

**REPRESENTATION OF TRANSGENDER WOMEN IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOAP
OPERA, *7DE LAAN***

by

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DECLARATION

Student number 493-1731-8

I declare that **Representation of transgender women in the South African soap opera, *7de Laan*** is my own work and that all the sources that I have either used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of comprehensive references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

C.R. Cupido

07 February 2022

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This study is dedicated to Gwen, whose details were lost years ago, but who motivated for this study's completion by sharing her story and support during a frank early morning conversation on Oxford Road in Johannesburg.

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to explore and discuss how transgender women are spoken about and treated by examining the portrayal of Geneviève du Pré in the South African soap opera *7de Laan* and highlighting the importance of relevant and relatable portrayals. Transgender representations are on the rise globally, but quantity should not be equated to quality in light of criticism around negative portrayals that encourage transphobic behaviour.

The dissertation's main research question is: How are transgender women represented in the South African soap opera *7de Laan*? Five sub-questions were constructed to guide the investigation and those related to whether stereotypes exist within the portrayal and whether *7de Laan* perpetuates stereotypes. Additional sub-questions pertained to the findings of the thematic analysis conducted on the 14 episodes that feature Geneviève; the narrative structure of soap operas and how it positions the medium as an enabler of change. The study's final sub-question related to soap's ability to provide a platform for the identification, negotiation or construction of identities.

The investigation employed a qualitative cross-sectional thematic analysis of the 14 episodes featuring Geneviève. The study also used triangulation, and the additional data sources included discourse analysis of Facebook comments related to the portrayal and an interview with the actress who portrayed Geneviève du Pré.

Due to the study being exploratory, the long-term research outcomes of contributing to the body of research related to transgender representation may not be immediately realised. It is hoped that the study will spark a debate around the deficit pertaining to the representation of transgender women in South African soap operas specifically, and the importance of addressing accurate portrayals.

Key terms: transgender women; transgender woman; transgender; trans; LGBT; LGBTIQ; LGBTIQ+; LGBTQIA+; gender; gender identity; soap operas; representations; portrayals

ISISHWANKATHELO

Injongo yesi sifundo yayikukuphonononga nokuxoxa ngendlela ekuthethwa ngayo nendlela abaphathwa ngayo abafazi abazikhethela ukutshintsha isini sabo sendalo, ngokubhekiselele ekuzotyweni komlinganiswa onguGeneviève du Pré kumdlalo kamabonakude ongu7de Laan. Esi sifundo sibonisa ukubaluleka kokuzoba abalinganiswa ngokufanelekileyo nangokukholelekayo. Ukuzotywa kwabalinganiswa abatshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela kuyanda ehlabathini jikelele, kodwa ubuninzi abumelanga kulinganiswa nomgangatho kuba ukuzoba abalinganiswa kakubi kukhuthaza impathombi yabo batshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela.

Umbuzo wophando ongundoqo uthi: Baveliswa njani abafazi abatshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela kumdlalo kamabonakude waseMzantsi Afrika ongu7de Laan? Kwaqulunqwa imibuzwana emihlanu yokuqhuba uphando. Umphandi wabuza ukuba ingaba ukuzotywa kwabafazi abatshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela kusekelwe kwiingcinga ezithile ezingajikiyo okanye ingaba u7de Laan uqhubela phambili ezo nginga. Eminye imibuzwana yagxila kuhlalutywe lwemixholo yemiboniso eli-14 awayedlala kuyo uGeneviève; kwisakhiwo sebali semidlalo kamabonakude; nokuba ingaba eso sakhiwo sivumela ukuba umdlalo ukhuthaze utshintsho kusini na. Umbuzwana wokugqibela wabhekiselela kwimidlalo kamabonakude njengeqonga lokwazisa, lokubonisana okanye ukwakha ubuwena bomntu.

Uphando lwaqhutywa ngokuhlalutya izimvo zabathathi nxaxheba malunga nemixholo efumaneka kwimiboniso eli-14 adlala kuyo uGeneviève. Uphando lukwaqwalasele izenzo ezisisiqhamo sempixano phakathi kwabalinganiswa ababini; lwaqwalasela neminye imithombo yezimvo njengoFacebook, malunga nokuzotywa kukaGeneviève; ingxoxo malunga nezo zimvo; kwakunye nodliwano ndlebe nomdlali odlala indawo kaGeneviève du Pré.

Njengokuba esi isisifundo esiyingabula zigcawu, zisenokungabonakali kwangoku iziqhamo kunye negalelo laso kuphando olumalunga notshintsho lwesini ngokuzikhethela. Sinethemba lokuba esi sifundo siya kukhokelela kwingxoxo emalunga nokunqongophala kokuveliswa kwabafazi abatshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela kwimidlalo kamabonakude yoMzantsi Afrika kunye nokubaluleka kokuzotywa kwabalinganiswa ngokuchanekileyo.

Amagama aphambili: abafazi abatshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela; umfazi otshintshe isini ngokuzikhethela; utshintsho lwesini ngokuzikhethela; ukuwela; LGBT; LGBTIQ; LGBTIQ+; LGBTQIA+; isini ngokuzikhethela; ukuzibandakanya nesini esithile; imidlalo kamabonakude nonomathotholo; umelo; ukuzotywa kwabalinganiswa

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om ondersoek in te stel na, en te bespreek hoe daar oor transgendervroue gepraat word en hoe hulle behandel word met verwysing na die uitbeelding van Geneviève du Pré in die Suid-Afrikaanse strooisage, *7de Laan*. Die studie werp lig op die belangrikheid van relevante uitbeeldings waarby aanklank gevind kan word. Transgenderverteenwoordiging is besig om wêreldwyd toe te neem, maar kwantiteit moenie aan kwaliteit gelykgestel word nie aangesien negatiewe uitbeeldings transfobiese gedrag aanmoedig.

Die hoofnavorsingsvraag was: Hoe word transgendervroue in die Suid-Afrikaanse strooisage *7de Laan* uitgebeeld? Vyf subvrae is geformuleer om die ondersoek te lei. Die navorser se vraag was of die uitbeelding van transgendervroue op stereotipes gebaseer was en of *7de Laan* stereotipes perpetueer. Bykomende subvrae het op die bevindinge van 'n tematiese ontleding van die 14 episodes gefokus waarin Geneviève 'n belangrike rol vertolk het, sowel as op die narratiewe struktuur van strooisages en hoedat die narratiewe struktuur die medium toegelaat het om 'n instaatsteller van verandering te word. Die finale subvraag het verband gehou met strooisages as 'n platform vir die identifisering, onderhandeling of konstruksie van identiteite.

Die ondersoek het 'n kwalitatiewe, deursnee tematiese ontleding van die 14 episodes waarin Geneviève opgetree het, aangewend. Dit het ook triangulering, bykomende databronne soos Facebook-kommentaar op die uitbeelding van Geneviève en 'n diskoersontleding van hierdie kommentaar, sowel as 'n onderhoud met die aktrise wat die rol van Geneviève du Pré vertolk het, gebruik.

Aangesien die studie verkennend van aard was, is dit moontlik dat die langtermynnavorsingsuitkomst en bydrae tot navorsingsmateriaal oor transgenderverteenwoordiging nie dadelik erkenning sal kry nie. Die hoop is dat die studie die voorloper sal word van debatvoering oor die ontoereikende verteenwoordiging van

transgendervroue in Suid-Afrikaanse strooisages en die belangrikheid van akkurate uitbeeldings.

Sleuteltermes: transgendervroue; transgendervrou; transgender; trans; LGBT; LGBTIQ; LGBTIQ+; LGBTQIA+; gender; identiteit; strooisages; voorstellings; uitbeeldings

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

I don't understand why people are so threatened by us, by who we love and how we choose to express ourselves. I think we have like a long way to go in practising love and empathy for our fellow human beings.

- Zoey Black (2021)

This chapter introduces the research focus, its objective and relevance. It also briefly outlines the theoretical and literary framework that guide the study and the methodology employed before detailing the flow of the dissertation.

This study is concerned with the representation of transgender women in South African soap operas and explores and describes how transwomen are being represented by analysing the first fictional portrayal of transgender female character on the country's television screens.

There is a deficit regarding the representation of transwomen in local soap operas. At the time of writing, the only soap opera in the country that featured a character who identifies as a transwoman and who was portrayed by a transfemale actress, was *7de Laan* (Igual 2017; Kekana 2017; Valentine 2017). This study, therefore, interrogates the episodes featuring the character, Geneviève du Pré, via thematic analysis, which is concerned with identifying and analysing patterns or themes within a set of data (Braun & Clarke 2013:224). A theme is defined as: "a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually emerges through the inductive analytic process which characterises the qualitative paradigm" (Mogashoa 2014:109). This study therefore isolated themes related to the portrayal to describe how transwomen are represented in the soap opera. The themes explore whether the stereotypical trans representations that the media is accused of presenting are present and highlights the importance of accurate portrayals. Accurate portrayals with regards to this study refers to whether the representations are fair, legitimate and recognisable for those who are being represented, or as explained by Snorton (2017:14), portrayals which indicate "imaginative capacities to construct more livable [...] trans worlds". Soap operas incorporate realism to purport authentic insight into everyday life and enable identification between the audience and characters (Smith 2004: 244).

The portrayals are important for anyone who may look to soap operas to find the familiar and have it assist their understanding of themselves and their society (Sarkissian 2014; Capuzza 2014:116; Capuzza & Spencer 2017). The portrayals and their related ideologies are also important for audience members who may not interact with transgender individuals to ensure that transgender individuals are afforded the respect they are entitled to as human beings with agency.

The study makes use of triangulation by using three data sources. Using multiple data sources ensures the validity and trustworthiness of this research. The data sources include the analysis of 14 episodes featuring the character Geneviève du Pré, Facebook commentary related to the portrayal and an interview with Deonay Olivia Balie, the actress who portrayed Geneviève.

South Africa's Constitution extends human rights to all its citizens. The South African Constitution guarantees equality and non-discrimination by recognising diversity. However, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people in South Africa are still subjected to hate speech, discrimination and violence (Lawyers for Human Rights 2021; Luvuno, Ncama & Mchunu 2019:2; South Africa Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 2014:2). The country is lauded for its progressive policies, but violence against LGBTQI people is rife. At the time of writing, more than ten people had been killed by the beginning of August 2021, which highlights the severity of the situation (Dludla & Skweyiya 2021). The government has further illustrated the stark reality of the widespread discrimination by stating that members of this community could "experience multiple episodes of victimisation over their lifetime" (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities 2020:27). A 2014 report that focused specifically on the experiences of transgender women in South Africa revealed that "86% of participants have survived an incident of physical, psychological and emotional violence" (Chakuwamba & Van der Merwe 2014:34). These acts mainly took place within the community and social institutions (Chakuwamba & Van der Merwe 2014:34).

Publicised attacks like the one that Siphosethu Nkololo experienced and the murders of Khulekani Gomazi and Phoebe Titus need to be considered within the broader context that these acts occur, especially in a society where social stigma is prevalent (Irantzi 2021; Ashwal 2017:27). Social institutions such as the media can maintain patriarchal, discriminatory ideologies that contribute to these stigmas of intolerance and discrimination

and need to be interrogated to ensure they are not perpetuating acts of violence. The soap opera landscape, in particular, holds influential power with regard to perceptions of societal dynamics. The medium uses stereotypes and contributes to reproducing them; they are then accepted as the norm (Motsaathebe 2009:428; Kellner 1995:2; Wood 2011:259). The influential power of soaps needs to be recognised to ensure that the kaleidoscope of gender identities are positively embraced (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities 2020:18).

South African soap operas can challenge the gender binary, which refers to the classification of gender in society into two distinct categories, namely male and female (National Centre for Transgender Equality 2018). The classification is based on the belief that an individual's biological sex gender determines their gender (Morgenroth, Gustafsson Sendén, Lindqvist, Renström, Ryan and Morton 2021:731).

Morgenroth et al (2021:732) note that these socially constructed views are

not only *descriptive* (i.e., describing what sexes and genders exist and how these two concepts are related) but also *prescriptive* and *proscriptive* (i.e., dictating which genders and sexes should or should not exist and how they should or should not be related).

The soap opera's narrative can counter this dominant ideology and provide a site for the resistance, negotiation and construction of transgender identities. This can be achieved via the use of entertainment-education (edutainment), which incorporates education in content to encourage targeted social change and development (Riley, Sangalang, Critchlow, Brown, Mitra & Nesme 2021:42; Samuels 2020:4; Ladigbolu & Olajide 2018:156; Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:58; Khalid & Ahmed 2014:69-70; Japhet 2013:1; Singhal & Rogers 2004:5).

This research highlights the importance of accurate portrayals within a democratic society and substantiates claims that the soap opera medium has an inherent ability to challenge the dominant ideology and provide a platform for the negotiation and creation of new identities.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Globally, transgender media representation has been on the rise. The portrayals have been critiqued for containing stereotypes, lacking depth and having an overt fascination

with surgery (Capuzza 2014:115; Jobe 2013:1; Koch-Rein et al 2020:2; Media Monitoring Project [sa]:3). South Africa's transgender state of visibility is reflected by an academic deficit as a lack of research exists in the country. This highlights the need for research of this nature to address that deficit and understand the kinds of representations that South Africa's diverse population is being afforded. Representations that encourage othering and transphobic behaviour should be addressed and eliminated, as they foster unfounded divisions, which could lead to violence in society (Ramphele 2016:47).

South Africa's transgender population is marginalised and faces a lack of visibility on television screens. The country's soap opera universe introduced its first transgenderfemale character, known as Geneviève du Pré, in April 2017, portrayed by actress Deonay Olivia Balie (Kekana 2017; Valentine 2017). Geneviève appeared in the Afrikaans soap opera *7de Laan*.

During the same period *Generations: The Legacy* introduced the character Wandile Radebe, portrayed by actress Chi Mhende. The introduction of transgender characters to South African television screens is lauded because portrayals in the media should reflect the diverse citizenry. This study deliberately did not analyse the representation of Wandile, as the focus of this research is on the representation of transgender women and the step forward for South Africa's soap opera universe with regards to having a transgender actress portray a transgender character. The character Wandile is a transgender male, portrayed by a cisgender female. The casting approach in itself underlines one of the hindrances to representative portrayals, where transgender characters are represented by non-trans individuals (Joshi 2021; McLaren 2018:29; Cook 2015). The latter highlights legitimate concerns around "who can speak for trans people and how trans lives should be represented" (Koch-Rein, Yekani and Verlinden 2020:2). During an interview related to her portrayal of Wandile, Chi Mhende noted that she "had so much fun playing a boy" (Tshisalive 2017), further illustrating the representational politics as troublesome, as it can reinforce a myth that transgender individuals are not 'real' or that they are pretending to be someone else. The casting therefore as noted by Cook is significant, "and only gets more important when the story to be told is not just for entertainment" (2015). The implications of casting a cisgender actress to portray a transgender character extend beyond the screen and impacts the lived experiences of many trans individuals.

If this research chose to include an analysis of the character in *Generations*, it would fail to recognise the significance of the portrayal of Geneviève by actress Deonay Olivia Balie, and the importance of visibly including transgender individuals in filmmaking processes related to the transgender experience to further address the cycle of under-representation. It is imperative that transgender individuals play transgender roles. Representative portrayals are vital because the media has the well-researched ability to influence views and behaviours (Capuzza 2014:115; Miller 2012:12; Muindi 2015:13, Sarkissian 2014; Media Monitoring Project [sa]:3).

Importantly, soap opera research has moved beyond the hypodermic needle theory, which views the audience as passive receivers of the intended message (Nwabueze & Okonkwo 2018:1; Fourie 2007:232; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:8; Pitout 2006:284). The audience participates actively in the transmission process, as viewers engage with the content and can reject or accept the meanings and therefore, the hypodermic needle theory is not applicable. However, the audience views can still be influenced because the “media insinuate their messages into our consciousness at every turn” (Wood 1994:34). The research rejects any assumption that all viewers can identify ideological undertones because the assumption is problematic.

The media is an agent of socialisation in contemporary society, and its content “is linked to the economy of knowledge production” (Ramphole 2016:45). The media, via all mediums, highlights what is important, which stories are worthy of being told and therefore assists the audience in understanding their society and their place in it. Soap operas speak to the masses. The medium uses realism in its narrative to craft a recognisable world for its audience. However, that world and the message being told need to be interrogated to ensure that discrimination is not being fostered by reinforcing a dominant ideology that alienates a segment of society. If a soap opera such as *7de Laan* only portrays characters that align with the idea of gender as binary, then a message that favours the gender binary is perpetuated to viewers. The outcome is the same if transgender characters are portrayed via a binary gaze, where their bodies are othered and where stereotyping is normalised. Accurate, representative portrayals are pertinent to society as a whole, especially for those who are being portrayed.

Research has shown that soap opera portrayals may influence how viewers see relationships and gender roles (Mahlatsi 2018:103). How a transgender character is

spoken about or treated in a soap opera can impact how a transgender person is talked about and treated in reality. The portrayals could also encourage transphobia. Capuzza and Spencer (2017:217) note that the power and influence of these portrayals highlights “television’s potential to demystify gender nonconformity, to confront transphobia, and to confirm transgender subjectivities”. Edutainment, as mentioned earlier, is a powerful strategy that can assist in recognising the potential to foster change.

This thesis highlights the need for diverse and accurate representations of transgender women in South African soap operas by examining and discussing the portrayal of Geneviève du Pré in *7de Laan*. It also illustrates the inherent ability of soap opera narratives to challenge the dominant ideology and provide a site for the recognition, acceptance, rejection or discovery of gender identities.

1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

For some South African citizens, soap operas are the only sphere where they are in contact with individuals who challenge the gender binary. There is consensus among researchers that the transgender community, in particular, is often misrepresented in the media (Capuzza 2014:115; Jobe 2013:1; Media Monitoring Project [sa]:3). Therefore, it is imperative to interrogate the legitimacy of the representations being presented to the audience and, of particular importance, to those represented.

The primary goal of the study is applied communication research, as it draws attention to the importance of the soap opera medium as a site for the discussion and negotiation of gendered subject positions and does so by investigating the representation of *7de Laan*’s transgender character, Geneviève du Pré. The investigation employs a qualitative cross-sectional thematic analysis of the 14 episodes featuring Geneviève. The study also uses triangulation using two additional data collection methods that created an increased understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and ensured that the study’s findings were credible, valid, trustworthy and consistent by analysing Facebook posts related to the portrayal by applying discourse analysis. The two other data sources included Facebook commentary that followed a post by *7de Laan* that punted Deonay Olivia Balie’s debut as Geneviève on the soap’s official Facebook page, and an unstructured interview with the actress who portrayed Geneviève

Due to the study being exploratory, the long-term research outcomes of contributing to the body of research related to transgender representation may not be immediately realised. It is hoped that the study will spark a debate around the representation deficit related transgender women in South African soap operas specifically and the importance of addressing accurate portrayals.

1.3.1 Research Questions

The main research question of this study was: How are transgender women represented in the South African soap opera *7de Laan*? In addition, the following five sub-questions were formulated to address the research topic:

- Are stereotypes present in the portrayal of transgender women on *7de Laan*?
- What does thematic analysis reveal about the representation of the character in *7de Laan*?
- How can soap operas act as a platform to challenge the dominant ideology of gender binarism?
- What issues do the Facebook commentary reveal about the portrayal of Geneviève on *7de Laan*?
- How did the actress who portrayed the character Geneviève du Pré feel about the representation?

1.4 APPROACHING THE STUDY

In this segment, the research design and methodology will be discussed to provide insight into the strategy that framed the study in terms of the methods and techniques adopted, which helped guide how the fictional portrayal of the character Geneviève in *7de Laan* was investigated and discussed.

1.4.1 Research methodology

The research design is a qualitative cross-sectional thematic analysis of 14 episodes of *7de Laan*. The research aims necessitate thematic textual analysis as an approach, which allows researchers to determine the relationship between concepts in qualitative data through the use of coding and theme identification to understand how specific factors

influence views and situations (Alhojailan 2012:40-41). The research approach therefore aligns with the aims of this study, which explores how transgender women are represented in South African soap operas, by analysing and discussing the only available portrayal of a transgenderfemale character and then uses that data to explore what the portrayal means for those who are being represented.

This research was not concerned with quantifying the portrayals but rather *how* transgender women are represented and whether those representations are accurate. Therefore, this research adopted an interpretivist paradigm, as it is chiefly concerned with observation and interpretation, which are the main underpinnings of that paradigm (Thomas 2010: 296). The research approach employed via the interpretivist paradigm lens would not produce measured data, which is why the quantitative approach was not utilised.

Quantitative research is generally viewed as formulaic and systematic and quantifies data via numbers by taking its cue from scientific analysis models (Wimmer & Dominick 2006:50). The approach is focused on how often a variable is present. If it were to be applied to this study, it would offer insight into the number of times transgender women appear in South African soap operas, but this research is not concerned with that phenomenon. The nature of this study speaks to the quality of the portrayal instead of the quantity. It examined themes and concepts present in the text, and therefore a qualitative research approach was best suited.

Due to the main data source being limited to the single representation of a transgenderfemale character, the study employed triangulation to cross-validate, enrich and confirm the findings and the narrative allocated to the initial data with additional relevant data sets. The additional data sets include Facebook comments related to the portrayal of the character, which were analysed via discourse analysis. An unstructured interview with the actress who portrays Geneviève du Pré formed the third prong of the triangulation approach and further helped capture a different dimension of the same phenomenon under investigation.

1.4.2 Theoretical approach and overview of the literature

The study explains why South African soap operas should ensure accurate portrayals by interrogating the portrayal of the country's first fictional transgender woman. It also

substantiates assertions that soap operas have an inherent ability to challenge the dominant ideology and provide its viewers with a site for creating and negotiating identities. Therefore, the key theoretical concepts in this study have been narrowed down to 'representation' and 'transgender'. Related theories have been identified as the theoretical framework, namely Stuart Hall's theory of representation and the field of transgender studies, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

It is noted that some researchers would assume that queer theory would be suitable for this research, as it rejects the hegemonic heteronormative understanding of gender as a binary construct. It is not suitable, and, as highlighted by Namaste (2000:23), queer theory "exhibits a remarkable insensitivity to the substantive issues of transgendered people's everyday lives". This study focused on the representation of transgender women. Queer theory's tendency to eclipse the lived trans experiences and its focus on sexuality makes it unsuitable for a trans study (Ramphela 2016:10; Namaste 2000).

1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 comprises the Literature Review Part I and is concerned with how transgender women are represented. The review is based on the theories relevant to this study, including the theory of representation, transgender studies, empowerment theory and the entertainment-education approach. The relevance of the study's theoretical underpinnings and considerations are substantiated by contextualising the research problem and aims within South Africa's historical and current treatment of transgender individuals. The chapter highlights the negative portrayals that the media is criticised for defaulting to and why relevant and relatable portrayals form a vital part of the media's role as an agent of socialisation within contemporary society.

Chapter 3 focuses on the medium under investigation, namely soap operas and comprises Literature Review Part II. The chapter provides an overview of the origins of soap operas. The medium's narrative structure and its othering are explored to substantiate the assertion that soap operas have an inherent ability to challenge the dominant ideology. The argument postulates soaps as a medium that can educate and empower its audience by providing a site for creating and negotiating identities and a platform to encourage social change. The chapter further reflects on how fictional portrayals in soap operas have contributed to targeted change within societies.

Chapter 4 delineates the study's research methodology, which includes the analysis of the portrayal in the soap opera, as well as the Facebook comments related to the portrayal and an interview with the actress reflecting on the portrayal. This chapter begins with a discussion of the qualitative research approach and substantiates its use in the study. A detailed breakdown of the paradigm guiding the study is then provided, as well as the population, sampling and analytical methods employed in the three data collection methods.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the analysed data concerning the research questions and provides insight regarding how transgender women are portrayed in the South African soap opera *7de Laan*, how the audience reacted to the portrayal and the actresses' opinion of the portrayal. The study's use of triangulation presented a context within which the portrayal could be understood in terms of various perspectives and its application further contributes to the trustworthiness and validity of the research.

Chapter 6 summarises the main areas investigated throughout this study. The chapter refers to the research questions and describes the conclusions drawn and their implications and limitations.

1.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an overview of the research topic, its relevance and its contribution. Chapter 2, comprised of Literature Review Part I, discusses how transgender women tend to be treated, spoken about and portrayed in the media. The chapter further details the theoretical underpinnings of representations in the media and the importance of fair, equitable, relevant and relatable portrayals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW PART I

...for a very long time, the ways in which trans people have been represented on screen have suggested that we're not real, have suggested that we're mentally ill. That we don't exist. And yet here I am. Yet here we are. And we've always been here.

- Laverne Cox (2020)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

American actress and LGBTIQ+ advocate Laverne Cox provides sobering insight with the above quote. The portrayal of the transgender community in the media have shown a tendency to portray misrepresentations, and an array of stereotypes which are usually tied to depictions of trans*¹ individuals as deceptive, dangerous predators (Media Monitoring Project [sa]:3; Jobe 2013:1; Capuzza 2014:118; Halberstam 2018; Koch-Rein et al 2020:2). In addition to the latter, transgender people are generally painted in a homogenous light as if everyone that identifies as transgender is the same – when they are not.

Series like *Pose* (2018-), are indicative of what the media is capable of in terms of telling trans stories without using a cisgender gaze, which “cast(s) transgenderism as a kind of aberration” (Halberstam 2018:92). *Pose*, which is set in New York City in the 1980s reflects on the history of transgender representation, within the context of violence amid increased visibility in society. As mentioned, the series steps away from the gaze traditionally aligned with trans representations where transcharacters are made to be gawked at, representing a radical change in terms of on screen trans* representations. Furthermore, characters in *Pose* “aren’t just one-dimensional side chicks, sidekicks, or fantasies — they’re also sisters, mothers, and savio[u]rs to the people around them” (Willis 2018). The storylines associated with them acknowledge the struggles and hardships the characters face due to their gender identities but it also celebrates their achievements and familial ties and includes narratives that show strong and complex characters. Furthermore, when tragedy strikes, as with the death of character Candy, the series does not depict “the act of murder nor the spectacle of violence and is careful not to give graphic visibility to the violation of a Black trans woman” (Koch-Rein et al 2020:1). The latter illustrates a move away from

¹ The asterisk, when used in transgender literature, is indicative of opening up categories of gender variance and as noted by Halberstam, its use “embraces the nonspecificity of the term ‘trans’ and uses it to open the term up to a shifting set of conditions and possibilities” (2018:53)

reducing transgender women to spectacles, while still recognising their lived experiences. Representations have far-reaching consequences and as mentioned by Solomon and Kurtz-Costes

fictional media representations of trans women in film and television may be the only way that some individuals receive information and impressions about real trans women, and it is therefore crucial to examine how these representations may influence people's attitudes and beliefs (2018:34).

It is understood that the media exerts significant influence on society. The images that the media portrays and the stories being told help us understand the world and our place within society (Wood 2011:259; Stokes 2003:104; Croteau & Hoynes 2000:151). When media texts misrepresent someone or a group, it speaks to the dominant views in society. The text reinforces those views to its audience and strengthens that ideology so that it continues to blossom, which can foster unnecessary divisions in society. South Africa, in particular, is a country that understands the brutal implication of dehumanising certain groups. Therefore, it is surprising that the process of diversifying representation regarding gender identities on television screens has been slow.

South Africa was introduced to its first transgender female character and actress in April 2017 (Kekana 2017; Valentine 2017). This occurred more than two decades after the country achieved democratic status. The acknowledgement by the soap opera that South Africa's gender landscape is diverse is lauded, but this representation must be interrogated. It does not have to be questioned because it is the first portrayal of its kind but because the media sometimes neglects its role as an informer and enabler of democratic development and identity construction.

This literature review details the relevance of representation and transgender studies to this study. The latter is viewed as a relatively young field within academia as trans studies have previously been discussed under the umbrella term of LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer) and within the framework of queer theory. As mentioned earlier, queer theory rejects the hegemonic heteronormative understanding of gender as a binary construct. It would be assumed to be a great fit by some researchers for a study of this nature (see Section 1.4.2). This researcher rejects that assumption because queer theory should not be used to inform or frame trans studies as "queer theory is both the door through which trans studies enters and the room in which it is institutionalized [sic]" (Keegan 2020:349). Trans studies is a relevant discrete discipline.

This research adopts Susan Stryker's (2004:212) view of transgender studies being queer theory's *evil twin*. The relationship illustrates that the theoretical approaches share parentage in terms of feminist and sexuality studies but highlights that trans studies "wilfully [*sic*] disrupts the privileged family narratives that favour sexual identity labels ... over gender categories" (Stryker 2004:212). Therefore, queer theory is not relevant to this study's theoretical framework, which is concerned with transgender representation (Keegan 2018:2).

The literature review also presents an overview of how transgender people are represented and focuses on the historical and current socio-political contexts that transgender individuals face daily in South Africa. The review further details the relevance of entertainment-education and the empowerment theory to this research and uses representation theory as a springboard.

2.2 REPRESENTATION THEORY

*The meaning is not in the object or person or thing, nor is it in the word.
It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to
seem natural and inevitable.*

- Stuart Hall (1997:21)

The theory of representation is concerned with portrayals in the media. The theory interrogates how the media presents reality to an audience to understand the images being portrayed and how those images shape societal views (Bernstein 2002:261). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall is synonymous with the concept of media representation. Hall's work *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (1997) is viewed as one of the most influential texts regarding the topic. He defines it as a vital cog in the process of meaning creation within a culture because "representation connects meaning and language to culture" (Hall 1997:15). This theoretical approach is used by researchers under the assumption that the media forms a part of how the audience understands society.

2.2.1 Identity, representation and the media

Representations affect identity formation via the ideology presented (Bernstein 2002:259). Identity is defined as an individual's sense of self in relation to those around them (Howarth

2011:2). Our identities “shape how we communicate, what we communicate about, how we communicate *with* others and how we communicate *about* others” (Howarth 2011:4).

The ideology uncovered when examining media texts refers to society’s underlying beliefs, as “an ideology is basically a system of meaning” (Croteau & Hoynes 2003:159). The power associated with representations is the very reason why this element of the media process should be interrogated. On an ideological level, the media presents representation networks that favour certain views, identities and interests over others. These networks “support *a priori* hierarchies of knowledge, restrict the development of identity and sustain discourses of difference, privilege and power” (Howarth 2011:12).

The latter supports the notion of identity development as a process shaped by representations because “identities are constructed within, not outside discourse” (Hall 1996:17). The process could also limit the identification of available identities if they are undermined by a dominant ideology of discrimination. Representation should, therefore, be understood as an ideology in its own right because some minority or oppressed groups “do not have the material or cultural capital to challenge representations of them that they see as inaccurate or destructive” (Howarth 2011:14).

The media informs its audience of society and, in doing so, educates. It is a powerful cultural and socialisation tool that has “become a key member of the household, with virtually access to every member of the house” (Muindi 2015:13). The educational aspect should be used in the media for nation-building and to assist transgender individuals in feeling safe, heard, accepted and respected.

The representations in the media are, therefore, of vital importance. They should see society’s minorities

depicted as a part of society, one that has some special interests but also one that faces many of the same challenges as every other citizen (Media Monitoring [sa]:3).

If this mainstreaming takes place, it may assist in lessening discrimination by fostering an understanding of the meaning of the constitution enshrining human rights for all that live within South Africa’s borders.

The constructionist approach guides this study. It asserts that the meaning afforded to an object or an idea is not inherent but that people who hold power within a culture hold sway. It is therefore, as noted by Hall (1997:25)

the social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others.

The media is just one of those social actors, but it is a powerful one. The media is present in every aspect of life and has become an agent of socialisation (Jobe 2013:6; Stokes 2003:104; Kellner 1995:16; McQuail 2010:438). The media is a culture on its own. Its language consists of images and sound, and the meanings produced by it are not minor because “they organize [*sic*] and regulate social practises, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects” (Hall 1997:3).

Therefore, representation theory positions the media as a powerful socialisation tool that can “preserve, transmit, and create important cultural information” (Bernstein 2002:260). The role of culture with regards to this study will be explored below.

2.2.2 Defining culture

A culture refers to a group where members share beliefs, ideas and norms (Hall 1997:1). Those commonalities give rise to a similar reference system and help sculpt an understanding of the world. Hall notes that the term can vary in definition as culture is a continuous, participatory activity concerned with “feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas” (Hall 1997:2). The creation of meaning is possible due to a “system of representation”, consisting of various ways of identifying, classifying and organising concepts (Hall 1997:17). One such method involves the principles of difference and similarity, where a pen and pencil may be better understood in relation to each other (Hall 1997:17). Both items are writing instruments, but one contains graphite and the other ink (Mathyer 1969:103). The items are similar in that they are used to write on paper but differ to the extent that they conjure up different images of interaction or use and have different names. The continuous process of understanding items in relation to each other and what makes them different contributes to a shared cultural conceptual map. The map helps navigate the array of representations in society. The idea of a shared map could make culture sound unitary and rigid, but as Hall (1997:2) explains, “there is always a great

diversity of meaning about any topic and more than one way of interpreting or representing it”.

Individuals, therefore, have various conceptual maps. One of these maps may be purely their own, where an amalgamation of the representations of the various cultures they belong to has taken place. They would also have “shared conceptual map[s]” which are linked to distinct cultures they form part of (Hall 1997:18). Hall points out that these maps exist because, if different individuals’ maps were completely at odds with those around them and no shared language existed, communication would not be possible (Hall 1997:18). He further explains that the ability to understand and communicate complex concepts supports the existence of a shared conceptual map.

However, the map is not enough to create and sustain dialogue between members of society as they need to communicate actively, which is done via a language. Members share a language, not limited to communication in the linguistics sense, which includes objects, words or signs (Hall 1997:19). Language, therefore, becomes an essential component in translating representation into concepts; it *makes* the lamp a lamp, speaks it into existence and gives it meaning. Three overarching theories are employed to understand the use of language and representations. They are described as reflective, intentional and constructionist (Hall 1997:15). These approaches aim to understand the relationship between language and the world. They explore whether language is just a reflection of the world as it exists, whether it is an intentional attempt by producers to construct meaning, or whether meaning is actually a creation of language within a culture (Hall 1997:15).

As noted by Hall (1997), the term, culture, is not restrictive and is, therefore, not confined to race, ethnicity or nationality. It could refer to members of an online gaming fraternity, the audience of a soap opera or the entire population of South Africa. Cultures act as guides or blueprints to help us “make sense of the world of people, objects and events, and [is] how you are able to express a complex thought about those things to other people” (Hall 1997:16).

Cultures can afford members solidarity, but they can also foster discrimination. The discrimination could take the form of one group, religion or a certain gender identity being judged, stereotyped or excluded from social development considerations based on

difference. The transgender community is one of the most oppressed and stigmatised groups in contemporary society, and a culture of intolerance contributes to that discrimination (Ashwal 2017:22). The discrimination is encouraged by binary views and is strengthened by stereotypes. The existence of stereotypes, as noted by Hall (2003:284), reveals power dynamics that are best understood by identifying the greatest benefactor of a relationship. Stuart Hall (2003:229) notes that, "...people who are in any way significantly different from the majority – 'them' rather than 'us' – are frequently exposed to this *binary* form of representation". The binary views are not the result of spontaneity, and neither are the stereotypes that encourage them. Hall (2003:284) explains that stereotypes are cultivated "when self-integration is threatened". These divisions are sustained by othering and fuelled by ideologies that claim that belonging and difference are conflicting experiences that cannot operate in harmony.

Othering favours a relationship that is deeply embedded in an unequal power dynamic that is focused on difference. Difference is essential to understanding meaning in terms of providing a point of reference, as per the pen and pencil relationship, where the one is understood in relation to the other. The reference is usually communicated within a culture using language. The framework concerning that reference will be discussed further in the study under Saussure's semiotic approach.

The power dynamic present within culture and language that favours a binary reflects Jacques Derrida's (1981:41) argument that there is always a relation of power between two opposite poles and that there are not many neutral binary oppositions. Derrida further asserts a relationship is not "a peaceful coexistence of a *vis-a-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy". The latter parallels Edward Said's text, *Orientalism* (1978), which is frequently cited in gender studies research but has also been referenced as outdated (De Groot 2013:193). The text positions the Orient as a European creation, representing the nation's "deepest and most recurring images of the other" (Said 1979:1). Said's work explains that this Orient spectre has assisted in polarisation and creates a binary view favouring the Occident (Said 1979:5). The Occident is synonymous with positive and growth-driven characteristics; it is polarised by the Orient. The relationship may be viewed as one participant occupying a pedestal and dominating, while another is perceived as inferior. The latter is confirmed by Said, who notes that the relationship between the two is "a relationship of power, of domination, [and] varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 1979:5).

Said's work is often criticised for being androcentric in its assumptions about scholarship and culture production (De Groot 2013: 192). De Groot notes that, despite its criticism, Orientalism, if viewed as a nonaligned term or one that is not fixed, "can be used to study the networks of material, political and aesthetic connections underpinning cultural production" (2013:194). These networks, with regards to this research relates to the media and its products, which reinforce ideologies that can be positive and negative. The positive ideology is not the concern of this study but rather the network's potential to persuade the negative ideology. The cause for distinction is based on the negative ideology presenting "a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the 'Other'" (Hall 2003:238). An enabling environment fuels this negative, dangerous site.

South Africa is a diverse nation with 11 official languages and a multitude of ethnicities and cultures. It also "has an extensive history of prejudice, hatred and inequity with an over-intolerance of *difference*" (Ashwal 2017:23). Therefore, it is pertinent that South Africa's social and political history be considered when trying to understand how transgender individuals navigate their identity and expression. One of the dark chapters related to the country's relationship with gender and sexuality is the Aversion Research Project (De Gruchy & Lewis 2001:866)

2.2.3 The Aversion Project – a brief overview

South Africa's historical view of gender and sexuality is binary, and medical experiments supported that delineation during the apartheid era (Ashwal 2017:23; Kaplan 2004:1145). Rumours of human rights violations in South Africa's Defence Force (SADF) branded as medical research circulated for years. However, details of what transpired only first came to light in June 1997 at the health sector hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Van Zyl, De Gruchy, Lapinsky, Lewin & Reid 1999:11; Kaplan 2004:1146; Ashwal 2017:24). The TRC hearings sparked an investigative interest in the subject. They resulted in the publication of a 116-page document titled *The aversion project: Human rights abuses of gays and lesbians in the SADF by health workers during the Apartheid era* (Van Zyl et al 1999:11). Psychiatrists in the SADF were implicated in human abuses from 1969 to 1987, under the guise of 'treating' and 'correcting' homosexuality (Ashwal 2017:24; Kaplan 2004:1145; De Gruchy & Lewis 2001:866; Van Zyl et al 1999:11).

In 1982, a SADF policy directive signed by the head of the army, General CL Viljoen, ordered that “all possible steps must be taken to combat the phenomenon of homosexuality or lesbianism in the army” (Van Zyl et al 1999:55). The steps referred to included aversion therapy and treatments involving extreme doses of hormones, chemical castration and electric shocks (Van Zyl et al 1999; Ashwal 2017:24; Kaplan 2004:1145). South Africa’s view of gender and sexuality has since evolved. The country’s constitution states that all its citizens’ rights are guaranteed, and it condemns discrimination based on religion, sex, gender and sexual orientation. The country is viewed as progressive in terms of democratic rights and its LGBTIQ+ legislature, but it is said to be still “far from being a ‘dreamland’ for trans*” South Africans (Klein 2009:15).

2.2.4 South Africa’s transgender landscape – perceptions and policies

Carrol, Gilroy and Ryan (2002:139) define transgender as “a range of behaviors, expressions, and identifications that challenge the pervasive bipolar gendered system in a given culture”. In South Africa, a cisgender, patriarchal culture is perpetuated, and most LGBTIQ+ individuals “continue to battle societal prejudice and discrimination in addition to overarching societal pressure to conform to social constructions” (Ashwal 2017:25).

South Africa’s Bill of Rights is lauded as being advanced because it condemns discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation and sex (Husakouskaya 2013:2). Additional policy proposals, like the revised Sexual Offences Act, are meant to empower members of the LGBTIQ+ community and further cement civil rights. However, the current legislative protection stands in contrast to the experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals in South Africa. Ashwal comments that

...there has been a dramatic increase in homophobic and gender-based hate crimes in South Africa despite the framework for gender and sex equality and protection from discrimination of sexual orientation in post apartheid’s constitution (2017:25).

Some members of the South African population devoutly view gender as binary, and deviating from that binary can be dangerous (Klein 2009). The death of someone perceived as gender deviant could take longer to investigate or not be investigated at all because of the stigmas attached to challenging the gender binary. At times, communities remain silent due to cultural beliefs that the individual is abnormal and that “their dehumanisation is justifiable” even when the perpetrator of a crime against an LGBTIQ+ person is known (Ashwal 2017:27).

Iranti-Org published a press release in January 2020, which provided insight into the experiences of trans individuals in South Africa. The release referred to the murders of Mmabatho 'Madonna' James, Portia Simphiwe Mtsweni and Nara Mphele and asserted that:

...besides the constant threat of danger that LGBTQIA+ persons routinely face, they are also not guaranteed justice. Constitutional rights are not protected, valued and often denied assistance from the police (Iranti-Org 2020).

Müllner and Meer's (2018) study that looked at the justice afforded to LGBT people in South Africa found inadequacies in the country's justice system regarding how sexual violence cases against LGBT individuals are dealt with. They affirm that these inadequacies exist because they are "rooted in prejudice, homophobia, and a lack of skills and knowledge" (Müllner & Meer 2018: 6).

Those factors are prevalent in society and are reflected in a research report by The Other Foundation from which Müllner and Meer draw support. The report presents evidence of contradictions in how South Africans perceive members of the LGBT community. The study showed that more than half of the respondents (55%) say they would accept a family member who identified as gay. Respondents, who believe this community should enjoy the same rights as they do, totalled 51%. An overwhelming 72% feel that same-sex sexual activity is "morally wrong" (Müllner & Meer 2018:4). The 72% figure does not directly relate to the study's topic, but it illustrates the contradictions present concerning how members of South Africa's population view the LGBT community's rights and how their actions are measured

Müllner and Meer (2018:4) conclude that "South Africans who do not conform to heteronormativity experience discrimination and marginalisation because of their sexual orientation, gender identity (SOGI), or gender expression". LGBT individuals face ridicule from the South African Police Services (SAPS). Müllner and Meer (2018:6) present an example from an interview where an LGBT activist in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) indicated that sexual violence survivors might be subject to victim-blaming or have their gender questioned when seeking to report a case. The interview offers an example of the kind of comments that a sexual violence survivor may receive from a police officer, namely "you wanted to be a woman maybe that is why the guy did this to you" (Müllner & Meer 2018:26). This view is discriminatory and misogynistic and suggests that, in being a woman,

rape should be anticipated. These views perpetuate an unfounded ideology that fosters discrimination and stigma permeating through other segments of society, such as the healthcare services industry.

Transgender individuals who require access to healthcare are often ridiculed, scrutinised, or prevented from accessing services because of their gender identity (Müllner & Meer 2018:15). Activists in Gauteng and Mpumalanga shared stories with Müllner and Meer that describe instances where survivors were made a spectacle of and ridiculed. These include situations where “healthcare providers would call their colleagues over from their departments, or away from their own tasks to ogle the survivor” (Müllner & Meer 2018:27).

Members of the LGBTIQ+ community are entitled to the same liberties the rest of the South African citizenry enjoys. If media portrayals are contributing to the stigma and hate crimes targeted at this community, then those portrayals need to be interrogated, especially if such scrutiny could assist in saving the life of someone in future. Many South Africans, all with different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, only interact with individuals who identify differently in terms of gender and sexuality via the media. The audience requires fair and representative portrayals. They may be viewed as deviant themselves and require assistance in understanding their identity. They may have a family member or a friend perceived as gender deviant in society (Capuzza 2014:116).

2.3 THE MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The media frames the public’s understanding of self and citizenship. It occupies a role of influential opportunity, with the ability to sculpt public opinion. Public opinion refers to the *status quo*, the predominant leaning, or sum of views, of the population as a whole, essentially what is deemed ‘the norm’ (McQuail 2010:515). The media is the “most readily accessible source for assessing the prevailing climate” and therefore its status as a culture should not be overlooked (McQuail 2010:519). This study concurs with Kellner’s adoption of the term ‘media culture’ (1995:34) instead of mass media or popular culture when referring to this system. The system has far-reaching influence, as it “calls attention to the circuit of production, distribution, and reception through which media culture is produced, distributed, and consumed” and rejects the idea of a passive audience (Kellner 1995:34).

The media's influence should not be underestimated. Theories associated with representation studies understand that what the media presents is not reality. It is a constructed, reimagined version of reality that helps its audience make sense of their world (Van der Spuy 2011:99). The media reinforces that ideology by re-representing how it features in society. That process is possibly best described as ritualistic (Carey 2008:17; Pitout 2006:251). Communication theorist James Carey (2008:17) explains that an individual reading a newspaper is not merely obtaining information but rather "attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed".

The maintenance of what is viewed as the norm, by telling the audience what they should be focused on, validates the reality, ideas and views present in society and is supported by various forms of ideological domination (Kellner 1995:2; Wood 2011:259). By reiterating the dominant ideology, the media holds the well-documented ability to foster division and discrimination (McQuail 2010:493; Hall 1997:16, Howarth 2011:159; Stokes 2003:104).

The media's mediated reality may not be an accurate or true reflection of reality as media products have been purposefully selected and edited before dissemination. The media facilitates the audience's understanding of society, and that mediation can take various roles. These include being a window on events, a gatekeeper where only certain information is shared, a platform for the distribution of ideas and a disseminator of information (Van der Spuy 2011:98). The messages shared by the media contain ideology, and it is usually the dominant one (Bernstein 2002:262; Severin & Tankard 2014:233; Howarth 2011:163). The dominant view is not an equal reflection of all opinions "rather, it is the most general, functional, and stable mainstream, representing the broadest dimensions of shared meaning and assumptions" (Gerber 1998:183). This research does not assume that the transfer or reinforcement of dominant ideologies via media content is linear or that the audience cannot reject certain ideological undertones because that would be fallacious. Instead, this research instead maintains that values and morals are introduced and nurtured by the media reading process. This view is supported by George Gerbner's cultivation theory (1998:180). Gerbner defines cultivation as television's contribution to the viewer's formulation of social reality. That contribution is not viewed as being impactful over a brief period. Instead, Gerbner (1998:179) notes that what is most likely to cultivate stable and common conceptions of reality is therefore, the overall pattern of programming to which total communities are regularly exposed over long period of time.

The duration and dominance of the imagery's exposure in terms of the viewer's information source profile also, according to Gerbner, play a role in cultivation (1988:182). The soap opera narrative, discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, aligns with the basic criteria for cultivating common views of reality. The narrative is continuous and focused on a multiplicity of plots (Marx Knoetze 2015:55; Pitout 2006:251-252; Geraghty 2005:312; Hobson 2003:35; Allen 2001:17). The storylines contain plot twists that can stretch over days, months or years, strengthening the medium's resistance to closure. The closure resistance means that viewers constantly engage with multiple characters and voices over extended periods. When observed within the context of cultivation theory, soap operas present an ideal medium for cultivating representative values and views. The latter infers that the *7de Laan* character Geneviève du Pré, who appeared in 14 episodes, could contribute to cultivating societal perceptions of transgender women.

This study does not reject the autonomy of the audience as individuals who actively participate in the mediated process. However, it should be noted that human beings may lean towards accepting views so that they themselves are accepted in society. Pryor, Perfors, Piers and Howe (2019:13) conducted research into the conformity of norms by people who have opposing belief systems. The findings revealed a tendency to adopt ethical standings to maintain social ties, even when the norms, such as those presented in that research, are unfounded and not real (Pryor et al 2019:13). Therefore, the media's content should be interrogated to ascertain what is being said and *how* it is being said as it may be reproducing various forms of prejudice and triggering divisions (Kellner 1995:4). Those divisions may find support through the media's representations which provide:

models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of "us" and "them" (Kellner 1995:1).

2.3.1 The media as a mediation and socialisation agent

The media has, therefore, become a dominating force of socialisation. In light of this, the study supports the views presented by Hall that the interaction taking place between the media and the audience is not a one-way process. As noted previously, the outdated hypodermic needle theory is, therefore, rejected, as it views the audience as passive receivers of content (Fourie 2007:232; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:8; Bandura 1989:5). This study understands what the media presents is mediated and speaks to the very essence

of realism. Realism refers to the depiction of reality, which is “made of devices such as characterization [*sic*], narration and mode of address, which are reproduced over and over again in various guises” (O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske 1994:256).

This study also acknowledges the assumption that an audience knows that the storyline being presented by the soap opera they frequently watch is not real. However, the assumption is problematic as it assumes that the audience interprets content the same way and are aware of the ideological undertones. This study, however, does not rely on notions or assumptions of how an audience interacts with media content because the real-world effects of the divisions that the media culture can create are worth investigating to address and attempt to mitigate in those future.

Bernstein eloquently explains the relationship between the audience and media and problematises an aspect of that when she says:

the more the realism of a text is being accepted by audiences the less they are likely to question the representations it offers, and the more these representations will seem natural (Bernstein 2002:262).

To ensure the sense of ‘realness’ when the media represents its version of reality, it uses systems of meanings, known as codes, that speak to the audience’s conceptual map (McQuail 2010:387). The map involves language, signs and symbols “that serve as guides for judgment and action” (Bandura 1989:9). When analysing these codes, it should be understood that they do not have to be accurate or realistic; they merely need to be recognised as something that may be present in society. One of the codes commonly used is stereotyping. It speaks to a concept, mannerism or even characteristic assumed to be common among a certain group. The assumption then becomes a repetitive identifier of that entire group which can lead to discrimination (Bernstein 2002:261; Burton 2002:133; O’Sullivan et al 1994:299).

2.3.2 Societal codes - the use of stereotypes

Stereotyping is an ideological process that works to the advantage of the more powerful groups in society.

- Alina Bernstein (2002:265)

Some academics, such as Graeme Burton (2002:133), believe that stereotypes are not inherently ‘bad’ and that it depends on how they are used. He further explains that there are three levels at which the categorisation of people takes place and that

at each level the representation becomes simpler, cruder, more generalised, more clichéd, more worrying in terms of the value messages underlying what we see or read (Burton 2002:132).

Stereotypes, however, are problematic regardless of the various layers because, as Bernstein said, “when a perceived idea of a certain group matches the 'reality' of media representations, a powerful stereotype is being reinforced,” as it favours those in power, and essentially maintains social and symbolic order (2002:265).

It is understood that the media does not explicitly tell its audience how and what to think, but it can contribute to creating and sustaining views (Gerber 1988:179; Muindi 2015:21). The media plays an important role in society as an informer, entertainer and educator (Nyamnjoh 2011:28). It assists in creating meaning and highlights which “issues, events and people” warrant the audience’s attention via a shared conceptual map (Wood 2011:259). The media also helps us understand who we are and our identity concerning society (Howarth 2011:167, Bernstein 2002:312).

Therefore, the interrogation of that shared conceptual map is generally of vital importance because the way the media represents a concept, idea or event supports how it will be understood by society. As noted previously, South Africa is a diverse nation. However, that diversity does not usually extend to the concept of gender. Anyone who deviates from the normalised ideal of the gender binary may be viewed as “un-African” (Bennet & Tamale 2017: 26). The un-African label impacts conceptual maps that transcend borders and demonstrate linguistically how division is sustained by othering on various levels.

Overarching ideologies of heteronormativity and gender binarism are prevalent in South African society and are often culturally sustained views of what is acceptable. Culture binds us to one another, but as surmised by the term ‘un-African’, culture can also alienate us. Representations of transgender people are often fraught with stereotypes, overly concerned with surgery or present a homogenous view of the experiences of a kaleidoscope of individuals (Halberstam 2005:48; Capuzza 2014:115; Jobe 2013:1; Media Monitoring Project [sa]:3; Miller 2012:12).

The media reflects the dominant opinions and experiences of those present in society. In a diverse nation such as South Africa, a particular population segment only interacts with individuals who defy gender binaries via soap operas. These diverse voices and

representations are needed in the media because we look to the media for meaning. As Hall (1997:2) noted, meaning can relate to the same topic and still vary in interpretation and representation (1997:2). Therefore, the diversity of meaning necessitates that:

citizens using the media should be able to find cultural representations and political expressions that are both reflective of their own views and experiences, and that diverge considerably from those views and experiences (Croteau & Hoynes 2000:151).

If the media's shared conceptual map maintains gender binarism, it is problematic because it rejects the legitimacy of the existence of anyone who does not identify with these specified categories. As highlighted earlier, we give objects, people and events meaning by the cultural frameworks via which we interpret them. Therefore, the media should be providing the audience with accurate representations, particularly for those being represented, as "the lives of those who embody non-normative sex or gender depend, often quite literally, on what meaning gets made" (Elliot 2010:9). At times the media's meaning creation process involves edutainment-education, which has proven to be a successful strategy to encourage change in society.

2.4 EDUCATION-ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment-Education, commonly referred to as E-E or edutainment, is a strategic approach that uses education and entertainment to convey a message that aims to advance development and directed change within society (Riley et al 2021:42; Samuels 2020:4; Ladigbolu & Olajide 2018: 156; Khalid & Ahmed 2014:69-70; Japhet 2013:1; Singhal & Rogers 2004: 5; Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:58). Blending entertainment and education streams are used in radio and television soap operas. It helps to expand "audience member's knowledge about an educational issue, create favourable attitudes, shift social norms and change overt behaviour" (Singhal et al. 2004:5). The use of edutainment in soap operas like *7de Laan* can assist in broadening the audience knowledge base with regards to the kaleidoscope of gender identities that exist in society. The approach can further encourage a change in social perceptions regarding how individuals who are generally viewed as challenging the gender binary are treated, by portraying its fictional world that resembles reality where various gender identities co-exist without discrimination.

2.4.1 Edutainment – an overview

Edutainment is a form of storytelling, which reflects the evolution of communication and socialisation methods. For centuries, stories have been told to pass on traditions,

communicate values and morals, and preserve social order (Brown & Singhal 1999:264; Tuwe 2018:73). The instructions and lessons related to what is deemed good or bad, or morally right and wrong, have been interwoven into the narratives of mythology, chronicles and fables for centuries. The story of *Anansi the Spider* is an example (Abba 2016:25; Brown & Singhal 1999:264). Anansi, also known as Ananse, is a mischievous and wise character coming from folklore linked to the Ashanti people of Ghana (Ellington 2016:1; Abba 2016:25; Adjei 2012:31). One of Anansi's stories explores how 'wisdom' became universal. The tale narrates how all the 'wisdom' present in the world was once contained in a clay pot and released when Anansi smashed the pot after losing his temper (Abba 2016:25). The stories, which teach moral lessons and reflect on society, made their way orally from Ghana to the Caribbean during the slave trade and eventually travelled to America (Ellington 2016:1).

How stories are told has evolved to include mass media as a storyteller, but the content still tells stories about society (Muindi 2015:1). Soap operas, in particular, entertain and educate, which "speaks to a long-held belief in the power of storytelling, particularly narrative fiction, to influence public opinion" (Samuels 2020:4).

2.4.2 Edutainment's influential capacity for social change

Edutainment can exert social influence on two levels. The first level relates to edutainment's ability to impact the awareness and behaviour of the audience regarding social change (Singhal & Rogers 2004:5). The second refers to how edutainment can assist in constructing an enabling external environment related to the audience to enact change at a "system-level" (Singhal & Rogers 2004:5). Evidence of edutainment's pro-social development potential can be drawn from several studies. The use of edutainment as a targeted communicative strategy can be traced to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) 1951 radio soap opera *The Archers* and the telenovela *Simplemente María*, which debuted in Peru in 1969 (Riley et al 2021: 42; Khalid & Ahmed 2014:73; Japhet 2013:8; Singhal & Rogers 2004:9).

The Archers is the longest-running drama globally (Rodero, Mas, Larrea & Blanco 2014:178). The show consisted of daily 15-minute episodes centred on rural life in the fictional village of Ambridge and advocated innovation in farming (Samuels 2020:4; McIntosh 2016:18; Brown & Singhal 1999:266). The soap's coverage included techniques

for crop planting, methods aimed at boosting yields, and strategies to prevent diseases and control pests (Brown & Singhal 1999:266-267). *The Archers* was favoured among adults in the United Kingdom, and, at the peak of its popularity, “two out of every three British adults were regular listeners” (Japhet 2013:8). The soap opera’s initial focus was on agriculture, but its storylines evolved to engage current issues, such as the story of Helen and Rob, which ran between 2013 and 2016. The Helen-Rob plot centred on coercive control. Coercive control is a form of domestic abuse which can involve, among others, isolation tactics, physical abuse, deprivation of basic needs and threats of violence (Samuels 2020:2; Clark 2020:2; Fontes 2015). The plot enabled a national conversation, and, at the height of its popularity, calls to helplines registered a 17% increase (Samuels 2020:8). The storyline involved the input of women’s organisations in assisting in portraying this form of domestic abuse accurately, which helped “redefine the social norms around domestic violence, and enable new subjectivities to enter the public sphere” (Samuels 2020:20).

The Peruvian telenovela, *Simplemente María*, is another example of how edutainment can encourage social change. *Simplemente María* told the Cinderellaesque story of a single mother named Maria (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:74; Wang & Singhal 2021:821). Maria enrolls in adult literacy classes, learns seamstress skills on a Singer sewing machine and becomes successful (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:74; Wang & Singhal 2021:821). The programme’s audience ratings increased, along with Singer machine sales and enrolment in adult literacy and sewing classes (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:74; Wang & Singhal 2021:821; Brown & Singhal 1999:268).

The success of *Simplemente María* inspired Miguel Sabido, a writer-producer-director at the Mexican television network, Televisa, to develop a strategy that incorporates education in entertainment specifically for soap operas (Brown & Singhal 1999:268). Sabido initially referred to the strategy as “entertainment with proven social benefit” (2004:61). The approach, now known as edutainment, was used in telenovelas between 1967 and 1982 and sought to advance development in Mexico, focusing on family planning, literacy and cultural pride (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:74; Brown & Singhal 1999:268). Sabido’s approach dominates theoretical writing around edutainment in soaps.

The success of the telenovelas inspired greater adoption of edutainment by other countries and is evident in programmes globally (Brown & Singhal 1999:268; Chandrasekar &

Aatman 2017:58). The Nigerian weekly serial called *Cock Crow at Dawn* debuted in 1980. The programme promoted agricultural activity among various income groups and contributed to increased participation in the agricultural sector (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:70; Brown & Singhal 1999:268). Findings related to the 30-minute show revealed a strong inclination by farmers to use the soap opera as a source of information, as 53.3% of respondents indicated that they expected to benefit from watching the show (Ladigbolu & Olajide 2018:161).

The Tanzanian radio soap *Twende na Wakati* (Let's Go with the Times) further exemplifies edutainment's ability to ignite change within society. The 30-minute soap opera debuted on Radio Tanzania in 1993. The content addressed favouritism regarding male children and opposed a narrative claiming that the lubricant of a condom contained the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). *Twende na Wakati's* storyline also included family planning as an encouraged option for couples (Rogers, Vaughn, Swalehe, Rao, Svenkerud & Sood 1999:195). A multi-method triangulation research study concluded that the soap impacted the adoption of contraceptive methods. The findings showed that *Twende na Wakati* contributed to spousal conversations about family planning and revealed a measurable increase regarding listeners who adopted family planning methods (Rogers et al 1999:202-203). During a 1994 survey, 20% of listeners linked their adoption of family planning to the soap opera, and that figure increased to 24% in 1997 (Rogers et al 1999:203). The 4% increase underscores edutainment's ability to be "a social mobilizer [*sic*], an advocate or agenda setter" (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:72). The communicative strategy's potential to deliver on those roles is supported by four characteristics, which distinguish edutainment from traditional education programmes.

2.4.3 Edutainment's methodological and theoretical characteristics

Edutainment's characteristics include the purposeful communication of an educational issue to a large audience, the promotion of pro-social beliefs and values, and the use of role models where "the characters' fates serve as vicarious learning experiences about the realistic consequences of alternative behaviours" (Rogers et al 1999:194).

Its key and final characteristic is identified as its theoretical foundation (Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:59). Edutainment is not a communication theory but rather a theory-based approach that aims to produce social change (Frank & Falzone 2021:4; Khalid & Ahmed

2014:70; Japhet 2013:6). The approach incorporates elements from communication and behavioural theories and its theoretical underpinning includes Carl Jung's collective unconsciousness theory, Eric Bentley's dramatic theory and Albert Bandura's social learning theory (Riley et al 2021:42; Khalid & Ahmed 2014:76; Japhet 2013:13; Singhal & Rogers 2004:36; Brown & Singhal 1999:268; Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:58). Edutainment's theoretical foundation, therefore, like Bandura's Social Learning Theory, considers the "psychosocial mechanisms through which symbolic communication promotes personal and social changes" (Singhal & Rogers 2004:76). The symbolic communication regarding this research refers to meanings presented in soap operas by the storyline and characters.

Edutainment's theoretical considerations assume that an individual's behavioural pattern, morals and values reflect various influences strengthened by institutions. The media is one of those institutions because "whether it be thought patterns, values, attitudes, or styles of behaviour, life increasingly models the media" (Bandura 1989:22). The latter means that, when an edutainment strategy is planned, the socio-cultural context is considered before implementation. Edutainment views learning as a continuous process. The 'continuous learning' framework implies that behavioural or social change is possible within an enabling environment such as those encouraged by the Soul City Institute for Social Justice's (SCI) television series (Singhal & Rogers 2004:6). The non-governmental organisation (NGO) was launched in 1992 under the name Soul City Institute for Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SCI). The SCI was at the forefront of edutainment in Africa and has dealt with various social issues by using television dramas supported by radio, print and social media campaigns (Japhet 2013:14).

The first *Soul City* series centred on mother and child health issues. The content subsequently included HIV/AIDS education against a backdrop of a growing number of infections in South Africa (Soul City Institute for Social Justice 2018). SCI's edutainment approach aims to increase awareness at both the community and individual levels by using audience participation. The strategy produces a collaborative product where

the lived experiences and voices, the social norms and behaviours of the target audience are captured; giving the media resonance, credibility and clarity of message (Japhet 2013:14).

In 1999, the fourth *Soul City* series addressed domestic and spousal violence by suggesting an intervention approach for neighbours during a period where "abuse was

seen as a private matter, carried out in a private space, with curtains drawn and behind closed doors” (Usdin , Singhal, Shongwe, Goldstein & Shabalala 2004:154). The series portrayed neighbours indignantly banging pots and pans outside the house of the abuser when an act of domestic violence occurred. The latter demonstrates edutainment’s use of role models to suggest behaviour and foster self-efficacy. The modelling behaviour resonated with viewers as “pot banging to stop partner abuse was reported in several locations in South Africa” (Usdin et al 2004:155). The practice was modified by the patrons of a pub in South Africa’s Tembisa township who banged bottles in response to abuse at the premises (Usdin et al 2004:155).

Soul City’s fourth series illustrated that taking the socio-economic context into account can help accelerate the impact of pro-social messages as the audience is receptive to the content (Khalid & Ahmed 2014:76). Quantitative data shows that the series created a supportive environment. The storyline led to domestic abuse forming part of the dialogue for 36% of viewers, and it assisted some audience members to address the abuse they faced because they identified with the characters (Usdin et al 2004:172).

The *Soul City* series, *Twende na Wakati*, *Cock Crow at Dawn*, *Simplemente María* and *The Archers* all provide evidence confirming assertions that edutainment can drive social development and change through dialogue when supported by representative, relevant and realistic portrayals. The portrayals, as noted previously, provide the audience with role models and draw from Bandura’s Social Learning theory, which postulates that

virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behaviour and its consequences for them (Bandura 1971:2).

However, teachings gained from the observed experiences should not be viewed as linear and immediate because “audience members selectively expose themselves to E-E messages, selectively perceive them, selectively recall them, and selectively use them for their own purposes” (Singhal et al 2004:14). A two-way interaction between the audience and the messages being received from soap operas reflects the “bidirectionality of influence” (Bandura 1989:4). The audience is a product and producer of their environment (Bandura 1989:4). The theory illustrates the influential flow as a Catch 22 situation. The latter implies that an aggressive interaction by someone can produce a hostile environment enabled by existing environmental factors ripe for hostile activation. Edutainment aims to create an enabling environment that allows the audience to reflect on their situations compared to the characters on screen and empower them to enact change (Sood, Menard

& Witte 2004:144). The concept encompasses an empowerment approach to social change that is integral to the edutainment strategy and will be discussed below as a construct and theory relevant to this research.

2.5 EMPOWERMENT THEORY

To 'empower' is to create an enabling environment where people who do not usually command power can gain control of their lives and understand their environment and their place in it better. Theoretically, empowerment asserts that,

while people may occasionally need assistance, information, or expert advice, they should play as active a role as possible in designing and controlling their own help and destiny (Perkins 2010:208-209).

Julian Rappaport (1986:155) is credited with developing the concept, highlighting that social ills arise from powerlessness and social policies acknowledging the contributing factors are required. Rappaport (1986:156) notes that empowerment "encapsulates the symbolic message required to bring a new sense of urgency and to transcend the rights/needs dialectic". Empowerment works on a system-wide level because it is a "collective rather than just an individual process" (Perkins 2010:207). The process is focused on strengths and capabilities and analysing environmental influences to advance skills, address issues and enable a collaborative approach for a just society centred on community (Perkins 2010:208; Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:570). The theory, traditionally viewed as a psychological construct is applicable to a multiplicity of disciplines like health education, business administration and media, as the construct of empowerment recognises the influence of mediating structures in society. Empowerment within the realm of soap operas is an important concept as it assists in understanding the consequences of mediating structures' products like soap operas to exert influence and to empower those being represented. We look to the media for meaning, and empowerment becomes even more important when portrayals like Geneviève's allow for the previously misrepresented identities of transgender women to be negotiated and challenged. Empowerment therefore with regards to this study relates to empowering a community that is being represented and recognised as part of society via the portrayal, and also by highlighting that misrepresentations can only be challenged by further inclusion to ensure that "there is balance in audience power in challenging media content as they shape their public perceptions" (Blose 2020:77).

Soul City's series and the British soap *The Archers* both employed collaborative approaches to edutainment, and the results provide evidence that collaboration “creates space for debate and learning” (Japhet 2013:141). The empowerment theory also involves separating processes and outcomes to illustrate that activities or actions, like a march against injustice, can be empowering. Such action could increase empowerment by impacting policy or legislature (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:570). It posits that “participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources, and some critical understandings of the socio-political environment are basic components” (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:571).

Social and cultural factors play an integral role in an individual's gender and identity development, and various theories explain the developmental link. These include Bandura's previously discussed Social Learning Theory, Walter Mischel's Social Learning Approach, Albert Lawrence Kohlberg's Gender Constancy Theory and Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory (Ashwal 2017:30-32). Although these traditional theories describe the human development process and its inputs, alternatives such as queer theory have been used to address binary identity constructions in contemporary society (Ashwal 2017:33).

2.6 QUEER THEORY

Queer theory, as noted earlier, despite rejecting the hegemonic heteronormative understanding of gender as a binary construct, is not suitable for this research. Justification for the aforementioned claim is discussed below by providing an overview of what the theory entails and why it is rejected as a part of this study's theoretical framework.

Queer theory's origins can be traced back to the 1960s and 70s. The theory's genesis coincides with the emergence of gay and lesbian identities as a research topic for social science scholars (Callis 2009:215; Calafell & Nakayama 2016:1). It is labelled a theory, but it is not a theoretical framework in the traditional sense, as there is not a systematic model that guides the approach. Instead, queer theory has been described as “a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire” (Spargo 2000:9). Queer theory challenges the binary approach to gender and sexuality by deconstructing the fixed notions associated with those terms, and queer theorists,

therefore, define gender as socially constructed (Spargo 2000:54; Calafell & Nakayama 2016:1). Pivotal studies related to this theory include Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978) and Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999). Foucault was a French poststructuralist. He is revered as the 'father of queer theory'. He introduced the idea of the discursive construction and sought to understand the nature of sexualities (Spargo 2000:26; Calafell & Nakayama 2016:3). Like feminist theory, Foucault's work is also concerned with the power dynamics that contribute to the construction of sexuality. He therefore, sought to ascertain and examine: "who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, [and] the institutions which prompt people to speak about it" (Foucault 1978:11). While viewed as revolutionary in terms of sparking the queer theory debate, his work has been critiqued for being too focused on male homosexuality and underestimating the importance of gender (Keegan 2018:2). However, Foucault's stance has been defended by academics who cite the historical context within which his work was produced (Spargo 2000: 53).

Queer theory's roots also include the 1980s and 90s queer political movement (Namaste 2000:19; Prosser 2006:260; Callis 2009:215). The idea of what it means to be a woman and what contributes to the societal understanding of gender was being interrogated at this time through the lens of feminist theory. Those enquiries would later include sex and gender binaries and provide insight to discussions related to queer theory (Callis 2009:216).

Butler's work titled *Gender Trouble* (1999) allayed some concerns about gender's relevance in the discourse of sexuality. The text built on Foucault's work and has been identified as influential regarding queer theory's development (Spargo 2000: 52; Callis 2009:226). *Gender trouble* shifts away from the constrained focus on sexuality and includes a broader understanding of sexuality and gender as distinct but linked concepts. Additionally, her work maintains that queerness does not have a fixed point.

Butler also introduced the notion of gender as a performance, saying that the view seeks to show

that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, positioned through the gendered stylization [*sic*] of the body (Butler 1999: xv).

The notion of performativity uses drag as an example, which has seen the concept come under intense scrutiny. According to theorist, author and filmmaker, Susan Stryker, her idea of gender 'performativity' has been misunderstood as a 'performance' in the colloquial term. Stryker (2006) explains that 'performativity' stems from speech act theory and is not the same as *performing*. She elaborates that, as a performative act, gender

does not need a material referent to be meaningful, is directed at others in an attempt to communicate, is not subject to falsification or verification, and is accomplished by "doing" something rather than "being" something (Stryker 2006:10).

Queer theory is used when an understanding of the issues facing the LGBTIQ+ community is being sought. The approach is a "theoretical orientation for how identity is to be understood" (Nagoshi & Brzuzy 2010:434). The theory rejects the hegemonic understanding of gender as a binary concept which proposes that gender is comprised of two distinct categories, namely male and female (Wood 2011:259; Wellborn 2015:2; Callis 2009:215; Calafell & Nakayama 2016:1). Queer theory asserts that the understanding of gender is socially constructed and argues that gender is fluid and should not be tied down by these distinct categorisations (Wellborn 2015:6; Calafell & Nakayama 2016:1). Therefore, theorists in this field are interested in what Callis terms "the webs of power and discourse that create and uphold gender binarisms" (2009:215).

Queer theory offers the solidarity of group identity for the LGBTIQ+ community and has been lauded by scholars for being progressive. It has, however, faced much criticism. The criticism includes having an ethnocentric view and discounting issues such as class and race by viewing sexuality as the most important component of identity construction (Callis 2009:217; Walters 1996:834; Nicholson & Seidman 1995:19). Queer theory has also faced much backlash based on its failure to consider the individual queer experience (Namaste 2000:16; Nagoshi & Brzuzy 2010:434; Keegan 2018:6-8; Ashwal 2017:34-35). The critiques are valid, and that failure, as highlighted by Namaste, "exhibits a remarkable insensitivity to the substantive issues of transgendered people's everyday lives" (2000:23).

This study is focused on the representation of transgender women. Queer theory's tendency to eclipse the lived trans experiences and its focus on sexuality makes it unsuitable for a trans study (Namaste 2006:16; Roen 2001:253; Ramphele 2016:22). Accordingly, this study rejects the use of queer theory as a component of its theoretical framework, despite academia's observed trend in using the theory as a blanket approach to the LGBTIQ+ community. Queer theory cannot account for the uniqueness of

transgender bodies, experiences and politics (Keegan 2018:6). This rejection is encapsulated by social anthropology scholar Francis Nyamnjoh's (2011:24) view regarding theories. He advocates that

good theories, sophisticated theories, lasting theories have got to be able to serve as navigators of various identity margins, various margins of reality, being able to capture reality in its wholeness and nuanced complexities.

The adoption of transgender studies, which incorporates "ideas of the fluidity embodied, socially constructed, and self-constructed aspects of identity within the narratives of lived experience", is, therefore, more suited to this study (Nagoshi & Brzuzy 2010:432).

2.7 TRANSGENDER STUDIES

Transgender studies, which centres on gender fluidity instead of biology, emerged in the early 1990s (Halberstam 2005:49). Theorists aligned with the field are Sandy Stone (1987, 1991), Viviane Namaste (2000, 2006), Jack Halberstam (2005, 2018), Jay Prosser (1998, 2006), Katrina Roen (2001) and Susan Stryker (2004, 2006, 2007). Susan Stryker notes that transgender studies is closely aligned "with the rise of queer studies, with which it has enjoyed a close and sometimes vexed relationship", as explored earlier (2006:7). The origin of the word 'transgender' has primarily been attributed to an advocate for gender expression named Virginia Prince (Stryker 2006:4; Arune 2006:5; Kunzel 2014:287). The term was used to describe individuals whose identities were "on a spectrum between transvestite and transsexual" (Stryker 2006:4). In contemporary society, the word refers to someone whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth (Halberstam 2005:53-55; Tomson 2016:206; Keegan et al., 2018:201; Jobe 2013:5; Breaux & Thyer 2021:72).

Transgender studies foster an understanding that gender is a complex term that cannot and should not be tied down by the limited societal views of binary ideology. The field accepts that people express gender in various, sometimes distinct ways and that each individual is an expert on their own gender (Stryker 2006:4; Breaux & Thyer 2021:72). It is an interdisciplinary field that addresses the erasure concerns of transgender people, by taking into account their lived experiences, which queer theory overlooks. Stryker (2006: 3) explains that transgender studies are therefore focused on, among others:

anything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the

biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy.

Transgender studies pay particular attention to why people should be able to express their gender, recognises that each individual has autonomy over their body and recognises that gender is fluid, which therefore supports its incorporation into this study's theoretical framework (Stryker 2007:3; Nagoshi & Brzuzy 2010:432; Breaux & Thyer 2021:72).

2.8 TRANSGENDER MEDIA REPRESENTATION

The very detailed and painful, expensive process of transition is simplified into one day in surgery. Pronouns used in reference to a transgender are inaccurate, as if to say, 'Hey, this man thinks he's a woman. Isn't that funny?'

- Jessie Jobe (2013:7)

An era of visibility is said to be underway regarding transgender representation in the media (Capuzza 2016:90; Capuzza & Spencer 2017). The increase in portrayals regarding the transgender movement is a milestone, but the portrayals should not merely be accepted as is. Quantity does not indicate quality because an increase in representation "may not equate necessarily with accurate depictions or challenges to the status quo" (Capuzza 2014:116).

2.8.1 Misconceptions about trans identity

The transgender identity is not often well understood due to a culturally created binary idea of gender. An individual is expected to be *one* or *the other* by occupying a fixed position of being male or female (Capuzza 2014:117). Misconceptions also illustrate a lack of understanding regarding trans identity and sexuality and present the two as conflated when in fact, "transgender people identify with the full range of human sexualities" (Capuzza 2016:83). These misconceptions translate to the media and are problematic (Jobe 2013:12, Capuzza 2016:83, Capuzza & Spencer 2017). Portrayals that provide the audience with one trans narrative out of an entire spectrum "over-simplify the complexities of transgender lives and limit both cisgender people's understanding of gender and transgender people's identity and expression" (Capuzza 2016:92).

Jessie Jobe interrogated representations in news articles, movie portrayals, and series, explaining that “the transgender community often gets misrepresented in the media” (2013:1). Portrayals in fictional programming, where producers can challenge the status quo, tend to reinforce stereotypical perceptions by depicting trans individuals in a way that mocks the community or fosters fear of individuals who form part of it (Capuzza & Spencer 2017; Jobe 2013). Jobe’s work includes interrogating a transgender portrayal in an animated series known as *Family Guy*. The episode’s focus is the parent of a character called Glenn Quagmire. The audience learns that Ida, Quagmire’s parent, is visiting her son’s residence to undergo gender affirming surgery. The episode sees her engage in coitus with another character known as Brian. Brian retches continuously for thirty seconds after learning of Ida’s trans identity, which suggests that Ida’s identity is disgusting and sickening to him (Jobe 2013:26). Ida’s surgery is also incorrectly portrayed as a one-day affair, which is harmful to the perception being described to society as the single issue facing trans individuals. Not all individuals in the trans community seek surgery. The ones that do face large financial bills and require the support of loved ones during the healing process (Klein 2009:18). Many transgender individuals in South Africa cannot afford the surgery. The stigma attached to being transgender could mean that some do not have a support system because they have not felt comfortable sharing their identity with family and friends or have been shunned.

The mocking of this community introduces discrimination based on fictional portrayals and can have an overarching influence. Muindi (2015) is supportive of this influential capacity claim and points out that

when viewers interpret characters as real people behaving in a socially approved manner, the message is that viewers themselves can model their own behaviour accordingly (2015:21).

2.8.2 Importance of representative portrayals for trans South Africans

These depictions of transgender people contribute to a knowledge base of expectations. These expectations do not have to be accurate or fair to inform and impact the audiences’ perceptions of trans individuals. A less knowledgeable viewer may find support in pre-existing views, as “false assumptions become prejudices if they are reinforced often enough, [and] ... can lead to discrimination” (Jobe 2013:6). It is understood that the

audience is not merely a passive receiver of content and that it can choose to accept or reject the meanings being presented in portrayals. It should also be reinforced that the media operates in a commercialised space in society, aiming to attract viewers to generate revenue. Therefore, media products are packaged with content that seeks to resonate with society by appealing to a particular demographic. The content would not exist if there were no market for it, considering that a televised, packaged view of stereotypes linked to transgender individuals “made it through [the] writing, editing, production and broadcast process” (Jobe 2013:22). The content affirms there are members of society who view transgender individuals as outside the norm, worthy of mocking via stereotypes that are accepted as a defining feature of a community (Capuzza 2016).

The portrayal of one aspect that may feature in a transgender individual’s life, such as surgery, is trivialised when explained to the audience as a one-day process, where no recovery is required afterwards. It also portrays the community as homogenous, disregarding individual experiences (Klein 2009:16; Media Monitoring [sa]:2). That approach further entrenches stereotypes and “limits the range of transgender subjectivities available to viewing publics” (Capuzza & Spencer 2014:216).

2.9 CONCLUSION

The media is powerful. The system’s influential reach is extensive, and its content needs to be interrogated when a group viewed as going against the grain of society is portrayed. The importance of this interrogation is two-fold. It provides knowledge to its audience regarding the acceptance of society’s diverseness via these portrayals. It is important for transgender people, who look to those portrayals to understand self-identification amidst a cisgender status quo (Capuzza & Spencer 2017; Sarkissian 2014). The power and influence of these portrayals highlight “television’s potential to demystify gender nonconformity, to confront transphobia, and to confirm transgender subjectivities” (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:217). This chapter explored the study’s theoretical framework and contextualised the relevance and significance of investigating trans female representations.

Chapter 3: Literature Review Part II, which follows, is focused on the soap opera narrative and its inherent ability to provide a site for the negotiation and contestation of identities.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW PART II

A form of narrative whose narration had begun decades in the past and which was predicated upon its ending being indefinitely deferred.

- Robert Allen (2011:83)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is concerned with how transgender women are represented by fictional representations in soap operas. The representations further offer insight into how transgender women are perceived in society based on the theories outlined in Chapter 2, including the theory of representation. The theory of representation recognises the influence of the media exemplified by its propensity to reflect the dominant ideology in its content (Pitout 2006:253; Bernstein 2002:262; Severin & Tankard 2014:233; Gerber 1998:183).

By weaving the dominant ideology into its narrative, soap operas can advance discrimination if it forms part of the practices or beliefs of the ideology being presented on screens. The influence claim is supported by theories such as the strategic communication approach known as edutainment, which incorporates Bandura's Social Learning Theory to frame an understanding that human beings can learn through observation. Therefore, the representations being offered to audiences need to be investigated to assess whether the media is providing fair and relevant portrayals. The portrayals are vital for transgender people, who look to them to understand self-identification amidst a cisgender status quo.

The ideologies embedded in the content have the capacity for further advancement via the medium by which it is presented. This study's medium, soap operas, have an inherent ability to educate and advance development and change. Chapter 3: Literature Review Part II focuses on the soap opera narrative. The chapter discusses soaps' intrinsic ability to provide a site for the negotiation and contestation of identities because the

South African soap opera narrative actively contributes to the construction of new identities and the negotiation of existing ones ... [and] ... in so doing, dominant hegemonic orders are challenged and questioned (Marx 2017:128).

This chapter introduces soap operas as a viable platform concerning the creation of

identities. The first two sections relate to the genre and its characteristics. One of its characteristics is a continuous narrative structure that resists closure and is focused on a multiplicity of plots (Pitout 2006:251-252; Muindi 2015:4; Geraghty 2005:312). The resistance of narrative closure posits the medium as an other within the medium universe because it goes against the domineering narrative approaches and encourages its audience to get involved and engage with the content (Hayward 1997:4; Pitout 2006:260). Knowledge of the soap opera medium's characteristics is necessary to contextualise its othering and substantiate that the medium can be a valid subject of analysis with an inherent ability to challenge the dominant ideology and ignite change.

The soap opera is a powerful and suitable educational tool. Unlike other traditional forms, the medium presents opportunities to contextualise and challenge the dominant ideology perpetuating discrimination based on a gender binary bias. This chapter will draw from the works of Len Ang (1985), Robert Allen (1983; 1985; 1992; 2001; 2011), Dorothy Hobson (2003), Magriet Pitout (2006), Tania Modleski (2008), Hannelie Marx Knoetze (2007; 2008; 2015) and Christine Geraghty (2005; 2010). This chapter contextualises the need for accurate portrayals by motivating soap operas' inherent ability to challenge the binary view of gender for the benefit of the citizenry and offer a site for identity to be resisted, contested and created. Detail regarding soap opera's characteristics that have seen it othered, in terms of its narrative products challenging the norm, will briefly be discussed. This detail is supportive of the view that a soap opera's content while forming part of a two-way process, can confirm, validate, advance and perpetuate an ideology (Hayward 1997:148).

While this study's focus is not on reception theory, it should be noted that the relationship between the producer and the consumer of the product is recognised as an active engagement where

soaps provide ways of visualizing and acting out social issues in a space apparently free from consequences. They are collaboratively produced and consumed, respond to the desires of audiences, and, finally but not least importantly, allow audiences to play an active role in determining the uses and meanings of their texts (Hayward 1997:144).

The collaborative relationship between the two is best referenced by Wolfgang Iser's theory of reception, which is focused on how the consumer relates to the media text. Iser, a German literary theoretician, explains that there is an 'implied reader' and an 'actual reader' (1974: xii). The implied reader is the conceptualised reader who is expected to

engage and react to the text in a particular manner due to the cues presented by the text. The actual reader's response is a culmination of fleeting and permanent influences, various ideologies and views that are open to constant evolution because we "bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections-for filling in the gaps left by the text itself" (Iser 1972: 285).

The soap opera medium is engaging because these serials "keep their viewers coming back by skilled appropriation of serial techniques that have existed for centuries" (Hayward 1997: 148). How the audience relates to the text implies that texts can have various meanings, and therefore soap operas provide a space for challenging dominant ideologies that perpetuate discrimination.

3.2 SOAP OPERA ORIGIN

The soap opera genre originated in America during the 1930s as radio serials aired during the day (Hobson 2003:7; Geraghty 2005:309; Anger 1999). Their growth in popularity to achieve mass media status during the thirties identified an opportunity for American manufacturers to expand their offering and gain market share. These serials' sponsorship names included *Palmolive* and *Procter and Gamble* (Hobson 2003:7; Syed-Azalanshah 2011:24; Hayward 1997:139; Allen 2001:15). Housewives were their target audience, which allowed the sponsors an opportunity to showcase and sell their products during the day. The times at which these would broadcast aimed to coincide with when housewives were said to be taking a break from their activities. According to Christine Geraghty (2005:315), soaps formed "part of a highly gendered cultural system but ... did offer space for women to reflect on what it felt like to be female in the contemporary world".

Robert C Allen (2001:3) suggested the term 'soap opera' may be a phrase from the entertainment press during the 1930s to indicate the link to soap manufacturers such as *Palmolive*. The soap opera sponsorship circle was not limited to soap producers but also included companies that manufactured food, beverages and toothpaste (Hobson 2003:8; Blakemore 2015; Onuh 2017:17). Allen (1985:9) offers an enlightening view on the irony of the term 'soap opera' when he breaks down the two words. He explains that "linked with the adjective 'soap', opera, the most elite of all narrative art forms, becomes a vehicle for selling the most humble of commodities".

The first soap opera is attributed to Frank Hummert and his then future spouse, Anne Ashenhurst (Hobson 2003:8, Marx Knoetze 2015:48). In 1932, they produced a soap opera called *Betty and Bob*. The fundamental character traits of soap operas can be found in the production, namely: the genesis as a love story, a progression to marital issues in contemporary society, along with themes such as jealousy, divorce and childlessness (Hobson 2003:9, Marx Knoetze 2015:48; Anger 1999).

Soaps underwent a content shift in the 1950s and 60s when working-class characters were included in the narrative. That shift saw a focus on domestic realism (Hobson 2003:11). The genre, at this time, also transitioned to television as a new kind of programme. Its popularity grew, particularly with the broadcast of the soap opera known as *Dallas*, which boasted a viewer base of 24 million (Marx Knoetze 2015:49). In her work *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang (1985) explains that the show is focused on a wealthy Texan family (Ang 1985:1). It became, for some governmental officials, a concern as a symbol of the growing influence of American consumerism on popular culture in their countries. One of these officials was the French Minister for Culture, Jack Lang (Ang 1985:2, Stapell 2016:85). At a conference in Paris, Lang referred to *Dallas* as “the symbol of American cultural imperialism” (Ang 1985:2). Lang later apologised for his comment, which scholars have used to highlight the perceived importance of visual popular culture to cultural identity.

Dallas focused on characters who formed part of society’s upper middle class (Ang 1985:4). The Australian soap opera *Neighbours*, according to Marx, disrupted that narrative by being “the first to reveal the different attitudes and values of the culture it represented” (2007:44). The inclusion of those voices saw the incorporation of younger characters and assisted audience growth as different age groups were being added. The addition of new age groups broadened the reach of the genre, as character identification included other members of the family.

3.3 SOAP OPERA CHARACTERISTICS

Soap operas are not homogenous, but some genre features are inherent (Marx 2007:45; Onuh 2017:19; Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:21). Soaps are usually 30 minutes long and broadcast on radio or television once or twice a week (Marx Knoetze 2015:52; Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:58). They are fictional programmes that contain a multiplicity of interwoven storylines (Allen 2011:16; Kozloff 1992:57; Geraghty 2005:312;

Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:58; Ford et al., 2011:7; Marx Knoetze 2015:52).

Soaps have a narrative approach that Allen (1992:82) aptly conceptualises by saying that, instead of “being based around a single revolving plotline, soap operas disperse their narrative energy among a constantly changing set of interrelated plots”. That serial narrative, the seemingly ‘never-ending story, where anything is possible, and resurrections are a norm, supports a hallmark of its characteristics, namely the resistance of narrative closure (Allen 2001:17; Marx Knoetze 2015:55; Muindi 2015:18; Scodari 2011:107; Anger 1999; Muindi 2015:4).

The storylines in soap operas are continuous, and the seriality is fostered by commercial breaks (Marx Knoetze 2015:52; Gledhill 2003; Allen 1989:6). That segmentation is a universal characteristic. This means mysteries and questions remain unsolved and unanswered, or their resolution could trigger their quantity and intensity (Allen 1992:81; Ang 1985:8). The refusal to bring closure to the storyline supports the genre’s pre-existing resistance to what is deemed as the norm. It, therefore, offers a site where its content can assist the citizenry to do the same concerning binary views on gender and the stigma that fuels discrimination.

The soap opera settings usually include small towns and recognisable locations such as cafes, corner stores, and homes. The setting for the narrative of the soap opera text under review in this study, takes place on a single street in Johannesburg, known as *7de Laan* in Afrikaans, and translated to 7th Avenue in English. Tania Modleski (2008:77) adds to the understanding of the soap opera setting and character types by explaining that

soap operas are set in small towns and involve two or three families intimately connected to one another. Families are often composed of several generations.

Soap’s approach to time is another defining character of the genre. It is presented as parallel to actual time and suggests that the actions last observed continue whether the audience is present or not (Hobson 2003:35). A character that was last observed jogging in a previous episode could therefore be at work when the next episode begins. Therefore, the entire sequence from jogging to arriving at work need not be shown. Character interactions at work also speak to one of the crises that soap opera dialogue presents to viewers, as it deals with topics that are “personal and every day” (Hobson 2003:35). Those discussions occasionally include the debut of society’s controversial topics in the narrative (Marx 2007:70).

How these crises are discovered, revealed and addressed is dramatic. The extent to which the element of drama is employed has soap operas occasionally described as melodramas (Onuh 2017:20). Scholars such as Christine Gledhill advocate strongly for a realised distinction. The two have similarities, which include the use of suspense, but the differences do not allow for soap operas to be described as melodramas. Melodramas, as an example, allow action into the narrative and are not gender-specific with regard to their target audience. Gledhill (1987:2) asserts that “soap opera, like the woman's film, has an affiliation with women’s culture, the elision of which with melodrama should not be assumed”.

The soap opera audience is presented with a fictional storyline that resembles their world and which is said to assist with escaping it too (Marx Knoetze 2015:64). The latter, which refers to soap operas as a vehicle for cognitive transcendence, should not be overlooked, as that would disregard the complex nature of the narrative. These programmes can speak to an audience on two levels, as they “use devices which both distance the world of the soap from that of the viewer and make quite explicit connections with it” (Allen 1983:105). This is achieved by soap operas’ use of time, referred to earlier. It resists definitive time, defies the construction of a coherent time referential and consequently extends dramatic events.

Time in soap operas also operates in proximity with actual time, which allows for its investigation under the lens of realism. Realism refers to examining fictional representational constructs and their assessment to understand whether they contain familiar elements that support a view reflecting a recognisable society (Gledhill; 2003:360; Marx Knoetze; 2015:61). Soap operas use social and cultural signs to present a fictionally constructed familiar, similar world to its audience (Marx Knoetze 2015:64). It addresses real societal fears, desires and anxieties, by telling the “stories of the ordinary” (Hobson 2003:35). Soap operas speak to everyday trials and tribulations. Allen (1992:81) refers to it as the “most popular form of television programming in the world”, but it is often looked down on. It is not grouped with high culture as it opposes traditional narratives and is indeed othered (Marx, 2008).

3.4 SOAP OPERAS AS ‘THE OTHER’

Marx suggests that soaps are othered because they can reject the dominant ideologies

(Marx 2008:82). The soap as an other is not viewed through the same lens as Said's Orient (see Section 2.2.1). This other "embraces its difference, an other which has a voice – a feminine subjectivity" (Marx 2008:82). This 'other' has been gendered and specifically relates to women. The other differs from various streams, as the concept is not viewed as man's other, but different and not linked to man's point of view or defined in terms of man's existence, as its polar. Instead, it is self-produced, self-imposed, self-created.

Marx (2008:83) elaborates that this other, like the soap opera narrative:

connotes a subject which acknowledges (and celebrates) its difference from the self – from the hegemonic order – but which resists being defined by this hegemonic order merely as its binary opposition ... an other that embraces its difference and employs this difference to create a new discourse – one in which the *other* may take part and create meaning for herself.

This other does not have negative connotations. Marx (2008) provides additional support for soap operas to be viewed as the other, gendered as feminine. The distinction with regards to a gendered narrative implies a binary.

Society's binary view on gender drives the motivation for this study. The reason the femininity of the text is being explored is that soap operas tend to resonate with viewers. How all character viewpoints are engaged encourages a sense of equality as "all the characters have the opportunity to voice their own opinions, regardless of their social position" (Marx 2008:77). The audience interacts with a variety of characters from who they may be able to learn to understand themselves better within society, where they may be marginalised in terms of healthcare access or even job security.

Therefore, if the gendering of the narrative could assist in locating a genre of media, which is easily accessible and fosters nation-building by providing its audience with characters with whom they can identify, then the merits of the approach deserve to be discussed.

Marx (2007:77) further surmises that, if there is consensus on the gendering of the soap opera narrative as feminine, then the medium's "predilection for emotion and dialogue" provides further impetus for it being a site that can challenge the dominant ideology. The latter draws from the views that soap operas encourage conversation by its diversity of voices on one topic and the continuous seemingly never-ending storyline, which means that various ideologies are presented in tandem allowing the audience to choose between

a variety of views instead of being bombarded with one overarching ideology (Marx 2007:77).

The provision of a space for identity navigation is also identified by McQuail (2010:122), who asserts that

a gender-based approach also raises the question of whether media choice and interpretation can provide some lever of change or element of resistance for women in a social situation still generally structured by inequality.

3.5 GENDERING SOAP OPERAS

The soap opera narrative has been identified as a supporting factor for its feminine gendering. The themes explored in the realms of the soap opera include what Marx refers to as “feminine interests, the family and romantic love” (2008:84). Issues related to gender equality in the workplace are also some of the contemporary social issues included in the narrative (Marx 2008:84). Soaps have therefore been conceptualised as fiction for women. A view that Myra McDonald criticises by pointing out that “feminist romanticism about soap operas helps to preserve gender distinctions in relation to the myth of femininity which should instead [be] challenged” (1995:72). Soap opera’s resistance to closure is also cited in supporting it being a feminine text. The storylines are paused often, and the climax is quite often evaded as “revelations, confrontations and reunions are constantly interrupted and postponed by telephone calls, unexpected visitors, counter revelations, catastrophes, and switches from one plot to another” (Modleski (2008:93).

There is a school of thought that this text, gendered as feminine, is created within a male-dominated society and reinforces patriarchy by aligning female characters with the traditional role of a housewife instead of a career woman (Marx 2008:85). The view that patriarchy is being reinforced holds some merit because women in soap operas who are career-driven are viewed as deviant. They are regarded as villains who usually don’t attain the dream of marriage or become mothers. In response, Geraghty (2005:8) offers a reminder of the history of soaps and the academic interest of the time related to the genre. She notes

that work on soap operas developed in a situation in which theoretical debate was much concerned with the interaction between formal and ideological properties of particular forms.

Endings, which featured in cinema and literature texts, were viewed as providing the viewer

with closure, as they brought issues raised during the narrative to a close. Geraghty (2005:8) notes that endings were also

strongly associated with the ability of the dominant ideology to close down and overdetermine progressive or radical possibilities which might have been raised in the ongoing narrative.

The view that male dominance is perpetuated can be substantiated, but the evidence that soaps provide a site to challenge that overarching view is overwhelming and relevant to this research. Soaps, as previously noted, are produced in a male-centred society and presented in a “male-dominated sphere” (Marx 2008:78). However, the medium’s narrative engages multiple voices continuously and personally and in a “feminine fashion which definitely creates a platform from which women can negotiate meaning or colonize male spheres” (Marx 2008:78). This study further acknowledges that soap opera narratives do eventually achieve closure. However, the process involves emancipatory readings and therefore supports the assertion that soaps provide a site for recognising and engaging an other.

The focus on a feminine text is used by researchers to support the idea of the other. The text is said to be inherently female because of an array of characteristics associated with being feminine or female such as its tendency to embrace emotion and encourage conversation.

3.5.1 Gender conscious narrative

The distinction with regard to a gendered narrative implies a binary. The arguments for gendering, such as those of McQuail (2010) and Marx Knoetze (2015), which favour gendering narratives by identifying a space for resistance may also bring the merits of gendering into question. McQuail suggests

that differently gendered media culture, whatever the causes and the forms taken, evokes different responses, and that difference of gender lead to alternative modes of making meaning from media (2010:122).

However, the question raised is whether viewing the text as masculine or feminine is necessary, especially in a society where binary views are being challenged. The importance and necessity of feminising a text to illustrate an ability to resist dominant ideology appear dated. Soap operas, as discussed previously, are othered in terms of structure, narrative and relationship with time. Feminising the text, in contemporary society, to illustrate its power to speak to other gender identities while being able to conceptualise

and contextualise the other is not necessary. This view finds support from Jennifer Hayward, who insists that “the narrative structure so often seen as determined by a female audience actually has more to do with the material conditions of the genre’s development” (1997:141).

It is important that the privilege of certain textual meanings associated with dominant ideologies be interrogated to assist in an understanding of bias in a narrative and to enable portrayals that are more realistic and representative. This is pertinent because, as Hayward says (1997:141), “it is equally critical to avoid easy and essentializing [*sic*] relations between gender and narrative form”. Hayward (1997:142) concludes that the soap opera genre is not inherently feminine due to its narrative. Instead, its content, not narrative structure, supports the view of it being a genre made for women. The emphasis on the seemingly never-ending narrative of soap operas as a feature that defines the genre has been labelled as a “weak one” by Geraghty (2005:10). She explains that an understanding of the intricacies of the genre has evolved and moved beyond emphasising the lack of an ending to define a soap “by its extended, complex and interweaving stories; a wide range of characters, allowing for different kinds of identification” (Geraghty 2005:10). Adopting this view removes the narrow focus on feminising, and “make[s] the form capable of providing the first step toward increased tolerance for others: a forum for public discussion of the issues involved” (Hayward 1997:192)

3.6 SOAP OPERAS’ VIEW IN SOCIETY

Soap operas are not all defined in their respective countries as daytime programming that targets the female audience. Geraghty shares that, in Britain, soaps are defined by “stories which engage an audience in such a way that they become the subject for public interest and engagement (2005:6-7). Therefore, as she further explains, they become a vehicle for social change, as they “speak both to television’s capacity for intimacy and its role as public educator” (Geraghty 2005:311).

3.6.1 Soap operas’ potential for change

The potential of soap operas to foster change by Entertainment-Education (EE) is supported by the work of Divyadarshan Chandrasekar and Ameya Aatman. Their 2017

study declares that “there have been several soaps that brought eddies in the zeitgeist” (Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:59) and highlights *Balika Vadhu* as one of those examples. *Balika Vadhu* started airing on a Hindi TV channel called Colours TV on the 21st of July 2008. As the English translation of the name suggests, the story begins with a child bride. It has a “child marriage in the forefront in the backdrop of a Rajasthani family” (Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:60). To provide context and clarification, Rajasthani is an Indian state. The programme spanned three seasons and told the story of many children forced into marriage under the guise of tradition and how their lives were changed. *Balika Vadhu* received an award at the Indian Telly Awards in 2008 for ‘Best Programme with a Social Message’ and contributed to creating soap operas centred on women’s lives (Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:66).

Soap operas can bring about a change in attitudes that challenge the dominant ideology. Chandrasekar and Aatman (2017:60) support this view by explaining that soap operas become a part of the viewer’s routine. Its repetitive narrative nature and ability to emotionally connect with the viewer makes it

a very effective method of transmitting knowledge, awareness and inducing positive or negative attitudes in individuals and within communities as a whole towards the issue being raised (Chandrasekar and Aatman 2017:60).

The approach should not be misunderstood as an attempt to brainwash citizens and force perceptions on them. Instead, it understands the need to present citizens with a reflective portrayal of society. It should allow its audience members to form their own views by providing accurate knowledge of society. The relationship between the viewer and content and the ability to reject what is being presented is supported by Chris Barker’s work (1999:170), which investigated the perception of soap operas in Asian and Afro-Caribbean girls. It presents evidence that soap operas allow for the renegotiation or creation of new identities. Barker’s work found that the audience rejected identities, such as dismissing a character being portrayed as being “a doormat character” (Blakemore 2015). The portrayal was questioned and rejected as not satisfactory to the audience. Chandrasekar and Aatman (2017:61) state that it is imperative that the media and its audience understand that

the characters and episodes of highly watched soap operas is a huge resource that must be tapped into so as to enable cost-effective education and sensitisation of the masses about social issues.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The media forms part of a great societal order, where power lies in the ability to weave normative discourses, usually cisnormative, into its content. That power contributes to regulating gender and sexual identities (Capuzza 2014:115). This chapter focused on how soap opera's othering, supported by its characteristics, and its ability to transgress the boundaries of traditional narrative, presents an inherent ability to challenge the norm and provide a site for resistance. That site for resistance is necessary for its audience, especially anyone navigating their gender identity. Although trans people are referred to as a single group, their skin tone and socio-economic status mean that they are all experiencing life differently, and so too with their gender identification process. Therefore, accurate portrayals are critical for nation-building, identity recognition, rejection, mitigation or creation.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology of the study. This study explores and discusses the representation of transgender women in South African soap operas by analysing the fictional portrayal of Geneviève du Pré in *7de Laan*. The research approach was not concerned with the quantification of the portrayals. Instead, it explores how transgender women are represented and whether those portrayals are fair to the community being described. This study is therefore qualitative and adopts an interpretivist paradigm. The chapter begins with a detailed discussion of the research paradigm guiding the study. The chapter includes a breakdown of the qualitative research approach and substantiates its use in the study before describing the population, sampling and analytical methods employed.

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Research paradigms, which act as frames of reference for a study's construction and implementation, have three distinct underpinnings (Babbie 2016:33, Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:51; Gilliland 2014: 86). Paradigms contain assumptions about how and why our views of reality exist; how knowledge is accumulated, validated and related to other members of society. They provide an outline for how research is approached and the methodology of data research. The four components are ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:51; Rehman & Alharthi 2016:51; Thomas 2010:298). Chilisa and Kawulich (2012:52) explain that, while paradigms are traditionally linked to specific methodologies, that stringent approach is not always applicable. A multitude of paradigms exist. The list, while not exhaustive, includes positivism, post-positivism, critical postmodernism, interpretivism and critical theory (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:53; Thomas 2010:293; Rehman & Alharthi 2016:52; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:113).

The positivist paradigm is generally associated with quantitative methodology, and the interpretivist paradigm is linked to qualitative research. The associations are not set in stone, as either of the paradigms could be used in a study where the methodology goes against the grain (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:52). The prerogative regarding which paradigm

is used therefore rests with the researcher. Identifying a suitable research paradigm is vital, as it informs the methodology (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:52). An overview of the positivist, interpretivist and critical theory paradigms is discussed to explain why a paradigm may suit a particular study and when it may fail to align with the research aims.

4.2.1 Positivism

The positivist approach is based on a belief that the existence of reality is not dependant on humans, their senses or laws (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:53; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:114; Deacon et al., 1999:4). Positivists seek to understand social reality through the lens of the natural world. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:53) explain that “in nature, there is a cause-effect relationship between phenomena, and once established, they can be predicted with certainty in the future”. This is what positivists try and apply to the social world and do so via the epistemological belief system of objectivism. Researchers observe the phenomenon without any interference and immersion in the study (Rehamn & Alharthi 2016:53; Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:54; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:114; Isaacs 2014:43). The positivist approach has faced criticism that claims while studying a phenomenon with a scientifically objective approach may suit the natural sciences, it is not suitable for a study on social phenomena (Deacon et al. 1999:6). The scholar Keith Richards, asserted that “positivism is dead. By now, it has gone off and is beginning to smell” (2003:37).

The criticism levelled against the paradigm may hold some merit, but research approaches are guided by the phenomenon under investigation and the related beliefs; therefore, viewing one paradigm as superior to another is futile. The methodology associated with the positivist paradigm often gives rise to numerical data to quantify aspects of the phenomenon being researched (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:54; Deacon et al. 1999:4). The research generated is judged as being ‘good’ when it adheres to objectivity, reliability, and internal and external validity. External validity equates to the generalisation of the findings. If researchers conducted the same study at different times and places, and their results were the same, reliability is applicable. The term ‘reliability’ is a quantitative research term. While its aim is relevant to all research approaches, this study favours terms used in the qualitative realm, namely trustworthiness, dependability and credibility. This is explored in further detail in Section 4.5 (Stenbacka, 2001:551; Bashir et al. 2008:39).

The nature of this study, which seeks to interrogate and understand the representation of transgender women in the soap opera *7de Laan*, does not lend itself to the exactitude or quantification of the positivist paradigm. A positivist approach may assist in understanding how often transwomen are portrayed in the media, but there is a deficit regarding trans female portrayals in South African soap operas. Deacon et al. (1999:9) remark that “what separates interpretive research from positivist research is not *whether* figures are referred to but *how* they are used”. Quantitative data can enrich a study and provide a foundation for further exploration. This study does not seek to quantify the current portrayal. Instead, it seeks to understand how transwomen are represented by exploring and describing the fictional portrayal. Therefore, this research has adopted an interpretivist paradigm, as it is chiefly concerned with observation and interpretation, which are the main underpinnings of that paradigm (Thomas 2010:296; Gilliland 2014:87).

4.2.2 Interpretivism

Interpretivism rejects the idea that only one truth or reality exists. Instead, it believes that a multiplicity of socially constructed realities exist and produce various truths (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:56; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:114; Deacon et al. 1999:7; Gilliland 2014:87; Rehman & Alharthi 2016:55, Nieuwenhuis & Smit 2012:127). The interpretive paradigm’s epistemology is described as subjective (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:55). Flick (2004:89) succinctly contextualises the paradigm regarding this research in stating that “perception is not seen as a passive-receptive process of representation but as an active constructive process of production”. This active process relates to the very essence of this study, as it highlights how representation takes place and its power in society. Interpretivism aims to understand the phenomenon within its context but recognises that the researcher cannot be disengaged from that being studied as they are linked to social reality (Chilisa & Kawulich 2012:56; Deacon et al. 1999:6; Gilliland 2014:87, Thomas 2010:296). Observations made using the interpretive paradigm are prone to subjectivity as they are impacted by the researcher’s views. Therefore, as noted by Bashir and colleagues (2008:35), “since we maintain our humanity throughout the research process, it is largely impossible to escape the subjective experience” (2008:35).

The researcher, who approaches her study as an interpretivist, aims to understand the phenomena under investigation by immersing herself in the research process to “make sense of the ways other people make sense of their worlds” (Deacon et al. 1999:7). The

methods employed, such as ethnography and textual analysis, provide qualitative data (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:56; Gilliland 2014:88). Numerical data could be generated during the interpretative stage of the research, but it is not usually relied upon (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:56). The subjective, interpretive nature of this approach leads to questions regarding how the research can be validated due to the age-old assumption that qualitative research is not real research or is viewed as being soft. Richards (2003:6) contests the latter and says the approach should not be considered to be in “soft ... [because]... it demands rigour, precision, systematicity, and careful attention to detail”.

4.2.3 Critical theory

Critical theory is based on an ontological premise of historical realism (Rehman & Alharthi 2016:57; Pham 2018:4). It assumes that reality is sculpted by political, cultural, gender and social factors that foster a social system. Critical theory, like interpretivism, understands that the researcher has an inherent ability to influence what is being studied. Unlike interpretivism, the aim is not to only understand society but to ignite change (Callaghan 2016:59; Deacon et al. 1999:13; Gilliland 2014:87).

Rehman and Alharthi (2016:57) explain that the goal is “to bring to light the beliefs and actions that limit human freedom with the ultimate aim of transforming the situation”. The purpose of transformation is a significant characteristic of critical theory and has been identified as a limiting factor concerning interpretivism. Pham (2018:4) advocates that the interpretivist seeks to understand “current phenomena rather than focusing [on] the problems related to empowerment of individuals and societies”.

This research’s long-term objectives are underpinned by critical theory. The study highlights the representational deficit regarding trans women and the need for accurate portrayals. However, the academic deficit concerning the topic means that the study is interpretivist. It will provide a foundation for further inquiry from the multitude of interpretations present in society and possibly a springboard for more critical investigations.

The abovementioned approach may appear to defy the often distinct categorisation of paradigms. However, it finds support from Rehman and Alharthi (2016:58), who do not believe that one should distort one’s own outlook to force oneself to abide by the creed of a philosophical or methodological

tradition just to avert the threat or accusation of 'intellectual excommunication'.

There are a variety of approaches to guide the analysis of qualitative data, and all seek "to provide an in-depth, socio-contextual and detailed description and interpretation of the research topic" (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016:100). This study is focused on the representation of transgender women in South African soap operas. Episodes of the soap opera that portray a trans female character are the primary data source. Those episodes are the text under investigation, and the aim is to identify themes within the text that provide insight into how transwomen are represented. Therefore, the study's analytical approach is thematic textual analysis. An overview of what it entails is discussed below.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

This exploratory, descriptive study has the representation of transgender women in South African soap operas as its focus. The research design was a qualitative cross-sectional thematic analysis of 14 episodes of *7de Laan*. There is a portrayal deficit, and *7de Laan*'s portrayal was the only relevant, existing sample at the time of writing. The study isolates, examines and discusses themes present in the text to understand how transwomen are represented. The word 'text' in media studies relates to images, music, and written and spoken language (Fairclough 2003:3). For this study, the terminology refers to the episodes of *7de Laan* analysed and the Facebook commentary about the portrayal.

4.3.1 Research techniques and procedures

The 14 episodes are the primary data source. The episodes were obtained from the country's Broadcasting Commission (SABC) for R640.00. The research approach employed was thematic textual analysis, and therefore the episodes were watched to identify themes that provide insight into the research problem. Coding was used to assist the researcher in describing how transgender women are represented and to address the research questions.

The researcher watched the episodes to discover themes applicable to the research aim. Proving relevance entailed identifying themes that could be shown to be significant via trans and representation theories used to frame the study. The themes were sorted into a

controllable few with applicable codes and presented in a table to provide content for a detailed analysis of the findings.

An additional data set or text was also examined. The additional data set referred to Facebook commentary related to Geneviève's portrayal and was identified as integral to this research because it enhanced the findings from the thematic analysis. Texts, such as social media commentary, can provide valuable insight into social dynamics because "one way in which people can act and interact in the course of social events is to speak or to write" (Fairclough 2003:21). How one speaks provides an account of social dynamics regarding power, identity and public opinion. Therefore, these comments were analysed using discourse analysis, which is focused on the use of text in social contexts (Fairclough 2003:2; Parker 2004:308; Rehman & Alharthi 2016:57).

4.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The research population encompassed three data sets. The first refers to the primary data: the 14 episodes of *7de Laan*. The last two comprised the Facebook commentary related to the portrayal depicted in the episodes and an interview with Deonay Olivia Balie. An overview of the population, the population parameters, and the sampling type, method and size are discussed in relation to the data sets.

4.4.1 *7de Laan* episodes' population motivation and parameters

The target population refers to all soap operas on the country's television screens. However, there is a deficiency concerning the population, so a relevant and accessible sample was identified. The accessible population were the episodes in *7de Laan* that feature Geneviève. The population was identified as relevant due to the representation deficit and because it features a transgender female character being portrayed by a trans actress. The relevance of who is portraying the character is pertinent, especially when representation is under investigation. The population's parameters relate to the 14 soap opera episodes that broadcast weekdays on SABC 2 from 18:00 - 18:30 in April 2017. The duration per episode was 23 minutes, and each episode was interrupted by advertisement breaks. The 14 episodes are the units identified for thematic analysis.

4.4.2 Facebook comments population motivation and parameters

The target population refers to all comments present on *7de Laan*'s official Facebook page. However, the accessible sample constitutes the 241 comments that appeared on a post published on 17 April 2017, which announced that the actress, Deonay Olivia Balie, would make her debut as Geneviève the following evening. The population's parameters include the timing of the comments being posted, specifically 17 April. The comments vary in length, contain text and no images. Some comments only contain emoticons. The 241 Facebook comments were the units identified for discourse analysis.

4.4.3 In-depth interview's population motivation and parameters

The target and accessible population referred to the actress, Deonay Olivia Balie, identified because she portrayed the character under investigation. The population parameters relate to the format of the 29-minute interview conducted telephonically as an unstructured interview.

4.4.4 Sampling procedure

Non-probability, purposive sampling was applied to both data sets, which meant the researcher predicted the choice of units of analysis (Du Plooy 2009:115). Purposive sampling was used due to availability and prior knowledge of the study's objective. The researcher subjectively identified the episode sample size for thematic analysis as the 14 *7de Laan* episodes and the 241 Facebook comments which appear below a Facebook post related to the portrayal. A random sampling method would not have suited the exploratory nature of a niche issue being investigated. The sampling type was applied to guarantee the relevance of the units of analysis and to ensure the validity of the data analysis approach.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS APPROACHES

4.5.1 Qualitative research

This study focused on the representation of transgender women due to an on-screen scarcity. The research explored how transwomen are portrayed, spoken about and spoken

to by analysing 14 episodes of *7de Laan*, which feature the character, Geneviève du Pré. Therefore, the research necessitated a qualitative research approach, as the

objectives of a qualitative design [are] to explore areas where limited or no prior information exists and/or to describe behaviours, themes, trends, attitudes, needs or relations that are applicable” (Du Plooy 2009:88).

Qualitative research is often criticised for being too flexible, not having much rigour, and a field where “anything goes” (Braun & Clarke 2006:78). The critique is strongly opposed as all research findings, whether qualitative or quantitative, should be reliable, even when analysis methods differ.

Qualitative research is usually not viewed as providing the same formulaic, numerical and statistical assurances as a quantitative enquiry despite both methods “try[ing] to find the same result: the truth” (Bashir et al. 2008:35). This study used triangulation, which is when more than one data-collection method and analysis is used to substantiate validity, reliability and credibility (Du Plooy 2009:40, Gilliland 2014:109). The additional data relates to Facebook commentary regarding Geneviève’s portrayal and an unstructured in-depth interview with Deonay Olivia Balie, who played the role of Geneviève du Pré. The use of triangulation strengthens the research findings by providing insight that supports the aim of highlighting the need for accurate and fair portrayals. An overview of the research fundamentals, such as paradigms, related population and sampling data, is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Research design

	Thematic analysis (7de Laan episodes)	Discourse Analysis (Facebook comments)	Survey (unstructured in- depth interview)
Research paradigm	Interpretivist	Interpretivist	Interpretivist
Research design	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
Sampling type	Non-probability sampling	Non-probability sampling	Non-probability sampling
Sampling method	Purposive/Availability	Purposive/Availability	Purposive/Availability
Sampling size	14 episodes	241 Facebook comments	One interview
Target population	All soap operas	All comments present on <i>7de Laan</i> ’s official Facebook page	Actress who portrayed Geneviève du Pré - Deonay Olivia Balie

Accessible population	7de Laan	Comments that appear on a Facebook post published on 17 April 2017	Actress who portrayed Geneviève du Pré - Deonay Olivia Balie
Population parameters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episodes of <i>7de Laan</i> featuring Geneviève du Pré • Broadcast on weekdays on SABC 2 from 18:00 until 18:30 in April 2017. Duration per episode is 23 minutes • Each episode is interrupted by advertisement breaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posted on 17 April 2017 on <i>7de Laan's</i> official Facebook page under a post announcing actress Deonay Olivia Balie's debut as Geneviève • The comments vary in length, contain text and no images. Some comments only contain emoticons. 	Telephonic interview open-ended questions
Units of analysis	14 episodes of <i>7de Laan</i>	241 Facebook comments	One interview

4.5.2 Thematic analysis

The research aims necessitated thematic textual analysis as an analytical research approach. Thematic analysis has been described as “a cornerstone of qualitative data analysis” (Herzog, Handke & Hitters 2019:1). This approach is flexible and does not have to be grounded in theory. It can be employed across a variety of epistemologies to provide a data account that is valuable, detailed and intricate. This segment provides substantiation regarding the use of thematic analysis. It presents a breakdown of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach and details how researchers can claim validity and reliability.

Thematic textual analysis is a popular approach used in qualitative studies to understand social phenomena (Kawulich & Holland 2012:231; Alhojailan 2012:40). It analyses, isolates and presents patterns in data (Braun & Clarke 2006:6; Kawulich & Holland 2012:23). This approach is suitable when deductive and inductive methodologies, and coding and categorisation, are employed to understand meaning (Alhojailan 2012:41). Herzog et al (2019:2) assert that thematic analysis is instrumental in “analysing experiences, perceptions and understandings”.

In addition, thematic analysis is concerned with codes. Codes are labels assigned to data relevant to the study due to its association with the research question. These codes are then developed into themes (Herzog et al. 2019:4; Kawulich & Holland 2012:231; Braun &

Clarke 2006:19; Vaismoradi et al. 2016:101), which connect underlying meanings present in the data. The themes are the end product of the thematic analysis approach. Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) summarise the theme development process by explaining that

codes with common points of reference, a high degree of transferability, and through which ideas can be united throughout the study phenomenon can be transformed into a theme (2019:2).

The process is not a simple one. The researcher plays a vital role in the analytical process. The data involved in the study is collected, transcribed into a textual format and re-read more than once to isolate key ideas and analyse the data to contextualise the phenomenon (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove 2019:4; Kawulich & Holland 2012:232). According to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017:2), the approach is flexible because it can be adapted to a specific study but still provide rich, complex, valuable data.

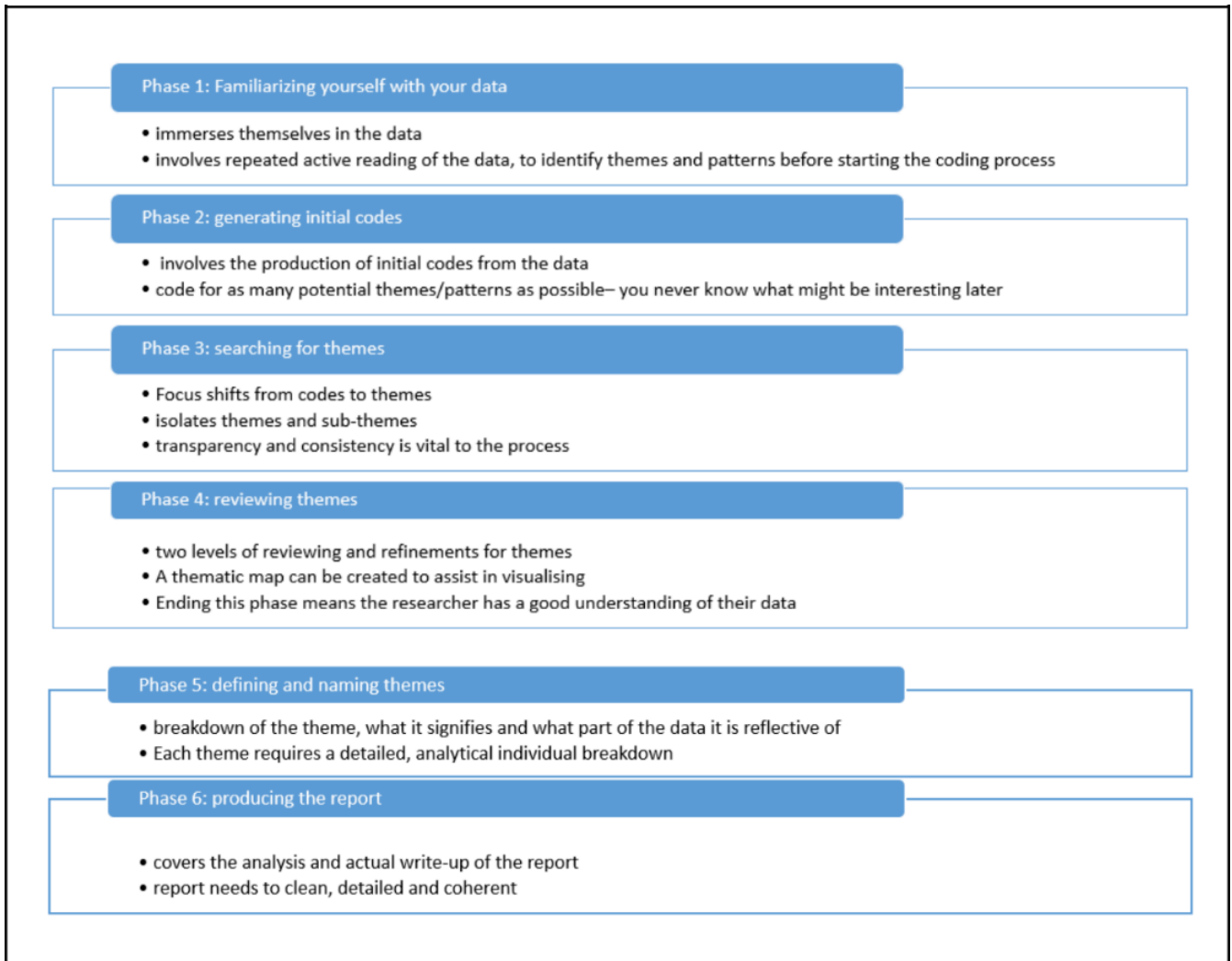
However, the flexibility of thematic analysis is a double-edged sword. Nowell et al (2017:2) note that the characteristic “can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence” regarding theme development. Nowell et al (2017:2) and Herzog et al (2019:6) also highlight that researchers who employ thematic analysis neglect the concept of transparency, which could bring a study’s validity and reliability into question. Therefore, they stress that a clear, methodical outline should accompany the study, which contextualises and thoroughly explains the use of thematic analysis.

The aforementioned appears to be logically paramount. A study cannot be evaluated against its desired goal when the research assumptions and methodology are not sufficiently detailed (Vaismoradi et al 2016:102; Nowell et al 2017:2-3). A lack of detail can also hamper future research if anyone seeking to build on it cannot understand how it aligns with future research (Braun & Clarke 2006:7). Braun and Clarke (2006:16) identified a six-phase approach to thematic analysis. They caution that it is not an attempt to limit the flexible and exploratory nature of thematic analysis but rather to provide “a vocabulary and ‘recipe’ for people to start doing thematic analysis in a way that is theoretically and methodologically sound” (2006:78). Thematic analysis fosters an understanding of the social reality of a phenomenon. However, the subjectivity involved in identifying the theme highlights the need for a guide, or recipe, to keep the researcher on track because the flexibility of thematic analysis could be equated to:

following a hose through long grass, where you cannot clearly see the way ahead, and the path is not direct: sometimes you move forwards; other times you coil back on yourself (Braun, Clarke & Weate 2016: 197)

Braun and Clark’s blueprint, which explains the progression from familiarising oneself with the data to the production of the report detailing thematic finds, is summarised in Table 4.2 and was used to guide this study.

Table 4.2: Guidelines for theme development



(Braun and Clark 2006:16-23)

4.5.4 Discourse Analysis

The additional data set was sourced from *7de Laan*'s official Facebook page. The data relates to the 241 comments on a post published on 17 April 2017, which announced that Deonay Olivia Balie would make her debut as Geneviève the following evening. The 241 comments are in the public domain and were analysed using discourse analysis. The approach recognises the importance of language in understanding social issues (Braun &

Clarke 2013:188) because “texts have causal effects upon, and contribute to changes in, people (beliefs, attitudes, etc.), actions, social relations, and the material world” (Fairclough 2003:8).

How a topic is spoken about can influence meaning and uphold ideologies. It was assumed that the analysis of these comments would provide evidence of transphobia within the *7de Laan* audience. The anticipated discrimination would give insight into the social realities of how a transgender woman is viewed, treated and spoken about in South Africa. The transphobic comments, and the anticipated positive and supportive ones, support this study’s call for fair, accurate and representative portrayals.

Discourse analysis involves the identification of themes or patterns in the texts to explore how they are constructed and how they contribute to the social reality within which they exist (Braun & Clarke 2013:177; Fairclough 2003:5). Discourse analysis and thematic analysis are complementary methods “where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data” (Braun & Clarke 2006:13).

4.5.4 In-depth interview

Triangulation in the study included an unstructured in-depth interview conducted with Deonay Olivia Balie, who portrayed the character, Geneviève du Pré. The interviewee gave consent for her identity to be disclosed. The 29-minute interview took place telephonically at the participant’s request. Six open-ended questions guided the interview, and the discussion was participant-led. An unstructured interview was used because it aligned with the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study and because the format is “best suited to exploring understandings, perceptions and constructions of things that participants have some kind of personal stake in” (Braun & Clark 2006:81).

The guiding interview questions (see Appendix C) were drafted within the framework of the research aims. An interview review guide (Braun & Clark 2006: 85) was used to assess the validity and relevance of the questions in terms of whether they helped to answer the research question; whether there were any negative assumptions embedded in them; how they could make the participant feel and whether they were relevant to the participant. The interview preparation also involved reflexivity and bracketing to mitigate bias and

presuppositions related to the study from the researcher (Roulston 2010: 23; Tufford & Newman 2010:81). Those strategies were employed because

qualitative researchers and interviewers are inevitably part of the studies that they conduct, whether or not they make explicit the connections between their subject positions and the ways in which these impact the outcomes of their studies in their reports (Roulston 2010:115).

After the interview was concluded, it was transcribed and analysed in relation to the findings of the thematic analysis.

4.6 ENSURING RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

A lack of mutual intelligibility between quantitative and qualitative concepts means that qualitative research is sometimes perceived as lacking credibility because the rigour in quantitative research is not generally applicable to the qualitative approach (Bashir et al. 2008:35). However, rigour is viewed as vital to research, as its absence, according to Bashir et al. (2008:36), sees research “become fiction”. The concept of rigour is underpinned by the notions of validity and reliability, which have different definitions in qualitative and quantitative research. The latter means that a different understanding of assessing whether validity and reliability are achieved in qualitative studies is necessary. The appropriate terminology for qualitative research that justifies the study and its validity are discussed and substantiated. The terminology includes but is not limited to trustworthiness, consistency, dependability and credibility.

In quantitative research, as noted in 4.2.1, the goal is to place data into categories that can be replicated to ensure that the results are generalised and reproduced (Bashir et al. 2008:36; Wimmer & Dominick 2006:14). That goal summarises the concept of reliability (Babbie 2016:146). The concept of validity relates “to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration” (Babbie 2016:148). This means that the phenomenon that the study claims to be investigating, is in fact, being investigated (Mentz & Botha 2012:80).

Qualitative researchers have a different view of what constitutes reliability and validity because “qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (Golafshani 2003:600). Despite having a different methodology and aim to quantitative research, the qualitative approach must still be

credible (Wimmer & Dominick 2006:120). Numerous definitions of how qualitative research interprets reliability and validity exist. An overview of what is understood by those terms in the quantitative field, along with how they are interpreted by qualitative researchers, is discussed below.

Quantitative research's understanding of reliability speaks to "testing or evaluating quantitative research" and is important to gauge quality (Bashir et al. 2008:39). Testing in qualitative research is understood as a means to draw out information, as a study of that nature seeks to simplify a complex phenomenon. Stenbacka's (2001:551) work titled *Qualitative research requires quality concepts of its own*, asserts that reliability is not an applicable term for qualitative studies, and claims that "the concept is misleading because, in qualitative research, the concept speaks to explaining, and also to assist in generating understanding".

Qualitative researchers propose alternative terms for reliability such as "credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability" (Bashir et al. 2008:39). The term dependability appears to be the most used synonym in qualitative research for the concept of reliability (Bashir et al. 2008:39; Golafshani 2003:601). It is argued to be aligned with the notion of consistency, which is achieved by verifying the research, checking the raw data, and how it was reduced to achieve the results presented (Bashir et al. 2008:39).

Another concept that features in the alternative reliability vocabulary of qualitative researchers is that of trustworthiness, which as Seale (1999:462) remarks, "lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability". Trustworthiness speaks to research being viewed as valid and supporting the study's finding by ring-fencing its validity with additional, supportive data. Trustworthiness can be achieved, as per this study, via triangulation, where different data sources or techniques are employed to "ensure that rigour, reliability, validity and good quality is achieved" (Gilliland 2014:109). The episodes in *7de Laan* form this study's primary data to ensure that the research is valid and credible. Triangulation was done by analysing the Facebook posts from the soap opera's fan page and the unstructured, in-depth interview conducted with Deonay Olivia Balie. The use of triangulation informs the intersectionality of the responses to the portrayal. It further supports an ethical research approach that seeks to present fair and accurate findings.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Qualitative researchers are immersed in the phenomena under scrutiny, and the aim is to “build up the most accurate and comprehensive account possible” (Deacon et al 1999:30). Avoiding bias in a subjective study is not easy and therefore ethical considerations are paramount. When ethical practices are disregarded, it could compromise the study by bringing its validity and reliability into question and adversely affect the participants or the individuals linked to the research topic (Wimmer & Dominick 2006:67; Deacon et al 1999:372).

Wimmer and Dominick (2006:69) propose four codes to ensure ethical conduct. These include autonomy, justice, nonmaleficence and a concept that works in tandem with the latter, namely beneficence. The principles ask that the researcher respect the values, decisions and beliefs of participants and speak to the ideals of informed consent and voluntary participation (Wimmer & Dominick 2006:69; Deacon et al. 1999:374; Nieuwenhuis & Smit 2012:133). Researchers are also urged to treat all participants equally, not intentionally inflict harm, and remove existing harms (Wimmer & Dominick 2006:69).

This study’s primary data source technique may not involve direct interaction with human participants, but the findings and language used could cause harm. Patricia Elliot (2010) highlights this study’s primary ethical consideration namely that a concern arises when a researcher writes about a group or community to which they do not belong. The researcher is not transgender and while the researcher is an ally of the transgender community, she is not a member. The researcher’s lived experience is vastly different to a transgender individual because of society’s current views of how gender is spoken about, perceived and internalised. This study includes triangulation with regards to the interview with transgender actress Deonay Olivia Balie, who portrays Geneviève, to ensure validity, sensitivity and accuracy of how a community that the researcher is not part of is presented by this study.

Approval to approach Balie for an interview was secured from the University of South Africa’s (Unisa) ethics committee and aligned with the values and principles of Unisa’s ethical guidelines, which promote autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (Unisa 2016: 11). This means that the participant was not coerced into participating. She

was aware that she could withdraw consent at any stage of the interview process and that maintaining the confidentiality of her identity was possible if she desired. Consent is usually provided in writing and signed by the participant. The participant gave verbal consent as part of the recorded unstructured telephonic interview in response to the statements listed on the consent form, which contains “adequate details of the research, including any risks associated with the study” (Unisa 2016:14).

Literature guiding the study’s theoretical framework, where possible, has been presented by trans individuals. As mentioned previously, there is a deficiency in the literature, but some literature does exist, and it provided a foundation to approach a subject that the researcher is not familiar with, in an ethical manner. The researcher has used terminology that does not alienate the transgender identity.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore, discuss and represent transgender women in South African soap operas. The primary data source is 14 episodes of one soap opera, which portrayed a trans female character. The population identified necessitates this study and its qualitative thematic research approach. The study aimed to add to the academic deficit regarding the existence, accuracy and fairness of transgender portrayals in South Africa. Lastly, the study sought to build a foundation for further research.

In Chapter 5 the study’s findings are discussed in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

It cuts them up and pastes them together, and presents them, on screens and speakers large and small, to other bodies – bodies that stand, sit, walk, or lie, alone and in crowds, in private and in public, bodies that gaze, that look away, that cringe, that laugh, desire, imagine, dream.

- C  el Keegan, Laura Horak and Eliza Steinboek (2018:1)

Media representations of transgender individuals are criticised for being inaccurate, stereotypical and lacking agency or substance (Klein 2009:27; Jobe 2013; Capuzza & Spencer 2017:215; Media Monitoring [sa]:3). The media “acts as a staging ground for the types of life that are permitted to become real and to shape reality in turn” (Keegan et al. 2018:7). Previous chapters have highlighted that the soap opera genre is not based on fantasy and that “soaps are firmly embedded in the tradition of natural realism purporting to portray the lives of everyday people” (Syed-Azalanshah 2011:28). These realistic portrayals are vital to the soap narrative, as they assist the medium in connecting with a diverse audience (Allen 1983:105; Hobson 2003:141; Syed-Azalanshah 2011:28; Marx Knoetze 2015:61; Capuzza 2014:117). How the media portrays or represents a transgender woman frames how she is perceived, and those portrayals can impact societal views regarding all trans individuals, despite their diverse lived experiences. Therefore, it is imperative that those portrayals are investigated to understand the message provided to the audience.

This study is focused on how transgender women are represented to understand the message being transmitted about how transwomen are viewed and treated in society. The portrayals are important for anyone looking at soaps to find the familiar and have them assist their understanding of themselves and their society (Sarkissian 2014:147; Capuzza & Spencer 2017:225). The portrayals and their related ideologies are also important for the audience who may not interact with transgender individuals to ensure they are afforded the respect they are entitled to as human beings with agency. This relates to the very essence of the role of soap operas, which is to attract a mass audience and sustain interest while making the familiar interesting and encourage an understanding of the unfamiliar (Hobson 2003:142; Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:21). Soaps play a vital role in cultural exchanges. Their importance and relevance are underscored by audience cultivation and

reception studies such as Muindi's (2015:21-22), which show a parasocial relationship between viewers and characters and content. Audience members can relate to characters to such an extent that

it is very common to find them in offices, factories, streets, markets and other private or public places engaged in heated debates about what is to happen in the next episode (Muindi 2015:22).

These discussions demonstrate the impact of soaps on influencing views and encouraging conversation. As described in Section 2.3, the viewing and interpretation of soap opera narratives does not take place in isolation and, therefore, it is imperative that *how* "popular narratives are read, the conditions under which they are produced and consumed, and the ends to which they are appropriated" are interrogated (Gledhill 1987:348). Technological advancement has allowed the spaces of engagement regarding content to move beyond offices, factories, streets and markets to Facebook posts such as the one that forms part of the triangulation employed in this study.

The episodes of *7de Laan* that feature Geneviève comprise the core data investigated, and those 14 episodes were analysed by using thematic analysis. Additionally, the research used data triangulation to increase the validity and trustworthiness of the thematic analysis findings. The additional data sources included analysis of Facebook commentary related to the portrayal and an unstructured interview with the actress who portrayed Geneviève. These were analysed using discourse analysis. The use of triangulation ensured trustworthiness, consistency, dependability and credibility of the research findings.

This chapter discusses the findings of the analysed data concerning the research questions and provides insight regarding how transgender women are portrayed in a South African soap opera.

5.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – INITIAL THEMES

This research analysed the 14 episodes of *7de Laan* that feature the character Geneviève du Pré. Seven initial themes were identified namely: learning gender; how transgender women are treated; diverse society; problematising language and gender; female agenda; not a wallflower and visibility matters. The seven themes were refined according to Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to thematic analysis (2006:78). The refinement involved

amalgamating similar themes, and the process was guided by the research question and the theoretical framework. The initial theme, learning gender, was coded from edutainment embedded in the episodes and is evident when a character called Connie tells another character to treat Geneviève “like a woman” (Maposa 2017). In advising that Geneviève should be treated as a woman, transwomen are shown as being recognised and respected for who they are without any exclusions.

The learning gender theme was further supported by one of the judges of the Miss Well-Rounded pageant referring to the Constitution in episode 4029, when noting that everyone is allowed to choose the live that they want to live, as per the excerpt below, which supports Geneviève being allowed to participate in the pageant because she is a transgender woman.

Mariaan: You guys knew and didn't tell us.
Diederik: It's my fault. I should've covered it in the rules. We discovered it too late. She was a favourite already
Mariaan: We don't need this kind of publicity on a front page
Andre: What's Vanessa's take on this?
Diederick: She's backing us. We're to blame. There are no grounds to disqualify Geneviève.
Mariaan: Now we have a crisis
Andre: Be prepared for lots of criticism
Marko: I say to hell with that. The public voted her in. She stays
Matrone: And she has our full support

[Mariaan turns to look at Matrone]

Matrone: What? You can't think I'm so narrow-minded as to judge her?

[Committee smiles at each other]

Mariaan: She was always my favourite

Matrone: Everyone's entitled to choose how they want to live their life.

The codes that contributed to the learning gender theme educate the audience about society's diversity, respecting each other's individuality and understanding that everyone's rights are protected. Those educational outputs were also identified within the diverse society theme and were evident by Geneviève referring to the LGBTI community and then explaining the acronym. The diverse society theme also included Janie Erasmus' speech to pageant attendees where she says that everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

The similarities in encouraging respect and celebrating differences within those two themes led to learning gender being incorporated under the key theme of diverse society.

Following the refinement process, four key themes were isolated as pertinent to this research, diverse society, problematising language and gender, not a wallflower and visibility matters. The classification of these themes as key was not due to their quantification in relation to one another but because the themes encapsulate “something important in relation to the overall research question” (Braun & Clark 2006:10). The final phase of the refinement process is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

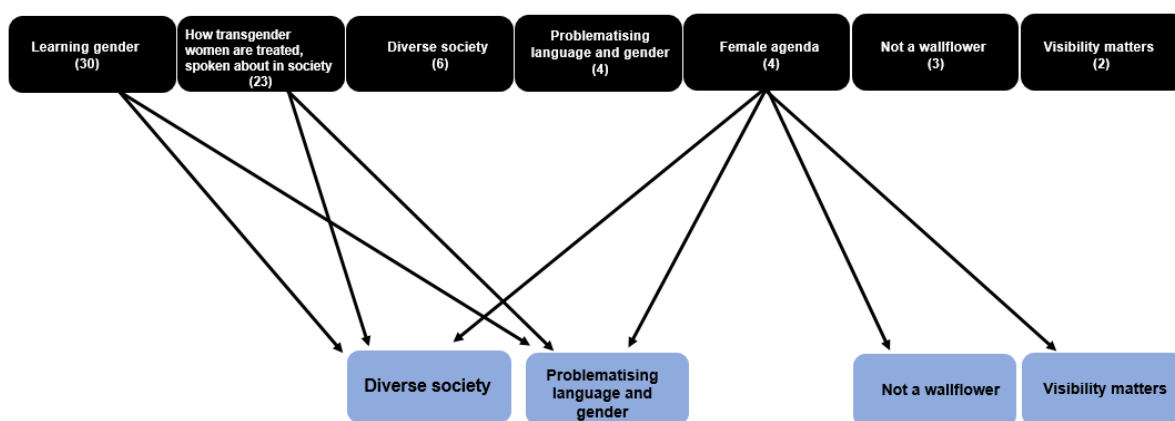


Figure 5.1: Final phase of theme refinement process

The flexibility of the thematic research approach means that the prevalence of the themes as a data set is not crucial to this research. Instead, its value lies in its ability to answer the research questions and motivate factors for future research. As noted above, seven themes were initially identified as relevant to this research and those were later refined to four key themes. Some themes are not directly supportive of the research questions but are supportive of another theme that answers the research questions. A detailed breakdown of the findings related to the four key themes is presented below.

5.2.1 Diverse society

The theme diverse society relates to a trend observed within the storyline that educates the audience on the diversity present in society and exemplifies the edutainment approach adopted by *7de Laan*. The soap uses role models such as Geneviève and the guest speaker at the fictional pageant, Janie Erasmus, to reiterate self-love and respect in response to judgement by oneself or others. The provision of role models reflects the theoretical underpinning of Bandura’s Social Learning theory, which claims that behavioural

learning and modification can take place vicariously (1971:2). The notion of respect is reinforced by Geneviève when she sings the title lyrics of Aretha Franklin’s song, *Respect*, and when Miss Erasmus addresses the crowd at the Miss Well-Rounded finale and says, “Every person deserves to be treated with respect. Even though we differ from one another” (Maposa 2017).



Figure 5.2: Janie Erasmus’ respect speech (Maposa 2017)

7de Laan demonstrates an awareness of its diverse audience regarding how it educates its viewers on respect and self-love by having more than one role model advocating for those principles. The soap’s scripting further demonstrates edutainment’s ability to exert vicarious influence on two levels, as confirmed by Singhal and Rogers (2004:5), Allen (1983:105) and Muindi (2015:21).

Edutainment can impact the awareness and behaviour of the audience in terms of the need for social change. The approach can develop an enabling environment that encourages social change on a collective-societal and individual level (Singhal & Rogers 2004:5; Japhet 2013:14). The use of role models such as Geneviève and Janie give

significance to the vicarious influence ... [as] ... observers can acquire lasting attitudes, emotional reactions, and behavioral proclivities toward persons, places, or things that have been associated with the model’s emotional experiences (Bandura 1989:32).

Janie Erasmus’ speech speaks to the entire audience, and her use of the personal pronoun ‘we’ invites the audience to be part of the reciprocal process of respect (Kaewrungruang & Yaoharee 2018:88; Al-Faki 2014:181). This is confirmed by Al-Faki (2014:181), who

identifies the pronoun as a “persuasive linguistic device which helps invite identification and solidarity”.

Erasmus’ speech speaks to the masses and educates the audience on a collective, unified basis. The audience is also invited to reflect individually when Geneviève responds to a question from one of the judges asking her to reimagine her life. Geneviève’s answer, as per Figure 5.3, demonstrates internal reflection and the recognition of self-worth when she notes that her experiences have contributed to the person she is and that “she’s proud of herself” (Maposa 2017).



Figure 5.3: Geneviève answering pageant finale question (Maposa 2017)

Geneviève’s response is important for anyone looking to their television screen for portrayals that may assist during their process of identification or acceptance. This is confirmed by Wellborn (2015:24), who notes that, when familial role models or support systems may be lacking, “media role models may be important resources for LGBT individuals”. Negative social messages that transgender individuals encounter, such as stereotypes and derogatory slurs, can “minimize [*sic*], devalue, or denigrate their identities” (Rood, Reisner, Puckette, Suracef, Bermang, and Pantalone 2017:1). Internalising negative messages, coupled with a binary view of gender in society, can fuel internalised transphobia but relatable, positive representations can also help address internalised transphobia by encouraging individuals to view their gender identity as more socially acceptable. During an unstructured interview, Deonay Olivia Balie, who portrayed Geneviève, reflected on how trans visibility and relatable portrayals “proves to trans people

[that, you know, what,] and also society that you can take up spaces as a trans woman” (2021).

The analysed episodes celebrate differences in society. In particular, the first episode promotes the various skill sets of the women participating in the pageant. One of the characters, Matrone, notes that one participant can use a gun, another bakes wedding cakes, and the other is skilled at carpentry (Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4: Steffie’s skill (Maposa 2017)

The three skills mentioned are diverse, and two of them oppose gender stereotypes in terms of skills that are associated with women (Ramphela 2016:17 2000 2006). The narrative’s inclusion of a woman who can shoot a gun or do carpentry supports the validity of a world with diverse human beings who do not adhere to a socially constructed gender narrative.

Geneviève’s portrayal in *7de Laan* reflects stereotypes based on her gender identity. She is discriminated against by once-off characters who dehumanise her by referring to her as a “whatever” (Maposa 2017) (Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5: Geneviève faces discrimination (Maposa 2017)



Figure 5.6: Geneviève referred to as 'weird' (Maposa 2017)

Geneviève is stereotyped and misgendered purposefully by a different character who uses her deadname², refers to her as “weird”, and dismisses her gender identity (Figure 5.6). The transphobic interaction preludes a front-page story about Geneviève in *7de Laan*'s fictional newspaper *Die Oggenblad*, which further dismisses Geneviève's gender identity. The front page contains a photograph of Geneviève (Figure 5.7), with the headline 'Man Deur na Top-10 van Mej Volrond Vrou' [Man through to top-10 of Miss Well-rounded Woman]. The second line says 'Gérard word Geneviève' [Gérard becomes Geneviève].

² The term refers to the name given to a transgender individual at birth, which has since been changed (Tomson 2016:205; Wanneburg 2019:6)



Figure 5.7: Geneviève misgendered in *Die Oggenblad* (Maposa 2017)

The newspaper article reflects contemporary South African society, where transgender women are victimised, judged on their appearance and discriminated against because of their gender identity (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:226; Ramphela 2016:18; Rood et al. 2017:6). Newspapers such as *Die Oggenblad* have a role in universally informing the audience in a democratic nation and not perpetuating discriminatory ideologies. The headline selection infers a gaze that is binary, insensitive and transphobic because it references Geneviève as a man. That reference frames the narrative and tells the audience what it should view as the most relevant aspect of the story.

The first word in the article's headline labels Geneviève as male, which dismisses her identification and invalidates the legitimacy of her identity. The story that the article is telling Geneviève as a consumer is that her gender identity is not recognised, and that is the same story the article tells the rest of *Die Oggenblad's* consumers. By not recognising Geneviève's identity, the newspaper validates a gender binary view and a transphobic narrative reinforced as a norm in the conceptual map referenced by Hall's (1997:18) theory of representation. This conceptual map exists in societies where various gender identities are present but may not be recognised, and when transphobia is shared as universal it can fuel internalised transphobia (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:216).

The appropriate approach to news coverage related to Geneviève's participation in the pageant should have involved her input and allowed her to control the narrative. The latter further highlights that her deadname should not have been used as it discriminates against

her gender identity and against anyone else whose identity may resonate with hers. The discriminatory behaviour presented by *Die Oggenblad* by its language selection is a norm in the media landscape, as trans representations are often misrepresented. This is confirmed by Capuzza (2014:115), Jobe (2013:1), Media Monitoring Project ([sa]:3) and Miller (2012:12). The onus is on the media to embrace its role in society as an educator and informer. Additionally, the media needs to recognise its ability to re-appropriate norms and challenge a dominant binary ideology that relies on stereotypes and misrepresentation because difference cannot be contained within a system favouring binarism (Derrida 1981:10).

Stereotypes and misrepresentations encouraged by gender binarism have real-world implications that contribute to discriminatory behaviour in societal institutions and disregards individuals who do not align with a gender binary bias (Bandura 1989:71). Transgender individuals face institutionalised discrimination, which prevents them from accessing healthcare services because they are ridiculed or looked down on (Ramphela 2016:11; Müllner & Meer 2018:6). The status quo favouring a gender binary infers that the prejudice levelled against trans women based on their gender identity places them at heightened risk for violence. Fear of secondary victimisation prevents some trans women from approaching the institutions designed to serve them (Chakuwamba & van der Merwe 2015:40). Chakuwamba and van der Merwe's (2015:41) work highlights that many transgender women have survived varying incidents of violence and that they hesitate "to seek protection from police because they had often faced disdain and institutionalized homophobia and transphobia from the law enforcement agents"

The above reinforces Klein's (2009:15) view that South Africa is "far from being a 'dreamland' for trans*" individuals. Therefore, in answering research questions 1 and 2, stereotypes are present in the portrayal of transgender women in *7de Laan*. They relate specifically to how Geneviève is spoken about, spoken to and treated. The stereotypes are perpetuated by once-off characters in everyday settings, which include Geneviève collecting a takeaway or enjoying a coffee at a neighbourhood café. The location where the discrimination occurs is significant because it reflects a society where some transphobic acts go unchallenged in everyday public spheres due to an ideology of intolerance. The intolerance is evident by Müllner and Meer's (2018:4) study, where 49% of respondents did not share the view that the LGBT community should enjoy the same rights as they do.

The stereotypes are not upheld by *7de Laan*'s main characters. Two of the three instances where Geneviève is discriminated against and judged are addressed by Geneviève and one of her friends, Aggie. The instance where no intervention takes place is during a scene in episode 4034, where Geneviève is at a bar table with Connie and Aggie, and a once-off character is staring at her. The character does not engage with anyone directly but stares at Geneviève and shakes his head often



Figure 5.8: Head-shaking incident (Maposa 2017)

The head-shaking incident breaks the trend observed where *7de Laan*'s main characters persistently respond to the discrimination directed at Geneviève and provide further evidence for the edutainment approach incorporated in the storyline. By showing an incident where no action is taken in response to discrimination, *7de Laan* provides another realistic representation of the judgement faced by transgender women. Discrimination is not always verbal, and neither is it always addressed. The mediated reality problematises transphobia, assists the audience member who does not share their story and helps them comprehend "it in greater depth by experiencing the representation in televisual form" (Hobson 2003:142). This representation reflects a reality where transphobic interactions occur without interference from bystanders who could defend or assist someone who is being belittled or dehumanised

The diverse society theme illustrates the difference in how transgender women are treated and spoken about in society and how they should be treated. *7de Laan*'s script reiterates a response by Connie to Aggie's query about how Geneviève should be treated following

the news article, namely that one should “Treat her like a woman. That’s what she is” (Maposa 2017).



Figure 5.9: ‘Treat her like a woman’ (Maposa 2017)

The research questions concerned with stereotypes stem from academic literature highlighting discriminatory portrayals in the media and their use in perpetuating further discrimination, where a transgender character serves as a form of entertainment (Capuzza 2014:117). The criticism refers to the perceptions of characters lacking depth and having their entire existence narrowed down to their gender identity or their genitals through othering as described by Hall (2003:284). This is further confirmed by Capuzza and Spencer (2017:215), who note that, while there has been an increase in positive trans visibility on screen, previous

depictions were more often than not based on negative stereotypes functioning in a way to ridicule this community via humour, disgust, fear, alienation, and anger.

These negative social messages misrepresent transgender individuals and reinforce a view that is not valid and should not be perpetuated within a diverse society. Due to the lack of representation on South Africa’s television screens, there is a need to consider the type of representations being presented and assess whether the alienating narrative, or the one keenly focused on ‘transitioning’, continues to be associated with trans characters on screen. This consideration speaks to the second key theme labelled ‘not just a wallflower’.

5.2.2 Not just a wallflower

Geneviève briefly brings up the transitioning topic during an interaction with Aggie. However, the conversation does not move beyond Geneviève saying that she is on hormones and that it was not an easy decision. No further interaction occurs, as Geneviève's character is what *7de Laan* has chosen to focus on, and the reiteration that she is a woman who plans to win the *Mej. Volronde Vrou* pageant.

The thematic investigation revealed that Geneviève does not lack depth. Her character is feisty, demanding, sympathetic, apologetic, driven and also experiences self-doubt. The audience is introduced to her personal storyline when Geneviève moves into Aggie and Connie's apartment. The audience meets Geneviève's demanding side when she requests breakfast while lying on Aggie and Connie's couch, with an eye mask on her face. Geneviève's humanity, and her ability to sympathise and apologise, is evident when she assumes that another character is commenting on Aggie's weight and, after being corrected, apologises and offers the character a slice of red velvet cake.

Geneviève's self-doubt is evident during the finale of the pageant (Figure 5.9), where she questions her right to participate, based on other people's views that she is "fake" (Maposa 2017). The fakeness relates to societal perceptions of what it means to be a woman and encompasses another societal perception that views trans individuals as deceitful or dishonest about their genders (Rood et al. 2017:6).



Figure 5.10: Geneviève displays self-doubt (Maposa 2017)

The character's storyline provides a view of one trans individual's experience in contemporary society using edutainment. In this scene, the reality that Geneviève deals with becomes recognisable, and the impact of the discrimination becomes real. Transgender individuals, as emphasised throughout this research, face discrimination and "over time, individuals might come to internalize these negative messages, which can lead to self-deprecation, self-hatred, and a belief that the messages are true" (Rood et al 2017:1).

The importance of showing this internalisation and doubt from Geneviève supports advancing an enabling environment for social change by using edutainment, as viewers are made aware of the impact of the discrimination levelled against transgender people and its impact on their self-worth. This incident helps to expand the knowledge of audience members who may view transgender individuals as lacking in emotions or who think their prejudiced behaviour has no impact. Importantly, this incident further shows any trans individuals who may be doubting the validity of their identity that they are not alone and that they matter, despite societal views around gender. The latter is reinforced by the third key theme, visibility matters, where Geneviève's reservations are acknowledged by Jerome, who reminds her that she is allowed to take up space and, by doing so, becomes a role model for those who also experience self-doubt.

5.2.3 Visibility matters

The reality of discrimination is something transgender people potentially face every day due to stereotypes encouraged and perpetuated by the media's portrayal of transgender people. An inclusive media that does not value one experience over another understands its role in society regarding identity creation (Media Monitoring [sa]:3). Human beings look to the media to help understand themselves, their world and their place in it (Ramphela 2016:18; Capuzza 2014:115).

The 'visibility matters' theme is pertinent to this research. It highlights the importance of accurate portrayals and an understanding that "television has the potential to demystify gender non-conformity, to confront transphobia, and to confirm transgender subjectivities" (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:217). The demystification of gender non-conformity is supported by this research, as *7de Laan's* portrayal of Geneviève allows society's dominant transphobic ideology to be challenged and confronted. The confrontation is

demonstrated by the main characters in the soap opera, who call out discrimination, stigmatisation and question existing gender stereotypes.

The narrative is informative while still keeping to the drama for which soap operas are known. Therefore, it continues to support using edutainment to enable social change and an example is evident during the pageant finale. Jerome intervenes when Geneviève begins to question her right to participate. He reminds her that she has been waiting for this opportunity and that she is a role model for other individuals who may look to her for guidance concerning their identity, confidence or to help them deal with self-doubt (Figure 5.11).

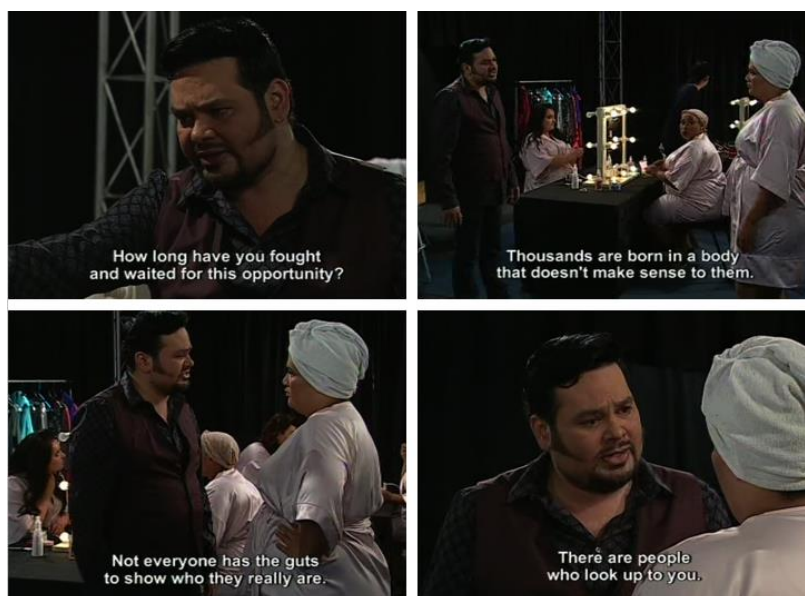


Figure 5.11: Jerome reminds Geneviève that she can take up space (Maposa 2017)

He reiterates that she should not think about why she is different and instead focus on why she is special. The theory of empowerment is evident in this interaction. As detailed in Section 2.5, the approach seeks to empower and create an environment where individuals can understand the environment and their place in it better (Perkins 2010:208; Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:570). Jerome acknowledges Geneviève's feelings and then helps her focus on the strengths and capabilities that can assist her in empowering others who may share the self-doubt she expressed.

The soap opera's script underscores the medium's ability to act as a platform to challenge the dominant ideology and provide a site to engage in gendered subject positions. That assertion is evident by *7de Laan's* reinforcement of valuing oneself and one's aspirations,

despite society viewing you as different or, as per the soap opera's once-off characters' claim, 'weird'. The theme 'visibility matters' highlights the need for and importance of representation in the media for those who are being portrayed. As Capuzza and Spenser (2017:215) argued, "these representations have the potential to influence how transgender people see themselves, which can exacerbate internalized transphobia". Geneviève's character displays vulnerability and self-doubt stemming from societal influence. Her feelings and thoughts are valid, and her ability to challenge the existing definitions of gender makes the content relatable. Therefore, the soap opera provides a site to engage gendered subject positions within its reiteration of self-love, which acknowledges the existence and validity of these identities and encourages viewers to do the same. The use of edutainment invites the viewer to learn vicariously about trans identities because as per Bandura's Social Learning theory,

judgments of self-efficacy, whether accurate or faulty, are based on four principal sources of information. These include performance mastery experiences; vicarious experiences for judging capabilities in comparison with performances of others; verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities; and physiological states from which people partly judge their capableness, strength, and vulnerability (Bandura 1989:60).

5.2.4 Problematizing language and gender

7de Laan has demonstrated a concerted effort to reiterate that Geneviève is a woman by using gender-affirming Afrikaans words. This is evident during a discussion between Connie and Aggie in episode 4029, where Connie reflects on her former transgender neighbour named Charlotte. Connie uses the word 'buurvrou' for Charlotte, which refers to a female neighbour. The underlined portion 'vrou' translates as 'woman' and is the gender indicator of the word neighbour in Afrikaans. However, the English subtitle says neighbour, which is gender-neutral (Figure 5.12). The selected use of the word 'buurvrou' would not be evident to a viewer who does not understand Afrikaans, but incorporating a gender-affirming word reiterates the education aspect of the storyline by reaffirming that transgender women are women.



Figure 5.12: Connie speaks about Charlotte (Maposa 2017)

Further support for this theme was identified during an incident in episode 4035, where Aggie reprimands someone targeting Geneviève and says the person needs to apologise to Geneviève, who is her 'vriendin'. In Afrikaans, the word 'vriendin' refers to a female friend, as the suffix -in is the feminine marker. When the suffix is not applied, the word 'vriend' is gender-neutral. Therefore 'vriendin' reiterates, via the application of edutainment, that Geneviève is a woman and should be referred to and treated as such. The use of 'vriendin' demonstrates an element of education where the audience is told how to refer to a transgender person woman.

5.2.5 Thematic analysis conclusion

South African soap opera viewers were introduced to Geneviève du Pré, a transgender female character, in 2017, marking a milestone for representations on the country's television screens. The examination of the portrayal is important. Capuzza (2014:116) states that

underrepresentation, stereotypical representation, an assimilation of minorities can contribute to the public's lack of understanding and acceptance of human diversity, potentially leading to prejudice and discrimination.

Geneviève's portrayal contains stereotypes regarding how she is treated and spoken about and reflects how transgender individuals are treated in society, specifically by being discriminated against because of her gender identity and misgendered. The portrayal of that discrimination provides a recognisable reality and highlights its faults concerning the

treatment of transgender women. *7de Laan*'s script does not support or reinforce those stereotypes. Instead, they are used to contextualise an understanding of the soap's ability to educate and challenge the dominant ideology by presenting the reality in its raw form and then providing the audience with tools to challenge the validity of that reality. The tools that the audience are equipped with include the reiteration of respect, the notion that no one should be discriminated against and the knowledge that everyone's dreams are valid.

The latter is echoed by actress Balie regarding the transphobic portrayal in Figure 5.6, where Geneviève is stereotyped and purposefully misgendered by a character who uses her deadname. Balie (2021) said the scene resonated with her:

I was quite emotional because it is something that that I went through. And even now, you know, you would find that people, some people still want to insist to call you this name, because they feel like you know, they have the ri, [they can do it, they want to], but for me, personally, I just ignore it you know. If you call me D*, I don't even look back because why it's not my name. And I won't even address it, you know, because that's entertaining the issue. So that [that] is actually what happens to most trans women, that stereotype of 'just because you wear dresses and whatever' doesn't make you a woman. People don't understand that transgender women with every fibre of their being, they feel like women, you know, their minds and their hearts and their souls, they feel like women.

Geneviève's portrayal in *7de Laan* aligns with what soap opera academic, Dorothy Hobson, views as vital to its form, namely that:

soap opera has to engage its audience. Its stories must be the stories of the audience and its predominant emotion must be that of recognition – recognition of the characters and recognition of the stories they tell (2003:34).

Therefore, the soap opera medium must tell authentic, relatable and recognisable stories to enact social change and provide role models for those who may require it. Balie (2021) noted that she could relate to Geneviève and that portraying the character assisted her growth as well:

it was amazing because it made me this strong person that I thought I was never... it made me mentally stronger to say you know what, if people don't agree that's their issue, but I'm gonna take up the space that I want to take up. So, I think most trans women could relate to her (Balie 2021).

5.3 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse is understood to be an expression or communication of thought via language, and it is categorised as “an element of social practices” (Fairclough 2003:26). The analysis of discourse is an interpretive method that provides various perspectives of one subject. It examines the linguistic aspects of texts and the socially situated use of language within texts (Litosseliti & Sunderland 2002:9; Mogashoa 2014:105; Fairclough 2003:26).

When researchers examine texts via discourse analysis, they

unpack the nominalisations and abstractions of that text, and reconstitute its links with the activities which it ultimately recontextualises, how ever attenuated that link may sometimes be (Machin & van Leeuwen 2007:62).

This study used discourse analysis to examine available Facebook comments related to the portrayal of transgender women and to illustrate the “intersection between discourse, subjects and ideology” (Bardici 2012: 33). The application of discourse analysis involved six stages, the preparation of the material for analysis, contextualising the text, coding the material in two phases, categorising the codes; the evolution of the initial codes to produce themes and the analysis of the identified themes as per Braun and Clarke’s approach (2006:6). A detailed description of the stages and the findings are discussed.

5.3.1 Preparation of material for analysis

7de Laan published a post on its official Facebook page on 17 April 2017 (Figure 5.12) advising that Deonay Olivia Balie would make her debut in the soap opera as Geneviève du Pré the following evening. The post received 1000 reactions, 241 comments and was shared 91 times. All available 241 comments were identified as relevant to the analytical aims, so screenshots were taken to prepare the material for analysis.



Figure 5.13: 7de Laan announces Balie's debut on Facebook (7de Laan Amptelik, 2017)

5.3.2 Contextualising the text

Some South Africans only interact with transgender women in the media as the prevalence of transphobia means some transwomen limit societal interactions or hide who they are to avoid discrimination (Ashwal 2017:41; Ramphele 2016:18; Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa & Kim 2012:161).

The analysis of the Facebook comments supports and validates the analysis findings of the episodes of *7de Laan*. The use of discourse analysis assisted in contextualising how Geneviève's portrayal was received by viewers and supported the assertion that transphobia exists. The existence of transphobia highlights the need for accurate and fair portrayals based on the understanding that soap operas provide a site for the recognition, rejection and acceptance of varied gender identities.

5.3.3 Coding of material

The preparation of the material for analysis via screenshots resulted in 43 pages of data. The coding process took place in two phases. The first coding phase recorded all initial considerations related to the comments in a table (Figure 5.14).

PAGE 39				
COMMENT 1	COMMENT 2	COMMENT 3	COMMENT 4	COMMENT 5
Attacks / Reprimands negative comments	Advises that moaning is used to give writers feedback	Petty, speaks about irony moaning about people who are moaning	Storyline focused (speaking about plot progression unrelated to Genevieve)	Supportive (says 'good luck')
PAGE 40				
COMMENT 1	COMMENT 2	COMMENT 3	COMMENT 4	COMMENT 5
Comments on Genevieve's appearance, based on stereotypes, misgenders and says "I think she is a man"	Storyline focused (speaking about plot progression unrelated to Genevieve)	Asks what they've missed	N/A Intent not clear (tags someone)	Comments on language used in comments
PAGE 41				
COMMENT 1	COMMENT 2	COMMENT 3	COMMENT 4	COMMENT 5
N/A Intent not clear (tags someone)	Storyline focused (speaking about plot progression unrelated to Genevieve)	Neutral (asks "Who are we to judge"	Supportive. "Congratulations 7de Laan and Deonay on your debut. Here's to a country that might move beyond stereotyping, gender binaries and understand the difference between sex and gender. To have this role played by a transgender woman is GREAT"	Not interested, says whatever and that is like Days of our lives
PAGE 42				
COMMENT 1	COMMENT 2	COMMENT 3	COMMENT 4	COMMENT 5
Supportive says "Deonay Olivia Balie – my Eie Rolmodel (my rolemodel)"	N/ /A Intent not clear (shorthand)	Judgement / Discriminatory translated as "Here comes shit, that wide man is gay mf"	Supportive "says 7de laan is the best nationwide and if I wasn't, why are people commenting"	Correct language in previous comment

Figure 5.14: Excerpt from coding process phase 1

The notes in the table described each comment's subject, the tone interpreted by the researcher and provided substantiation for the notes to support further analysis. The final coding phase grouped the initial codes with similar codes

5.3.4 Categorisation of codes

The discourse analysis took place in four stages and the latter involved placing the codes in broad categories relating to the investigative aim of the analytical approach and which are supported by the literature and theoretical framework. The categorisation included topics such as 'storyline focused' where comments were identified as unrelated to Genevieve, as they concerned the soap opera's overall plot progression. Two examples are evident in Figure 5.15, where viewers discuss the whereabouts of another fictional character in comments 2 and 4.



Figure 5.15: Storyline-focused comments on Facebook debut post (*7de Laan Ampelik*, 2017)

The other categories grouped comments related to Geneviève’s gender identity, misgendered Geneviève and reprimanded transphobic behaviour. A ‘not-applicable’ category that housed comments where the intent was unclear or related to a deleted post that could not be contextualised was included. It should be noted that 45 of the 241 comments were labelled as ‘not-applicable’, and therefore 18.6% of the data set fell in that category.

5.3.5 The coding process

This stage of the process reduced the broad categories to sub-themes. The reduction of those categories was guided by the literature and theoretical reviews, which identified evidence of transphobia as a discourse in society that can be observed in language use. The sub-themes are detailed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 : Discourse analysis' theme development

Sub-themes	Description/ examples	Number of comments in sub-theme
Not applicable	Intent not clear; tags someone; comment on deleted post . An example includes a comment about a character who has not made an appearance in any of the episodes analysed, which says “and when is Bonita getting Aids?”	45
Storyline focused	Speaks about overall soap opera plot progression with commentary unrelated to Geneviève	35
Comments on Geneviève's gender identity	Refers or queries Geneviève gender identity	7
Loaded comments	Comments misgender Geneviève; say “Mister du Preez”; another says, “I think she is a man”, and one says, “still looks like a bloke in drag ffs!”	12
Supportive	Comments reference the actresses' hometown of Steinkopf, Namakwaland, and commentators are supportive of her gender identity; one says “transgender womxn are womxn. Let's stop transphobia”; another says, “Congratulations, 7de Laan and Deonay on your debut. Here's to a country that might move beyond stereotyping, gender binaries and understand the difference between sex and gender. To have this role played by a transgender woman is GREAT”	41
Reprimands negative comments	One comment states, “everyone's going to have something to say about transgender people, they're all going to become Bible experts, and be bored of 7de Laan and say the soap's run out of ideas, but they forget that this is reality.”	12
Genevieve's appearance in focus	Comments refer to her as beautiful, sexy or both; and used a female pronoun	35
7de Laan as a soap commentary	Commentary that says they no longer watch 7de Laan; another refers to the storyline as boring and predictable	23
Defensive	Sarcastic comments which reiterate one's right to an opinion	9
In-fighting	Takes place among commentators and contains sarcasm and teasing	12
Biblical	Various inputs which use Biblical references to advocate transphobia and rebuke transphobia	10

5.3.6 Analysis of comments

The commentary supports the conceptualised, represented society that *7de Laan* shows transgender people facing every day. The representation afforded by the soap received numerous Facebook comments that are transphobic, contain stereotypes and display misgendering, while there are some comments which are supportive of the representation in response to the transphobic comments. The transphobic comments include Geneviève is referred to as 'Mister du Preez'. The post also received a comment that said, "I think she is a man", and another individual wrote: "still looks like a bloke in drag ffs!" The discrimination observed in these comments is sometimes defended by Biblical texts, although the use of religion in these comments is two-fold and occasionally contradictory. The reference to religion, which appears in ten comments, is used to justify the judgement of transgender people and also to highlight the Christian commandment of Love thy Neighbour, as per comment 2 in Figure 5.17.

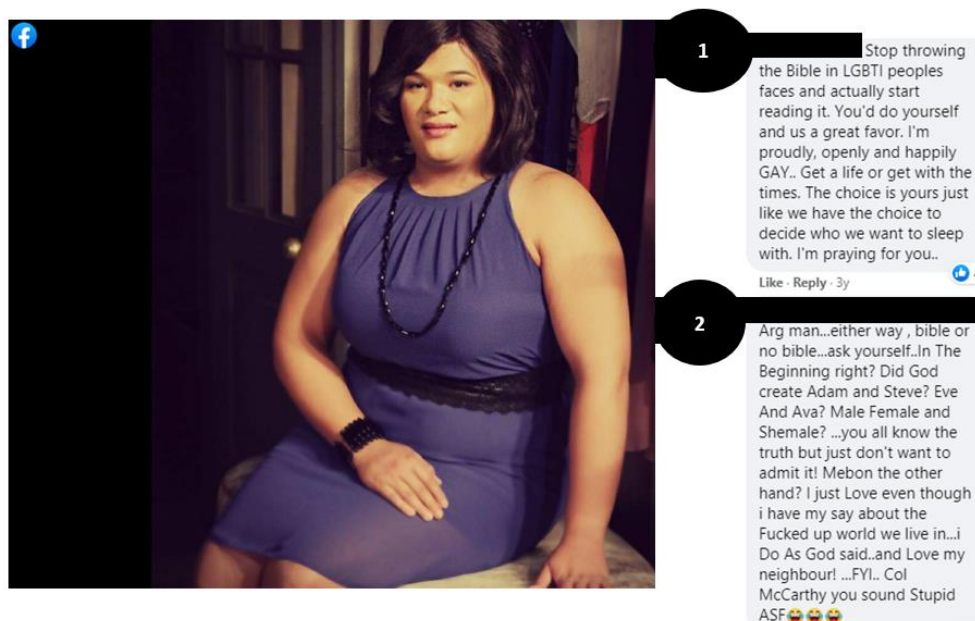


Figure 5.16: Biblical-focused comments on Facebook debut post (*7de Laan Ampelik*, 2017)

Rood et al (2017:8) confirm religious ideology as an originator of the social messages that negatively disregard transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) identities. It is interesting to note that every comment that could be interpreted as transphobic has at least one response that reprimands that comment and explains why. One example is comment 3 in Figure 5.18.



Figure 5.17: Addressing misgendering on Facebook debut post (*7de Laan Ampelik*, 2017)

The comment is in response to Geneviève being misgendered, where the responder asserts that: “transgender womxn are womxn. Let’s stop transphobia”. The language used is inclusive, and the correct word for the discrimination facing transgender people, namely transphobia, is used. The approach used to reprimand negative comments regarding transgender individuals is firm and educational. It echoes the approach used in *7de Laan*’s script.

7de Laan itself is not excluded from the Facebook commentary. Some viewers have labelled the storyline as boring and asked why it had to change, but the soap’s recognition of trans lives and the portrayal of Geneviève found favour with 41 commentators. One of those viewers referred to Geneviève as their role model (Figure 5.19), which underscores the ‘visibility matters’ theme identified in the thematic analysis, and the importance of having characters on screen with whom the audience can identify.



Figure 5.18: Balie is referred to as a role model on Facebook (*7de Laan Ampelik, 2017*)

An additional comment on the significance of Geneviève’s portrayal is: “Congratulations *7de Laan* and Deonay on your debut. Here’s to a country that might move beyond stereotyping, gender binaries and understand the difference between sex and gender. To have this role played by a transgender woman is GREAT.”

5.3.1 Discourse analysis conclusion

Discourse analysis of the Facebook posts related to Geneviève’s portrayal revealed a world transgender people face every day. The comments contained stereotypes, judgement justified by religion and instances of intentional misgendering. This reflects the world *7de Laan* used in its narrative to contextualise Geneviève’s portrayal.

The findings support the need for soap operas to portray a relatable world because one of the 241 comments identifies the actress Deonay Olivia Balie as their role model (Figure 5.19). The importance of accurate, relatable portrayals has been stressed throughout this research because it is pertinent to those who may look to soap operas for assistance in their identity process. The discourse analysis also highlighted a segment of society concerned with accurate portrayals and sought to abolish transphobia.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The episodes reveal a dedicated awareness by *7de Laan* to educate its audience about diversity in society and reiterates that transgender women should be viewed and treated as women. The soap uses stereotypes to present a 'mirror to society view' that allows the audience to observe the potential impact of transphobia on transgender individuals. The soap opera illustrates that transphobic attacks occur via misgendering, stereotyping and deadnaming. It then presents its viewers with relatable role models who advocate acceptance and social change to admonish those acts of discrimination. In educating its audience, the soap opera has permanent characters who use the correct pronouns when referring to Geneviève and cite the legislative protection afforded to all South Africans. This is confirmed by Balie (2021), who said:

They actually portrayed her very well, because she was a woman, she was treated like a woman. And even, you know, some of the older characters, you know, the conservative ones, like your Matrone, the fact that they were the one, you know, being portrayed as the ones cheering this woman on, you know, was actually very nice.

Balie's comment above refers to the reference made to Matrone's comment in section 5.2, which refers to episode 4029, when Matrone says everyone is allowed to choose the live that they want to live, and therefore the pageant's committee decides to allow Geneviève to continue to participate in the pageant. The supportive comment made by Matrone, is in response to the transphobic manner in which Geneviève's gender identity is covered by the local newspaper. The portrayal of that media coverage, coupled with Matrone's response to the committee's concerns reflect the society that transgender women face everyday and is further supported by the nature of the Facebook comments analysed which show transphobia and support for transgender women.

The following chapter summarises the conclusions and contribution of the study. The limitations and recommendations for future research uncovered during the research process are discussed.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the study by summarising the key findings concerning the sub-questions which guided the research process. The study limitations, suggestions and considerations for future research derived from the findings and theoretical framework will be briefly discussed.

By analysing the portrayal of Geneviève du Pré in *7de Laan*, this dissertation has shown the importance of accurate, representative and fair depictions of transgender women in South African soap operas. The use of triangulation, which involved the inclusion of two additional data sets and a theoretical framework consisting of four theories, provided a comprehensive understanding of the topic and enhanced the credibility, validity, trustworthiness, consistency, applicability and dependability of the findings.

6.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The main research question was: How are transgender women represented in the South African soap opera *7de Laan*? The following five sub-questions were formulated to guide the research process:

- Are stereotypes present in the portrayal of transgender women on *7de Laan*?
- What does thematic analysis reveal about the representation of the character in *7de Laan*?
- How can soap operas act as a platform to challenge the dominant ideology of gender binarism?
- What issues do the Facebook commentary reveal about the portrayal of Geneviève on *7de Laan*?
- How did the actress who portrayed the character Geneviève du Pré feel about the representation?

6.3 STEREOTYPES AND TRANSGENDER PORTRAYALS

The concern with stereotypes relates to literature that problematises the media's representation of transgender individuals globally by highlighting the incorporation of what has become 'generic' approaches in terms of trans portrayals. The generic approach takes place through a lens favouring gender binaries and can negatively impact public perceptions and foster internalised transphobia through the use of stereotypes (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:216). The latter supported the identification of two of this study's main research question, namely:

- Are stereotypes present in the portrayal of transgender women on *7de Laan*?

The media is criticised for including trans characters as entertainment where characters often lack depth (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:215; Capuzza 2014:116; Luttig 2014:10; Jobe 2013:1; Media Monitoring Project [sa]:3). An explicit focus on surgery has also been highlighted, which narrows the existence of trans characters to their genitalia and a narrative that favours the "wrong body discourse" (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:216). As noted extensively throughout this study, using these approaches in portraying a transgender individual is problematic. This is confirmed by Ramphela (2016:47) and Capuzza (2014:116). They note that applying a cis-gendered frame of reference others trans bodies and can contribute to a lack of understanding of diversity in society, perpetuate transphobia and incite violence. The authors further highlight the ability of these portrayals to impact the self-identification process of trans individuals and note that stereotypical representations can lead to negative self-images (Capuzza 2014:116). The link to the identification process, as explained by Ramphela (2016:48), is because "identity is about belonging, we are indebted to others through the relations we have with them and the society at large." The indebtedness refers to the ties we have with society in terms of the socialisation processes we undergo and are exposed to, as well as how we identify and are allowed to identify, in a society that polices what is deemed gender-deviant. The policing of gender and stereotypes are present in *7de Laan*'s portrayal of the transgender character Geneviève du Pré.

One transphobic incident, in particular, involves Geneviève being misgendered and leads to her gender identity becoming a front-page story in the local newspaper. The act of being addressed by a pronoun that is not reflective of one's gender identity is a common occurrence for many trans individuals, as noted by Deonay Olivia Balie, the actress who portrayed Geneviève:

the weird part is when people would ask you 'should I call you mister or miss?' when you are dressed as a lady, you have makeup on, you have hair, you have boobs, you have the body. You walk into a bank, and people would still, you know, ask you, 'are you comfortable with me calling you sir?' Like, why would you call me sir? If you can see that you know, my name is Deonay Olivia Balie (Balie 2021).

Geneviève encounters transphobic treatment in everyday settings. The fact that a permanent character only intervenes in two out of the three instances further illustrates how trans women are treated and spoken about in society. The use of stereotypes in this sense illustrates *7de Laan's* application of education-entertainment. Edutainment (see Section 2.4) is a strategic media approach that integrates education in entertainment mediums such as soap operas to expand audience knowledge about a topic to develop and enact social change. In showing its viewers the discrimination levelled against Geneviève and how her humanity and gender identity is delegitimised, *7de Laan* provides a space to educate. The portrayal helps to contextualise the stark reality faced daily by transgender women in South Africa and underscores Klein's (2009:15) assertion that the country is far from being a "dreamland" for trans individuals, despite its progressive legislature related to trans rights.

Despite characters in *7de Laan* defending Geneviève during two out of three of the transphobic interactions, transgender women still face discriminatory behaviour reflective of a societal gender binary bias. Failure to acknowledge the individual's gender identity amounts to erasure (Luvuno et al 2019:2; Ramphele 2016:48). This is confirmed by Ramphele (2016:48), who notes, "to acknowledge the existence of that which you see is to accept the responsibility of another human being and their humanness." The soap opera, *7de Laan* highlights the importance of this recognition of humanity by reiterating that Geneviève is a woman and her rights are recognised in South Africa's Constitution. As noted in the previous chapter, this is highlighted by

the character Connie, responding to a query about how Geneviève should be treated by saying, “Treat her like a woman. That’s what she is” (Maposa 2017). The soap’s storyline and script reference South Africa’s Constitution again when the judges of the Mej. Volrond Vrou [Miss Well-rounded Woman] pageant briefly deliberate whether Geneviève should be disqualified due to her gender identity, with older traditionally staunch characters like Matrone supporting the decision to retain Geneviève’s participation.

Therefore, in terms of whether *7de Laan*’s portrayal of a transgender woman contains stereotypes, the answer is yes. The soap opera incorporates stereotypes to illustrate the reality of discrimination and alienation experienced by transgender individuals. The soap then contrasts that ‘mirror to society’ view with a status quo of non-discrimination and acceptance by reiterating the reality of a diverse society that should accept all people backed by a legislature that recognises diversity and rejects discrimination. Therefore, the soap does not perpetuate stereotypes by encouraging or advocating its use. Instead, it uses stereotypes in its application of edutainment to illustrate inappropriate, dehumanising behaviour as a tool to foster social change. The ability of soaps to encourage change and sustainable development is confirmed by Chandrasekar and Aatman (2017:58). They note that soaps have had a “dramatic impact on the social mindset thereby inducing multi-level behavioural changes in individuals, groups and communities (Chandrasekar & Aatman 2017:59).

6.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF 7DE LAAN

Thematic analysis was the primary research methodology employed in the study and was applied to the 14 episodes of *7de Laan* that featured Geneviève to isolate, present and analyse patterns present in the data (Kawulich & Holland 2012:231; Alhojailan 2012:40, Braun & Clarke 2006:6). The application of Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis (2006:6), which involved the process of data gathering, transcription and codification to connect underlying meanings present in the data, helped identify seven main themes. These themes comprised 1) learning gender; 2) how transgender women are treated, spoken about in society; 3) diverse society; 4) problematising language and gender; 5) female agenda; 6) not a wallflower and 7) visibility matters. Themes that contained similarities, such as ‘learning gender’ and

'diverse society', were amalgamated. Combining some of the themes led to identifying four key themes: 1) diverse society; 2) problematising language and gender; 3) not a wallflower; and 4) visibility matters.

7de Laan revealed a move away from the type of fictional character that the media has faced criticism for portraying. This characterisation, which was discussed in great detail in chapter five, is generally one-dimensional and limits the diversity and humanity of transgender individuals (Capuzza & Spencer 2016:214; Ryan 2009:36). Geneviève's character is not one-dimensional. She is relatable and has a feisty, outspoken, demanding, sympathetic, apologetic and driven personality. Geneviève is also shown experiencing self-doubt during the pageant's finale when she questions her right to participate because she is concerned that she would be viewed as 'fake' (Maposa 2017). *7de Laan's* scripting addresses that self-doubt and uses another character to reiterate Geneviève's value to her by reflecting on the lived experience of other trans individuals in a society that favours gender binarism. The audience is therefore presented with a multi-faceted character that is relatable and confident. While some may view the way her confidence is portrayed as overzealous, it is a defence mechanism to protect herself "against the world" (Balie 2021).

Balie, who was allowed creative input into the character, has highlighted the importance of portrayals such as Geneviève's and, in particular, the character's confidence by saying

I sometimes say I still need to get into that, you know, confidence that she had. So, playing the role, it was amazing, because it made me this strong person that I thought I was never... it made me mentally stronger to say you know what, if people don't agree that's their issue, but I'm gonna take up the space that I want to take up. So, I think most trans women could relate to her (Balie 2021).

The relatability of the character underscores the essence of why authentic, diverse portrayals are necessary because they can assist anyone who may look to soap operas for help in understanding their society, themselves and their place in it through the familiarity of a relatable, recognisable society (Capuzza & Spencer 2017:25). The portrayals are also important to enact social change in expanding audience knowledge about various gender identities. The latter seeks to enable an environment

where transgender individuals are afforded the respect they are entitled to as human beings with agency who can take up space in society, underscoring the elements of learning about gender in the 'diverse society' theme. The theme is important regarding soaps representing a real, diverse society. The theme's relevance to this study is supported by the two overarching themes 'learning gender' and 'how transgender women are treated and spoken about'.

Every theme identified reiterates the edutainment approach adopted by *7de Laan*. The theme labelled 'problematizing language and gender' demonstrates a concerted effort by *7de Laan* to reiterate that Geneviève is a woman. The reiteration is demonstrated by gender-affirming Afrikaans words such as 'vriendin', which Aggie uses to refer to Geneviève. The word 'vriendin' in Afrikaans refers to a female friend, specifically due to the suffix '-in'. The reason the 'vriendin' example is highlighted is that, while a gender indicative word exists for friend in Afrikaans, a version without the '-in' exists as well. When the suffix 'in' is not applied, the word applies to a friend who identifies as male or female. Therefore, the use of 'vriendin' by *7de Laan* reiterates, via the application of edutainment, that Geneviève is a woman and should be referred to and treated as such.

7de Laan's portrayal and the inclusion of Deonay Olivia Balie as the individual portraying Geneviève, addressed some of the criticism levelled against soaps that include transgender characters, namely the overt focus on transitioning and surgery; and the incorporation of characters for entertainment purposes which tends to establish the character as a wallflower who lacks depth. Geneviève du Pré did not lack depth, as the audience was introduced to a feisty, driven woman who experienced self-doubt and who learns to recognise her worth. The topic of transitioning forms part of a retaliatory comment made by Geneviève, but it does not become a topic for discussion. Trans portrayals are also criticised for not focusing on lived experiences by failing to portray the impact of institutionalised transphobia on job opportunities or access to social services, and Geneviève's portrayal is somewhat reflective of that. Geneviève's character is only present for 14 episodes, and while her storyline provides insight into family dynamics and personality traits which culminated from her lived experience, these are not fully explored and instead provide links to interactions. The character's exit from the *7de Laan* narrative involves her

leaving the suburb with Jerome. Jerome is not a permanent character on the show. However, he does make appearances, and it would be interesting to note whether *7de Laan* brings Geneviève back for specific events that could reinforce the diverse society narrative and the need for respect.

The discourse analysis and the unstructured interview with Balie (2021) provided valuable insight and helped to contextualise the phenomenon under investigation. Literature and research reviews undertaken before conducting the study revealed that transgender individuals are marginalised and that edutainment and empowerment strategies can foster an environment that encourages change. The discourse analysis helped illustrate that the discrimination, misgendering and stereotyping faced by Geneviève is still present, despite the country's progressive legislature. The analysis of the Facebook comments further supported the importance of representative and accurate portrayals, especially for individuals who, like the one commentator, may have identified Balie as their role model.

6.5 FACEBOOK COMMENTARY AND TRANS REPRESENTATION

Discourse analysis was conducted on the 241 comments in response to *7de Laan's* announcement of Geneviève's debut. The analysis of the Facebook comments align with *7de Laan's* use of edutainment to address discrimination, transphobia and lack of knowledge of trans issues in South Africa. The research provided evidence of discrimination, transphobia and a knowledge deficit as there are comments that misgender Geneviève and contain stereotypes. Therefore, the comments supported the conceptualised, represented society that *7de Laan* shows transgender people facing every day. The societal dynamics involved in discrimination can be observed in these comments as transphobia is sometimes defended by Biblical texts. In contrast, in some comments, religion is used to rebuke judgement of another based on the Christian commandment of Love thy Neighbour. The thematic analysis noted that, in *7de Laan's* storyline, some characters addressed the discriminatory behaviour levelled at Geneviève and that the defence of trans individuals is not a usual occurrence in society. The latter realistic reflection includes a comment that rebukes an incident of misgendering in saying: "transgender womxn are womxn. Let's stop transphobia".

The approach used to reprimand negative comments regarding transgender individuals uses inclusive language, and the correct terminology for the discrimination levelled against the character and is firm and educational. It echoes the necessity and applicability of the edutainment approach used in *7de Laan's* script to portray transgender women in society. The soap opera's recognition of trans lives and the portrayal of Geneviève found favour with some commentators. One comment, in particular, referred to Geneviève as their role model, further supporting the 'visibility matters' theme identified in the thematic analysis. The role model comment and the importance of having characters on screen that the audience can identify with are confirmed by Capuzza and Spencer's (2017:217) claim that "television has the potential to demystify gender non-conformity, to confront transphobia, and to confirm transgender subjectivities".

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The importance of accurate, relatable portrayals has been stressed throughout this research because it is pertinent for those who may look to soap operas for assistance in their identity process. It was supported by the findings of thematic analysis applied to the episodes of *7de Laan*, the discourse analysis used to examine Facebook comments and the unstructured interview conducted with the actress who portrayed Geneviève. The study does, however, have limitations. There was a relatively small population for analysis, but it was the only relevant data set available where a transgender female actress portrayed a transgender female character on screen.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The scope of this study does not allow for a full investigation into the linguistic nuances of language or its relation to edutainment and social change in terms of challenging gender binaries. However, it does present a potential research theme linked to 'problematizing language and gender'. The problematizing aspect noted in this theme's title is evident in the English subtitles, which translate the Afrikaans conversations. The significance of using these gender-affirming words in Afrikaans is

lost in translation, as the English translations for 'buurvrou' [neighbour] and 'vriendin' [friend] are gender-neutral.

The examples related to 'problematizing language and gender' did not compromise the study findings, as those did not contribute to the requisite research questions. However, it may provide a foundation for discussion related to gender and language, as it is of interest to interrogate the bias to the male gender is entrenched in everyday speech and forms the basis for collective recognition with regards to words like 'mankind' and 'human' (Lindqvist et al 2018: 109). The latter proposes areas of enquiry related to languages and gender and how cultures contribute or respond to an understanding of gender identity. It also raises questions around the evolution of language as the global knowledge base grows to embrace and understand the concept of gender fluidity.

Future research could explore the links between transphobic perceptions in light of languages that do not enable an expanded understanding of gender due to rigid language systems, and what can be done to trigger a shift away from language that is entrenched in gender and whether that is possible in contemporary society. Additionally, future research could include views from a focus group regarding Geneviève's portrayal. The focus group could provide insight regarding how cultures contribute or respond to an understanding of gender identity.

6.8 CONCLUSION

In contemporary society, humans look to the media for cues on how to interact with their society and understand their place in it. When understood as a socialisation vehicle, the media tells its audience a story (Wasserman 2008), a story that does not just bear a resemblance to reality but has the power to transcend it, with society's dominant ideology generally interwoven into the narrative. In South Africa, that dominant narrative regarding gender identity is cisgender, entrenched in patriarchy, interlaced with a legacy of racism and one of the highest Gini coefficients³ in the world (Davids 2021). The country which emerged from apartheid fewer than three decades

³ A gini coefficient is a statistical resource which looks at how resources are equitably distributed in a country, and acts as an indicator of the distribution of wealth across a population (Farris 2010:851)

ago is a nation diverse in language, dress, food and opportunity. It does, however, struggle with the understanding of humanity and the meaning of human rights enshrined in the constitution.

Transgender individuals face challenges beyond the media's obsession with surgery, yet it is often a narrative hallmark in storylines. The focus on bodies and how they are gendered can fuel transphobia and result in violence, when someone may be viewed as deviating from the traditional male and female allocations. The media's role in a contemporary democratic society includes the tenet of nation-building. A media product that presents a view of reality where gender is binary disregards lives. It disregards the views and lived experiences of a portion of its democratic audience who resist the discriminatory, binary perception of gender. Gender is fluid. Currah explains that "gender uncertainty is visited upon us all. Gender is not so much a status but a lifelong project for everyone" (2016:441).

Academia has surpassed early notions that sex and gender are the same but understanding what that means for sexuality and gender is not a knowledge default in countries, including South Africa. The citizenry looks to the media to tell a story about society to understand society and their place in it. A cis female or male may find comfort in media representations that portray derogatory and unfounded stereotypes. They reinforce how they may have felt before observing the now *affirmation*. Any view that rationalises discrimination could contribute to acts where physical harm is caused to enforce said discrimination. Therefore, it is imperative that the narrative presented to the audience, as understood to be a possible trans-semblance of reality, reflects diversity. It should portray a society that is recognised and tells a story that educates its public. This would assist individuals in negotiating their identities by reinforcing a kaleidoscope of genders and possibly educating those around them.

There is a significant need to interrogate trans representations on South Africa's television screens. The transgender community is often misrepresented in the media, and some South African citizens only interact or observe individuals who challenge the gender binary in soap opera narratives. Therefore, it is pertinent to interrogate the legitimacy of the representations and the discourses in which they occur. This study's

interrogation assists in ascertaining whether the portrayals being presented to the audience reinforce or challenge transphobia, particularly for those who are being represented.

7de Laan's portrayal of a transgender women in South Africa provides a foundation for representing transgender women using edutainment. The portrayal does not depict a comprehensive lived experience, nor does it provide examples of institutional discrimination that have real-world ramifications, such as those that limit access to healthcare and legislative services or access to job opportunities. However, it does help to highlight how different discourses reinforce gender norms and how audience members can contribute to changing and challenging the reproduction and reinforcement of ideologies that perpetuate transphobia.

Soap operas such as *7de Laan* speak to the masses. This study's qualitative cross-sectional thematic analysis of 14 episodes featuring Geneviève confirms the importance of accurate portrayals and the inherent ability of soap opera narratives to challenge the dominant ideology and provide a site for the recognition, acceptance, rejection or discovery of gender identities.

The study's long-term research outcomes contributing to academia's deficiency of South African transgender representation may not be realised immediately. However, it is hoped that the study helps spark a debate around the deficit related to soap opera portrayals and the importance of addressing accurate depictions.

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**APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM**



I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the unstructured interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



Questionnaire/Interview Guide – Unstructured Interview

1. There seems to be an adjustment happening in society, where different identities are 'becoming' recognised, despite them always existing. The Netflix documentary *Disclosure* provides some insight into how individuals who identify as trans in the US, have been treated, portrayed and how they feel about that. What is your view on the recognition of trans people in South Africa?
2. Let's discuss Geneviève Du Preez's character in *7de Laan*. What is your view of the portrayal?
3. The media faces much critique regarding trans portrayals. Issues raised include the existence of stereotypes, as well as an intense focus on surgery. There are suggestions that issues facing trans individuals, like institutionalised discrimination should also form part of storylines. Institutionalised discrimination with regard to this study, would refer to discrimination at a bank or police station or a hospital, based on gender identity. What is your view of institutionalised discrimination?
4. Could you reflect on an experience of institutionalised discrimination??
5. Could you reflect on the portrayal of the character Geneviève?
6. In your opinion, what was the reason for having 14 episodes featuring Geneviève?
7. Do you think Geneviève could have been a permanent character?
8. Could you reflect on the scripting for the 14 episodes featuring Geneviève?
9. There is a scene that takes place in *Oppiekoffie*. Geneviève interacts with someone she knew previously. What is your view of the stigma that came across?