to be Somizi. When people think gay they think Somizi and we want to see more diverse representation.

### **4. Are you aware of other South African produced shows with gay characters and what are your thoughts on the way these shows portray gay people?**

Lindani: Imbewu The Seed on ETV has a transgender character. In fact the person that plays that character studies here.

Mod: There have been quite a few gay characters on television in the last years. My first recollection of a gay character in television was on a 90s sitcom called Streaks. The character was played by Themba Ndaba who now plays Brutus on the Queen. Generations has also had gay characters, so has Isidingo, Scandal, The River and a few others.

Thandi: I know this reality show called Umndeni, the guy is a Sangoma and he has wives that are men. These men came to him as amathwasa and they end up being his wives. Now it seems like he only accepts amathwasa that are gay. It's very confusing. It is entertaining but wicked.

Phumzile: There is another reality show called Becoming. It shows people transitioning from one sex to another. So that show is very informative.

Fisani: I think the last time we had a positive representation of gay men was when Generations had Senzo and Jason. They were killing it. At the beginning both of them were in the closet but then they made the decision to come out and be a couple, they embraced it. They had a normal lifestyle, there was no flamboyance, just guys.

##### **5. What would you like to see change in the way black gay men are represented in telenovelas in South Africa?**

Zandile: I would like them to be more realistic. They mustn't always be flamboyant and all that. They must just be "normal" beings. They should have businesses, be teachers- I have never seen a gay teacher on a show, lawyers and so on.

Fisani: Like she is saying, I think their representations should stop being for entertainment reasons because most gay men in telenovelas are only put there to make us laugh. I feel like they use gay men for humour in these dramas. So, it would be great if they had leading roles as protagonists and antagonists with proper storylines. Something serious. Something that we could believe is real.

Phumzile: Include all gay men. Do not have a one size fits all approach.

Phumzile: Show us different shades of gay. I mean we have classmates that are gay but you wouldn't tell that they are just by looking at them. We have shows that focus on girls, why

can't we have shows that focus on gay men, that show gay men succeeding and shows what they go through in life.

**6. Do you think representations of black gay men in telenovelas can help educate the public about sexual orientation?**

Mandla: Yes, I think so as long they are not put there to be smokescreen just so that productions can say we also have a gay character on the show. They should be written in these shoes because they want to share information.

Zandile: If you look at the storyline of a telenovela or whatever you are watching, you get to understand why each character is there but when it comes to gay people you question yourself a lot of times about their storylines. That's why you find most of them being discontinued just like Moshe Ndiki's character on The Queen.

Thandi: Yes, because we consume television more than anything and it's the best way to get any message across.

**7. How can content creators better represent black men in television?**

Victoria: I think it is about involving gay people in the writing process and stop using straight people to play gay roles.

Mandla: As a content creator, I can write a story about homosexuality but there are things I won't know so that is why a lot of these stories do not have depth in them. A gay person can bring more insight about gay life.

Mod: So, you are saying it is about bringing people with first hand lived experiences to share their stories?

Zandile: Also, this thing of casting the same people every time. There are a lot of gay people that can play these roles much better because playing a gay role will come naturally to them.

Mod: That is an interesting point, so do you guys think it is better if gay characters are only played by gay people?

Zandile: Yes, in as much as you will be in character but you will be playing something that you understand more about. Like I am a female and I would play a female character way better than a man would.

Mandla: I agree with her to a certain extend but if we say only gay men should play gay character there are people that won't have work because they are in the closet now for them to get these roles they would have to come out. It is tricky because at the same time a gay men would know which line to cross and which not to cross with their character.

Phumzile: Tell us their story. Even if you make them feminine but tell us their real story. The struggles they go through when they are alone and not in front of people.

## Appendix F: FOCUS GROUPS 1 AND 2 INITIAL CODES

Focus Group 1 Codes	Focus Group 2 Codes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helps to create identity</li> <li>2. Lack of quality</li> <li>3. Exaggerated representations</li> <li>4. Lack of seriousness in gay characters</li> <li>5. Getting queer actors to play gay roles</li> <li>6. Using assumptions to write stories</li> <li>7. No varied representations of gays</li> <li>8. Better understanding of gays</li> <li>9. Help people be less judgmental</li> <li>10. One sided representations</li> <li>11. Supportive roles</li> <li>12. Gay best friend</li> <li>13. Gay secretary</li> <li>14. No varied representations</li> <li>15. Same representations on both shows</li> <li>16. Chauvinistic behind the creation of these shows</li> <li>17. Patriarchy in the tone of the stories</li> <li>18. No lesbian or bisexuals or asexual characters</li> <li>19. Uzalo- Only gay in entire series</li> <li>20. The River- shows different aspects of gay people.</li> <li>21. The River- Teaching people about gay life</li> <li>22. The Queen- Prince a secretary</li> <li>23. No back story to gay characters</li> <li>24. Can't identify with the representation</li> <li>25. The Queen- Support role</li> <li>26. No deep storylines</li> <li>27. Having a gay character just for the sake of having one</li> <li>28. Straight writer's perceptions</li> <li>29. Influences audiences on gay people</li> <li>30. Politics dictate how stories are told</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Portrayed as flamboyant</li> <li>2. Treated as accessories to straight people</li> <li>3. Exaggeration of the characters</li> <li>4. Too unrealistic</li> <li>5. Too hyper</li> <li>6. Schumacher is portrayed as a gold digger of a gay man</li> <li>7. Schumacher is gay for pay</li> <li>8. Amazed at seeing (GC) flamboyant township gay</li> <li>9. Township gays are real</li> <li>10. GC gets along with everyone in the township</li> <li>11. Townships are not safe for gay person</li> <li>12. Schumacher is a promiscuous bisexual guy</li> <li>13. Schumacher comes across as bisexual</li> <li>14. Schumacher comes across as confused</li> <li>15. Schumacher using sex with men to get money</li> <li>16. Gays on Uzalo are not shown as to be career driven</li> <li>17. GC on Uzalo only works at salon</li> <li>18. Gays on Uzalo and the Queen are gossip mongers</li> <li>19. Bisexuals are cheaters</li> <li>20. Bisexuals cannot have a stable relationship</li> <li>21. We need varied portrayals of gays</li> <li>22. They only show feminine gays</li> <li>23. No masculine gays on these shows</li> <li>24. They only show flamboyant gays only</li> </ol>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>31. Just ticking the box with representation</li> <li>32. Importance of quality</li> <li>33. Representations affects our psychology</li> <li>34. Inauthentic representation</li> <li>35. Proud to be represented</li> <li>36. Varied representations of gays</li> <li>37. Influx of gays on TV shows</li> <li>38. Masculine representation</li> <li>39. Different aspects of gays</li> <li>40. Exploring gay romantic relationships</li> <li>41. Have gay lead characters</li> <li>42. Show different aspects of gay characters</li> <li>43. Teach kids about homosexuality</li> <li>44. Gay disability/ varied representations</li> <li>45. Teach parents about homosexuality</li> <li>46. Representations were sexuality is not an issue</li> <li>47. More affectionate scenes for gay characters</li> <li>48. More positive portrayals of gays</li> <li>49. Stop the hyper flamboyant representation</li> <li>50. Include gay people in writing process</li> <li>51. Let gay people have a voice in telling their own stories</li> <li>52. Stop assumptions about gay.</li> <li>53. Do thorough research on gays</li> <li>54. Tell diverse stories of gay people</li> <li>55. Varied representations of gay men</li> <li>56. Balanced portrayals of gay people in the media</li> <li>57. Show gay people with their families</li> <li>58. Show gay people in relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25. Shown to be under the shadow of straight characters</li> <li>26. GC only works at salon</li> <li>27. Prince is Harriet's PA</li> <li>28. No ambition</li> <li>29. More diverse representations</li> <li>30. Becoming is Informative</li> <li>31. Senzo and Jason were positive representation</li> <li>32. They must be more realistic</li> <li>33. They must be career driven</li> <li>34. Stop using gays for humour</li> <li>35. Have more gays in leading roles</li> <li>36. Gay representation is not a one size fits all</li> <li>37. Include all types of gays</li> <li>38. Have shows focussing on gays</li> <li>39. Shows must be informative</li> <li>40. No strong storylines for gays</li> <li>41. Let gays tell their own stories</li> <li>42. A gay person can bring more insight about gay life</li> <li>43. Cast gay actors in gay roles</li> <li>44. Show gay struggles</li> </ul>
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## Appendix G: TURNITIN REPORT

### Thesis 2022 Final 2

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>11</b> %	<b>9</b> %	<b>3</b> %	<b>6</b> %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

<b>1</b>	<b>docplayer.net</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>2</b>	<b>s3-euw1-ap-pe-ws4-capi2-distribution-p.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>3</b>	<b>mountainscholar.org</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>4</b>	<b>Www.bbc.co.uk</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>5</b>	<b>www.tandfonline.com</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>6</b>	<b>www.weforum.org</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>7</b>	<b>mafiadoc.com</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>8</b>	<b>Submitted to Bath Spa University College</b> Student Paper	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>9</b>	<b>www.sowetanlive.co.za</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %

## Appendix H: EDITOR'S LETTER

Helen Richter  
Advanced Editing, Proofreading  
& Copywriting  
[feetjieding@gmail.com](mailto:feetjieding@gmail.com)  
+27 729538169

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12 August 2022

To whom it may concern:

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### CERTIFICATE OF EDITING & AUTHENTICATION

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I have proofread and language edited the Master's thesis submitted by Andile Samuel Dube, titled:

" A Feminist Research (FR) project: Exploring the perceptions of undergraduate media university students on the representations of black gay men in two of South Africa's leading telenovelas, Uzalo and The Queen"

To the best of my knowledge, the work remains free of spelling, grammar, structural and stylistic errors, and the contents are certified as the authors' own work.

With thanks,

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H S Richter (Ms)

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