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Drama for Life
Masters Research Essay

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RESEARCH TOPIC: A Case Study on the Portrayal of Violence in Black Male Characters and
their Presentation in South African Film and Television: An Applied Drama and Theatre
Perspective

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Abstract

This study critically examines the portrayal of violence and masculinity in South African television, focusing on *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg*. Using a qualitative case study approach, it integrates Applied Drama techniques—particularly Image Theatre from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed—to explore how audiences interpret and respond to violent representations of Black male characters. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and participatory workshops. The study is grounded in theories of Representation, Audience Reception, Masculinity, Structural Violence, Dramaturgy, and Dialogic Spaces. Findings reveal that Applied Drama enables participants to engage critically and emotionally with media portrayals, often challenging dominant stereotypes. The research highlights the potential of performative, participatory methods in media analysis and calls for more complex and ethical representations of Black masculinity in South African film and television.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Declaration of original work.....	4
Chapter 1.....	10
1.1. Introduction and Overview of the Study.....	10
1.2. Film Analysis.....	12
1.2.1. Yizo Yizo.....	12
1.2.2. Kings of Joburg.....	12
1.2.3. Comparative Analysis of violence.....	13
1.3. Problem Statement.....	13
1.4. Research Aims.....	14
1.5. Research Questions.....	14
1.6. Rationale.....	15
1.6.1. Beneficiaries of the study.....	15
1.7. Literature Review.....	17
1.7.1 Representation of Masculinity and Aggression in SA film and Television.....	17
1.7.2 Types of Violence in SA film and Television.....	18
1.7.3 Social Learning in Media Contexts.....	19
1.8. Theoretical Framework.....	19

1.8.1 Representation Theory.....	20
1.8.2 Audience Reception Theory.....	20
1.8.3 Applied Drama and Theatre and Dialogic Spaces.....	20
1.8.4 Dramaturg Theory.....	20
1.8.5 Masculinity Theory.....	21
1.8.6 Integration of the theories to the study.....	21
1.9. Methodology.....	22
1.9.1 Case Study.....	22
1.9.2 Data Collection.....	23
1.9.2.1. Interviews.....	23
1.9.2.2. Questionnaires.....	23
1.9.2.3. Audio Recording.....	23
1.9.3. Data Analysis.....	23
1.9.4. Ethics.....	24
1.10. Conclusion.....	25
Chapter 2.....	26
Theoretical Framework.....	26
2.1. Introduction.....	26
2.2. Representation Theory.....	27
2.3. Audience Reception Theory.....	27

2.4. Applied Drama and Dialogic Spaces.....	28
2.5. Dramaturg Theory.....	29
2.6. Structural Violence Theory.....	30
2.7. Masculinity Theory.....	31
2.8. Conclusion.....	31
Chapter 3.....	33
Methodology.....	33
3.1. Introduction.....	33
3.2. Case study.....	33
3.2.1. How I carried out my case study.....	33
3.3. Data collection.....	35
3.3.1. Interviews: A dialogic and Applied Theatre Approach.....	35
3.3.2. Facilitated interviews using Applied Theatre Techniques.....	35
3.3.3. Observation.....	36
3.3.4. Questionnaire.....	37
3.3.5. Audio Recording.....	37
3.4. Data Analysis.....	37
3.5. Ethical Consideration.....	38
3.6. Conclusion.....	38
Chapter 4.....	39

Applied Drama and Image Theatre as tools for critical engagement with masculinity issues in film and television.....	39
4.1. Introduction.....	39
4.2. Field work and workshop implementation.....	40
4.2.1. Participants’ reactions and engagement.....	40
4.2.. Emerging themes from content analysis.....	41
4.3. Image Theatre as a tool for reflection.....	41
4.4. Image Theatre as an embodiment tool.....	45
4.4.1. Reflections from directors and producers.....	46
4.5. Breaking the cycle of desensitization.....	47
4.5.1. Challenging the dominance of violent storytelling.....	47
4.5.2. The emotional weight of violence: from passive viewing to active reflection.....	48
5.1. Conclusion.....	50
Chapter 5.....	51
Media influence and Meaning: Voices from the audience.....	51
5.1. Introduction.....	51
5.2. Content Analysis Findings.....	52
5.2.1. The representation of masculinity and power.....	52
5.2.2. Emotional and Psychological impact on viewers.....	54
5.2.3. Applied Drama and Theatre: Processing the impact through Image Theater.....	56
5.2.3. Contrasting emotional detachment in Kings of Joburg.....	

5.2.4. Media Influence and Emotional Conditioning.....	59
5.2.5. The role of drama in emotional reflection.....	59
5.3. Narrative justification and Audience Interpretation.....	60
5.3.1. Style and form: Social Realism vs Stylized Violence.....	60
Conclusion.....	61
Chapter 6.....	63
6.1. General Conclusion.....	63
6.2. General Summary of Findings.....	64
6.2.1. Applied Drama and Image Theatre as Tools for Critical Engagement.....	64
6.2.2. Media Influence and Meaning: Voices from the audience.....	64
6.3. Recommendations.....	65
6.3.1. Expand the use of Applied Drama in Media Studies and Community Engagement.....	65
6.3.2. Encourage Ethical Storytelling in South African Film and Television.....	65
6.3.3. Further Research on Audience Reception.....	65
6.4. Final Thoughts.....	65
Reference List.....	68

Chapter 1

Research Proposal

1.1 Introduction

The portrayal of violence in Black male characters in South African film and television reflects broader societal dynamics shaped by the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Film regulations during apartheid, including the National Censorship Act (1931) and the Publications Control Board (1963), were designed to control narratives and representations, perpetuating stereotypical and damaging depictions of Black men (Maingard, 1994; Paleker, 2011). These portrayals were rooted in ideological frameworks that dehumanized Black male identities and reinforced colonial power structures. Despite some progress, Motsaathebe (2008) notes a continued lack of nuanced research into how these portrayals of violence influence, and are interpreted by, audiences.

This study, *A Case Study on the Portrayal of Violence in Black Male Characters and Characterization in South African Film and Television: An Applied Drama and Theatre Perspective*, investigates how violence is represented in South African media and the implications of these portrayals for understanding masculinity, power, and societal attitudes. To examine these issues, the study adopts an Applied Drama and Theatre framework, drawing on the work of influential practitioners such as Augusto Boal and Helen Nicholson, who emphasize the transformative potential of performance as a tool for critical engagement.

Kennedy Chinyowa (2008; 2009), a leading scholar in Applied Drama and Theatre, underscores the value of creating “dialogic spaces”—platforms where participants engage with popular cultural issues and narratives to reimagine possibilities for social justice and change. Zakes Mda, combining his expertise in Applied Drama and literature, illustrates how authentic African narratives can challenge negative tropes and foster critical reflection (Mda, 2000; 2002). Similarly, Nicholson (2005) highlights the capacity of Applied Drama to interrogate social power dynamics and facilitate reflective dialogue on identity, representation, and historical injustices.

Building on these foundational insights, this study utilizes Applied Drama techniques to investigate the portrayal of violence in Black male characters and how audiences receive and respond to these representations. It explores how such portrayals shape public perceptions of Black masculinity and

examines the potential of Applied Drama and Theatre to challenge dominant narratives and foster deeper engagement. By integrating media analysis with participatory methodologies, the research contributes to a richer understanding of the cultural and social dimensions of representation, offering pathways for critical reflection and potential social transformation.

The study is informed by a multi-theoretical framework that includes Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, which posits that media does not reflect reality but constructs it—often reinforcing stereotypes of Black men as inherently violent through dominant cultural narratives (Hall, 1997). It also draws on Raewyn Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, which interrogates how violent forms of masculinity are reinforced within patriarchal structures (Connell, 1995). Additionally, Audience Reception Theories, including George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, are used to explore how prolonged media exposure influences societal attitudes towards violence and Black masculinity (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The theoretical framework is further strengthened by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Chinyowa's concept of dialogic spaces, both of which emphasize the role of Applied Drama in challenging oppressive narratives and promoting transformative dialogue (Boal, 1979; Chinyowa, 2009). This intersection of theories provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing how violence is constructed in media narratives and interpreted by audiences.

To carry out this investigation, the study employs a Case Study approach—an in-depth research method that allows for the detailed examination of specific individuals, groups, texts, or phenomena (Crowe et al., 2011). This approach aligns with the research focus on the representation of violence by Black male characters in South African film and television, as it enables close analysis of selected media texts and their broader societal implications. By concentrating on television series such as *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg*, the Case Study method facilitates an in-depth exploration of how male violence is constructed, represented, and received within specific socio-cultural and historical contexts.

Stake (1995) argues that the Case Study approach is particularly well-suited for exploring the nuanced dynamics of real-world scenarios, making it ideal for investigating media representation in South Africa's post-apartheid landscape. Moreover, this method supports the integration of theoretical frameworks—such as Representation Theory and Hegemonic Masculinity Theory—into practical analysis, illuminating how these concepts manifest in observable, context-specific examples (Yin, 2014). The Case Study approach also enables the inclusion of audience perspectives, offering valuable insight into how viewers engage with and interpret these portrayals. By grounding the analysis in both theoretical and experiential realities, this research aims to inform future media production and

Applied Drama practices, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between media narratives, masculinity, and societal perceptions of violence.

1.2 Background to the Films for Analysis

This study investigates the portrayal of violence in two South African television dramas: *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg*. Each series explores violence through distinct narrative frameworks, offering a lens through which to analyze how violence is represented within the socio-cultural and economic contexts of South Africa.

1.2.1 Yizo Yizo

Yizo Yizo is a South African drama series that aired from 1999 to 2004. It remains one of the country's most provocative television dramas, offering a raw and unapologetic depiction of life in a fictional township school (Phiri, 2023). The series' title, which translates to "the real thing" or "the truth," addresses issues such as crime, poverty, education, and community dynamics (Barnett, 2004). Violence in *Yizo Yizo* is portrayed through gang activity, school violence, and domestic conflict, reflecting the struggles of marginalized youth in South African townships. Here, violence is represented both as a survival mechanism and a consequence of socio-economic hardship, peer pressure, and systemic inequality. Through its unfiltered portrayal of township life, the series illustrates how violence becomes normalized in contexts of poverty and instability, contributing to broader conversations around masculinity and violence in disadvantaged communities.

1.2.2 Kings of Jo'burg

Premiering in 2020, *Kings of Jo'burg* is a crime drama that shifts the focus to the urban criminal underworld of Johannesburg. The narrative centers around a powerful crime family and explores themes such as power, loyalty, and betrayal (Lange, 2022). In this series, violence is intricately tied to the pursuit of dominance and control. Characters navigate a high-stakes environment where violence is used as a strategic tool to assert authority, enforce loyalty, and maintain their position within the criminal hierarchy (Mako, 2023). Unlike *Yizo Yizo*, where violence often emerges as reactive and circumstantial, *Kings of Jo'burg* presents it as calculated and instrumental—highlighting the transactional nature of violence within power structures.

1.2.3 Comparative Analysis of Violence

Both series place male aggression at the center of their narratives, yet approach it from contrasting perspectives. *Yizo Yizo* situates aggression within the context of township socio-economic struggles, offering a critique of how systemic inequality influences violent behavior. Conversely, *Kings of Jo'burg* frames aggression as a mechanism for exerting power and maintaining dominance within organized crime. These differing portrayals offer a nuanced understanding of violence as a phenomenon shaped by cultural, economic, and social forces. By examining these contrasting representations, the study seeks to uncover how violence functions both as a personal and collective experience, deeply rooted in South Africa's social fabric. This comparative analysis provides critical insight into how Black male aggression is constructed and perceived, situating these portrayals within the broader discourse on masculinity, violence, and media representation in South African society.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite the growing body of research on gender representation and media violence, there remain significant gaps in understanding how Black male characters in South African film and television portray aggression—particularly in light of the country's unique sociocultural and historical context. While numerous studies have examined the broader impacts of violent media content and its role in shaping gender norms and power dynamics (Johnson, 2008; Smith et al., 2019), few have explicitly explored these portrayals through the lens of South Africa's legacy of colonialism, apartheid, and persistent socio-economic inequality.

Television series such as *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg* offer compelling examples of how Black masculinity is intertwined with violence. *Yizo Yizo*, with its raw depictions of crime, brutality, and toxic masculinity, sparked national debate upon release. Critics and viewers alike questioned whether its realism crossed into sensationalism, reinforcing harmful stereotypes about Black youth or reflecting necessary truths (Magogodi, 2004; Mkhize, 2015). Likewise, *Kings of Jo'burg* uses elements of mythology and crime thriller tropes to depict masculine power, legacy, and violence in post-apartheid Johannesburg. The series has faced criticism for glamorizing hypermasculinity and patriarchal dominance, potentially reinforcing damaging male identity models (Mapumulo, 2020).

Scholars such as Johnson (2008) have emphasized the need for focused studies on how aggression is depicted in culturally specific contexts. Similarly, Smith et al. (2019) call for greater attention to audience interpretations of such portrayals. In South Africa, where constructions of Black masculinity are shaped by intersecting historical, cultural, and political forces, this need is particularly urgent. A

critical analysis of these portrayals—grounded in audience reception and socio-historical understanding—is necessary to unpack the broader implications of violence and masculine identity in the South African media landscape.

1.4 Research Aims

This study aims to critically analyze the portrayal of violence among Black male characters in South African film and television, with a particular focus on the impact of these portrayals on audience perceptions and broader societal norms. Using a Case Study approach, focusing on *Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg*, the study seeks to:

1. Investigate the cultural, historical, and social factors influencing the depiction of violence and aggression in Black male characters in South African media.
2. Examine the motivations and narrative functions behind these portrayals, exploring how they reinforce or challenge existing gender roles, stereotypes, and societal expectations.
3. Analyze how audiences interpret, respond to, and are potentially influenced by these portrayals, with specific attention to the relationship between media representation and viewer attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

By situating the research within the framework of Applied Drama and Theatre, the study also aims to explore how participatory, performance-based methods can facilitate critical engagement with these media representations and challenge dominant narratives around masculinity and violence.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How is violence depicted in the characterization of Black male characters in *Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg*, and what underlying themes and motivations emerge from these portrayals?
2. From an Applied Drama and Theatre perspective, how can the narratives and characterizations in *Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg* be used to foster critical analysis of masculinity and violence?
3. What impact do the portrayals of violence by Black male characters in these series have on audience perceptions of masculinity and violence in South African society?
4. In what ways do these portrayals reinforce or challenge prevailing stereotypes and cultural norms related to masculinity, violence, and power dynamics?
5. How do audience responses to these portrayals reflect broader societal attitudes toward masculinity and violence in South Africa?

1.6 Rationale

Investigating the portrayal of Black South African men in media, particularly concerning violence, is both timely and necessary. This study examines how violence and aggression are constructed through the characterization of Black male figures in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Jo'burg*, considering the broader implications for societal attitudes and behaviors. These representations contribute to either the reinforcement or disruption of prevailing gender norms and stereotypes, making it critical to explore their origins and effects.

By analyzing the cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts that inform these portrayals, the research aims to uncover the motivations and conditions that perpetuate violent representations in South African media. It also contributes to broader discussions on the influence of media on societal perceptions of masculinity, aggression, and violence. Drawing from Chinyowa's (2011) insights into the reflective potential of Applied Drama, the study employs performance-based methodologies to foster critical analysis and awareness. This approach not only deepens understanding of media narratives but also offers participatory avenues for interrogating and transforming dominant constructions of masculinity and violence.

1.6.1 Beneficiaries of the Study

This research has the potential to benefit several sectors by offering insights that can inform policy development, educational programming, and media production practices. The key beneficiaries include:

1. Media and Entertainment Industry

- **Film and Television Production Companies:** By gaining a deeper understanding of how depictions of Black masculinity and violence influence public perception, producers and filmmakers can create more nuanced and socially responsible content. This may challenge prevailing stereotypes rather than reinforce them.
- **Regulatory Bodies:** Institutions such as the Film and Publication Board may use the study's findings to enhance content classification systems and ensure that media representations do not inadvertently promote harmful gender stereotypes.

2. Educational Institutions

- **Curriculum Developers:** Findings from this study can inform curriculum content in media studies and social sciences, fostering critical engagement with issues of representation, gender, and violence.
- **Schools and Universities:** The research supports the development of educational programs aimed at strengthening students' media literacy, equipping them to critically assess and interpret portrayals of masculinity and violence.

This study is particularly significant in its focus on Black male characters in South African media—a demographic that remains underexplored in academic literature. It adopts a culturally specific lens, analyzing not only the portrayals themselves but also their implications for audience perception and broader societal norms. By critically examining how aggression is framed within South African media, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersections between representation, masculinity, and violence.

Ultimately, the research enriches scholarly discourse across media studies, gender studies, and cultural studies, offering valuable insights into how representations shape and reflect public consciousness and identity.

1.7 Literature Review

1.7.1 Representation of Masculinity and Aggression in South African Film and Television

Themes of masculinity and aggression are prominent in South African media, often reflecting and reinforcing prevailing societal norms. Representations of Black male characters range from dominant and hypermasculine to vulnerable and emotionally complex. While some portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles, others challenge them by offering more multidimensional depictions.

Mekoa (2018) observes that stereotypes of Black men as criminals, labourers, or hypersexual figures continue to dominate film and television narratives. Such portrayals are often attributed to tokenism, in which Black male characters are included in superficial or typecast roles without meaningful development.

Motsaathebe (2011) underscores the role of historical and cultural legacies, such as apartheid and patriarchal structures, in shaping these portrayals. These influences often perpetuate restrictive norms of masculinity. In contrast, Mokoena (2011) argues that some depictions resonate with the lived experiences of marginalized communities, providing both representation and empowerment.

This tension between stereotype and authenticity highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how masculinity is depicted and received. Applied Drama and Theatre offers a critical lens through which to examine these portrayals by emphasizing the dialogic and participatory nature of media consumption. This approach positions audiences as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients, enabling them to interpret, challenge, or reshape the narratives they encounter.

Techniques such as role-play, critical reflection, and storytelling offer tools for unpacking how media shapes perceptions of aggression and masculinity. Participatory workshops, for instance, can reveal how individuals engage with series like *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*, exploring masculinity in ways that challenge dominant narratives. These practices help uncover the deeper social and cultural underpinnings of media content and audience reception.

By incorporating Applied Drama and Theatre into the analysis, this study moves beyond static assessments of representation to explore the complex interplay between media texts, viewers, and societal context. This integrative framework contributes to a richer understanding of how media reflects and potentially transforms cultural norms around masculinity and violence.

1.7.2 Types of Violence in South African Film and Television

South African media frequently portrays multiple forms of violence, reflecting the country's complex social and historical dynamics. Physical violence dominates screen narratives, often manifesting through depictions of crime, assault, and domestic abuse (Radu, 2012).

Govender (2023) highlights the persistent epidemic of gender-based violence (GBV), noting that such portrayals can serve a dual function: raising awareness of societal issues or normalizing harmful behaviors. The risk of desensitization or glorification of perpetrators underscores the need for responsible representation.

Political violence is another recurring theme, often rooted in South Africa's turbulent past and ongoing struggles with inequality. Kali (2023) emphasizes that portrayals of protests, civil unrest, and state violence expose systemic failures and divisions. These depictions draw attention to unresolved socio-economic issues, including poverty and exclusion, while also influencing public perceptions of marginalized groups.

Kaziboni (2022) argues that violent representations often echo the legacies of apartheid, perpetuating cycles of trauma and mistrust. He notes that while such depictions may reveal uncomfortable truths,

they must be critically examined in terms of their impact on viewers and broader social consciousness.

As both an Applied Drama and Theatre practitioner and a filmmaker, I recognize the influence these portrayals have on public understanding and emotional well-being. The importance of audience engagement and reflection is therefore central to this study.

1.7.2.1 Incorporating Applied Drama and Theatre

Applied Drama and Theatre offers a transformative approach to interrogating violent media narratives. Through methods such as forum theatre, role-playing, and community workshops, this approach enables participants to critically engage with representations of violence, power, and identity.

Kaziboni's (2022) call for contextualized analysis aligns with these participatory techniques, which allow audiences to examine not only the content of violent portrayals but also their social implications. Mulvey's (1975) work on the role of the audience in meaning-making further supports the use of reflective practices to explore how viewers internalize or resist violent media narratives.

By facilitating dialogic spaces, Applied Drama and Theatre can help demystify the motivations behind violent portrayals and counteract harmful stereotypes. Activities such as reimagining characters or scenarios through improvisation can humanize violent figures and encourage deeper critical thinking about systemic contributors to aggression.

In this way, Applied Drama and Theatre can empower individuals and communities to question dominant narratives and foster empathy, thereby contributing to more constructive interpretations of masculinity and violence.

1.7.3 Social Learning in Media Contexts

Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory highlights the role of observational learning in shaping behavior. Within media contexts, the theory posits that audiences—especially young viewers—absorb behaviors and values by observing media portrayals, particularly when modelled by influential or relatable characters.

In the South African context, where the media frequently depicts hypermasculine and aggressive behavior among Black male characters, Social Learning Theory provides a critical lens through which to assess the influence of these portrayals on societal norms and attitudes toward gender and violence.

Cilliers (2017) extends Bandura's framework to digital media environments, observing that Generation Z engages with media in immersive and interactive ways. This amplifies the potential for media portrayals to influence social behavior, especially when aggressive characters are glamorized or shown as role models.

Mekoa (2018) warns that recurring portrayals of Black men as violent or victimized risk reinforcing narrow and harmful constructions of masculinity. Such representations can legitimize problematic social behavior and constrain the development of more nuanced male identities.

Conversely, Social Learning Theory also acknowledges the media's potential for positive transformation. McLeod (2011) suggests that by offering alternative narratives and empowering marginalized voices, media can serve as a tool for social change. South African filmmakers and Applied Drama practitioners, therefore, have an opportunity to disrupt negative stereotypes and present more authentic, multifaceted representations of Black masculinity.

By integrating media literacy and encouraging critical engagement with violent portrayals, audiences can resist deterministic interpretations and foster more progressive understandings of aggression and gender identity.

Thus, the media serves a dual function: it can reinforce harmful norms or act as a catalyst for reflection and transformation. Social Learning Theory not only frames these tensions but also emphasizes the active role audiences play in interpreting and responding to media content.

This study, therefore, contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between media, social learning, and societal norms—particularly within the context of South African representations of masculinity and violence.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study investigates how male performers depict violence in South African television and film, as well as how these portrayals influence societal perceptions of aggression and masculinity. It draws upon multiple theoretical frameworks that together offer a comprehensive foundation for analyzing

the intersections between applied theatre practices, audience reception, media representation, and socio-cultural structures.

1.8.1 Representation Theory

Representation Theory, as advanced by Stuart Hall (1997), explores how media shapes social meanings and cultural identities. It posits that media representation actively constructs reality rather than passively reflecting it. Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980) is particularly relevant, as it highlights how audiences may accept, reject, or negotiate the intended meanings of media texts. This study employs Representation Theory to examine whether violent portrayals of Black male characters reinforce or challenge prevailing stereotypes of Black masculinity in South Africa, particularly colonial narratives that associate Black men with aggression.

1.8.2 Audience Reception Theory

Audience Reception Theory focuses on how viewers actively interpret and respond to media content, influenced by their unique social, cultural, and historical contexts (Livingstone, 1998). This framework emphasizes audience agency in meaning-making. In this study, the theory is used to analyze how South African viewers engage with and interpret portrayals of male violence, exploring how these representations influence public understanding of masculinity and aggression.

1.8.3 Applied Drama and Theatre and Dialogic Spaces

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed provides a transformative lens for examining power, agency, and resistance in performance. According to Boal (1979), theatre serves as a tool for the oppressed to challenge dominant ideologies. This study uses Boal's methodology, particularly Image Theatre, to explore how male characters and participants use performance to critique and subvert violent masculine stereotypes. The concept of dialogic spaces in Applied Drama emphasizes participatory engagement and co-creation, aligning with this study's goal of fostering critical media literacy and challenging harmful portrayals through embodied analysis.

1.8.4 Dramaturgy Theory

Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory (1959) conceptualizes social interactions as performances where individuals present themselves based on social expectations. This theory is applied to analyze how male characters in South African media perform violent masculinity in response to societal norms. It also allows for the examination of how these performances maintain or challenge stereotypes, thereby revealing the performative dimensions of media portrayals.

1.8.5 Masculinity Theory

Masculinity Theory, particularly Raewyn Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, explores how dominant forms of masculinity are constructed and maintained through cultural narratives. This study employs the theory to interrogate how media reinforces or contests dominant masculine ideals, especially those that normalize violence and emotional suppression. By doing so, it aims to reveal how representations of violent male characters contribute to broader gender dynamics and power structures.

1.8.6 Theoretical Framework: Intersections of Key Theories

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing on multiple theories that intersect to deepen the analysis of how violence and masculinity are portrayed in South African film and television. The integration of these theories enables a holistic understanding of how representations are constructed, performed, received, and challenged.

1.8.6.1. Representation Theory and Cultivation Theory

At the core of the study is Representation Theory, which addresses how media constructs and disseminates images of reality—in this case, the portrayal of violent Black masculinity. Cultivation Theory complements this by positing that long-term exposure to repeated media messages shapes viewers' perceptions of social reality. Together, these theories explain not only how violence and masculinity are depicted in shows like *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*, but also how these portrayals influence public attitudes, potentially normalising aggression and reinforcing gendered stereotypes.

1.8.6.2. Masculinity Theory and Structural Violence Theory

Masculinity Theory provides a critical lens through which to analyse the specific behaviours, roles, and performances expected of male characters, particularly concerning power, control, and emotional repression. Structural Violence Theory, on the other hand, uncovers the systemic and invisible forms of oppression that underpin these performances of masculinity. The intersection here reveals how societal structures and historical inequalities not only shape the violent behaviours of male characters but also position such violence as a survival mechanism within the South African context.

1.8.6.3. Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy Theory

Both Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy Theory focus on the performance of identity. Symbolic Interactionism explores how individuals interpret and give meaning to social symbols—in this case, media characters and their actions—while Dramaturgy Theory, derived from Erving Goffman, frames social life as a theatrical performance, with individuals adopting roles based on

societal expectations. These two theories are used to interrogate how characters in film and television perform violence and masculinity as scripted roles, and how audiences, in turn, interpret these performances based on their social realities.

1.8.6.4. Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Drama

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and broader Applied Drama practices serve as both methodological and theoretical tools. These approaches provide a dialogic and participatory space where audiences move from passive viewers to active analysers and interpreters of media. Image Theatre, a technique within Boal's framework, allows participants to use their bodies to recreate, reflect on, and resist dominant representations of masculinity and violence. This theatrical engagement bridges theory and praxis, offering a critical and embodied method for disrupting harmful media narratives.

1.8.6.5. Audience Reception Theory and Dialogic Spaces

Audience Reception Theory, which examines how different viewers decode media texts based on their unique social positions, intersects with the concept of dialogic spaces—collaborative environments that encourage open discussion, critical reflection, and collective meaning-making. In this study, the workshop setting becomes a dialogic space where participants' lived experiences and emotional responses to media representations are validated and explored. This theoretical pairing underscores the importance of audience agency in interpreting and reshaping media narratives.

1.8.6.6. Integrative Summary

These theories, when viewed collectively, do not function in isolation but rather intersect in meaningful ways that enhance the study's critical depth. Representation and Cultivation theories establish how narratives are constructed and internalised. Masculinity and Structural Violence theories ground these narratives within broader socio-political contexts. Symbolic Interactionism and Dramaturgy expose the performative nature of identity, while Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Drama provide practical tools for challenging oppressive portrayals. Finally, Audience Reception Theory and Dialogic Spaces centre the voices of the audience, emphasising their interpretive power and potential for resistance. Through these intersecting lenses, the study offers a robust, multidimensional critique of violence and masculinity in South African media.

1.9 Methodology

1.9.1 Case Study

This study adopts a Case Study approach, which allows for an in-depth investigation of complex issues within their real-life contexts (Crowe, 2011). This qualitative method facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how violence and masculinity are portrayed in the selected television series *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*. The Case Study method is appropriate due to its capacity to capture the nuanced and multifaceted nature of media representations and audience reception.

Following Yin's (2014) guidelines, the research process involved:

1. Defining clear research questions;
2. Selecting cases aligned with the study's aims;
3. Collecting data through interviews, workshops, observations, and document analysis;
4. Analyzing the data using qualitative content analysis.
5. Interpreting the findings concerning the research questions;
6. Structuring the study with appropriate academic conventions;
7. Drawing conclusions based on the evidence gathered.

1.9.2 Data Collection

1.9.2.1 Observation

Observation, as defined by George (2023), entails systematically documenting behaviours and events within natural settings. This study applied observation in two contexts: (1) viewing and analyzing selected episodes from *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*, focusing on scenes of violence and character dynamics; and (2) observing Image Theatre workshops, where participants physically represented scenes of violence to explore their meanings and implications.

1.9.2.2 Interviews

Interviews provide in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives (Gill, 2008). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors, producers, and other stakeholders to understand their views on violent representations of male characters, as well as their reflections on the roles they portrayed or created.

1.9.2.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaires, as defined by Bhandari (2021), collect quantitative and qualitative data from participants regarding their experiences and opinions. This study used questionnaires to gather information from audiences on their perceptions of violence, its frequency in the media, their emotional responses, and how these portrayals influence societal norms related to masculinity.

1.9.2.4 Audio Recording

Audio recordings were used to capture interviews and workshop discussions, preserving verbal and emotional nuances (Gill, 2008). This ensured the accuracy and richness of the data, which informed the analysis phase.

1.9.3 Data Analysis

The study employed qualitative content analysis, a method for systematically coding and interpreting data to identify patterns and themes (Krippendorff, 2004). The analysis followed these steps:

1. Familiarizing with the dataset (field notes, recordings, transcripts);
2. Developing a coding scheme using both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) approaches;
3. Categorizing and organizing data into thematic codes;
4. Interpreting findings in relation to the research objectives;
5. Supporting interpretations with direct evidence from participants;
6. Structuring the analysis with clear headings, themes, and conclusions.

1.9.4 Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), ensuring compliance with ethical research standards (APA, 2017). Informed consent was secured from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were made aware of the study's purpose, data use, and their right to withdraw at any point. Support services were offered to mitigate any emotional discomfort, particularly in workshops dealing with violent themes. Ethical considerations were continuously monitored throughout the research process, following institutional guidelines (Wits University Non-Medical Ethics Committee).

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter established the foundation for investigating the portrayal of violence and masculinity in South African media, particularly among Black male characters. By outlining the research problem, questions, and rationale, the chapter emphasizes the relevance of using Applied Drama as a tool for analysis and engagement. The theoretical and methodological frameworks presented here set the stage for a comprehensive examination of how media representations influence audience perceptions and contribute to social narratives. The following chapters will build on this framework to deepen our understanding of media violence, identity, and societal transformation in the South African context.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The representation of violence in South African film and television plays a crucial role in shaping societal understandings of masculinity, power, and aggression. This research investigates how male characters perform violence, how these portrayals are interpreted by viewers, and the potential socio-cultural ramifications of such depictions. The chapter provides a theoretical framework that integrates various perspectives to critically engage with the subject matter. This framework serves to clarify key concepts related to the portrayal of male characters in South African television, offering both analytical tools and direction for data collection and analysis. Ultimately, it contributes to the generation of new knowledge derived from this study.

This research interrogates whether violent representations of Black male characters reinforce or challenge dominant stereotypes by drawing on the following theories: Representation Theory, Audience Reception Theory, Dramaturgy Theory, Applied Theatre and Dialogic Spaces, Masculinity Theory, and Structural Violence Theory. Representation Theory explains how different groups, communities, and concepts are portrayed in media. Audience Reception Theory sheds light on how viewers perceive and respond to these portrayals, revealing the complexity of meaning-making within diverse social contexts. Dramaturgy Theory frames male violence as a performative act shaped by societal norms, while Applied Theatre and Dialogic Spaces provide a lens through which performance becomes a site of critical engagement and transformation. Masculinity Theory explores the construction of aggressive male identities in media, and Structural Violence Theory draws attention to the systemic conditions underpinning these violent portrayals.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the framework supports a comprehensive and multi-layered analysis that moves beyond surface-level interpretations. It considers the intersection of media, culture, and performance to provide deeper insights into how South African television and film reflect and influence public perceptions of masculinity.

2.2 Representation Theory

Stuart Hall's (1997) Representation Theory argues that media does not passively reflect reality but actively constructs it, thereby influencing social identities and cultural meanings. His Encoding/Decoding Model (1980) further highlights how audiences interpret media texts—either accepting, negotiating, or rejecting the meanings embedded within them. Within the context of this study, Representation Theory is used to examine how violent depictions of Black male characters in South African media may support or resist prevailing stereotypes of Black masculinity. These representations often reinforce historical and colonial narratives that equate Black men with violence, aggression, and criminality. However, some media texts challenge these reductive portrayals by presenting more complex and multidimensional masculinities.

For instance, in the television series *Yizo Yizo*, the character Chester exemplifies violent masculinity, reinforcing dominant associations between Blackness and aggression. Yet, his character also displays vulnerability and moral conflict, thereby complicating monolithic portrayals of violent Black men. This study explores such contradictions in representation to determine whether South African media merely reproduces stereotypes or offers opportunities for critical engagement.

Representation Theory plays a crucial role in analysing how various groups, identities, and issues are depicted in media, including television, film, and news (Butler, 1990). It facilitates the identification of stereotypes and examines whether specific portrayals reinforce societal norms and biases. The theory also assists in uncovering underlying power dynamics—highlighting whose voices are amplified or marginalised—and in understanding how media portrayals shape or contest broader cultural narratives around identity and group relations.

Furthermore, Representation Theory enabled a critical interpretation of visual, narrative, and linguistic elements within the selected texts (Giroux, 1994). It thus provided a strong analytical framework for unpacking the ideological dimensions embedded within media portrayals of violence and masculinity.

2.3 Audience Reception Theory

Audience Reception Theory focuses on how media audiences actively interpret and engage with content based on their unique social, cultural, and personal contexts (Livingstone, 1998). Unlike earlier models that viewed audiences as passive recipients, this theory highlights the agency of viewers in the meaning-making process. In this study, it provides insight into how South African viewers perceive and respond to portrayals of male violence in television and film. By employing

qualitative methods—such as interviews and questionnaires—the study investigates how audience members, depending on their gender, socio-economic background, and lived experience, accept, negotiate, or resist these depictions.

For example, audiences who watched *Kings of Joburg* may have interpreted the violent male characters either as aspirational figures embodying power or as problematic representations reinforcing criminal stereotypes. Through interviews with a diverse sample of South African viewers, the study aimed to uncover how personal experiences and cultural frameworks shape their interpretations of male violence.

Audience Reception Theory proved valuable in both the data collection and analysis phases. It enabled the gathering of rich qualitative data to explore how different audiences make sense of the media texts under study. Methods included interviews and questionnaires to capture preferences, attitudes, and individual responses to specific portrayals (Morley, 1980). This allowed the research to reflect Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model, wherein media texts are interpreted in various ways depending on the audience's positionality.

In terms of analysis, Audience Reception Theory facilitated the use of content analysis to identify recurring themes in audience responses (Fiske, 1987), as well as discourse analysis to examine how language and communication shape meaning and ideology (Hall, 1980). These tools helped uncover the nuanced and context-dependent ways in which viewers interact with media portrayals of violent masculinity.

2.4. Applied Theatre and Dialogic Spaces

Theorists such as Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009), Jonathan Neelands (2009), and Helen Nicholson (2005) have contributed significantly to the development of Applied Drama and Theatre as a framework for critical discourse and social change. This study examined how male characters in South African media interact with and challenge violent masculinities using the concept of dialogic spaces derived from Applied Theatre.

Neelands (2009) emphasized the role of participatory theatre, advocating for audiences to be active participants in the meaning-making process. In the context of South African media, this perspective necessitates a critical lens through which portrayals of violent black masculinity can be engaged with rather than passively consumed. Nicholson (2005) further asserted that Applied Drama creates opportunities for conversations around identity and representation, thus offering a powerful tool for interrogating violent masculinities. Similarly, Prentki and Preston (2009) contended that dialogic

spaces within theatre foster critical reflection and social transformation—an essential component for understanding how media depictions of violence shape and reflect societal values.

This study employed the Case Study method not only to analyse media portrayals of violent masculinities but also to create a participatory research environment. Dialogic spaces facilitated an inclusive space where participants could engage critically with the subject matter. By incorporating this approach, the study moved beyond traditional data collection methods to include participant-driven reflections on how media depictions influenced perceptions of masculinity and social norms.

Facilitated interviews incorporating interactive, embodied, and participatory techniques—such as sociometry, hot seating, and Image Theatre—were conducted to allow participants to engage intellectually, physically, and emotionally with the research topic (Moreno, 1953; Burton & Bartlett, 2020). These practices encouraged nuanced discussions on masculinity and violence, thereby reinforcing the study's commitment to critical engagement and ethical inquiry.

2.5. Dramaturgy Theory

Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgy Theory conceptualises social interaction as a theatrical performance, where individuals strategically manage their self-presentation according to societal expectations. His notions of the "front stage" and "back stage" illustrate how people navigate public and private behaviours. This framework is particularly pertinent for analysing how male characters perform violent roles in South African film and television.

In the context of South African media, representations of aggressive masculinity can be viewed as performances shaped by audience expectations, cultural narratives, and industry conventions. Butler (1990) in "Gender Trouble" argued that gender is performative, constituted through repeated acts that reinforce societal norms. Violent masculinity in film, therefore, becomes a performative construct that aligns with established ideals of male dominance, power, and aggression. These portrayals are not mere reflections of reality, but strategically constructed images that sustain ideological positions.

For instance, the character of Tsotsi in the film "Tsotsi" (Hood, 2005) navigates between societal expectations of black male criminality and moments of emotional depth and redemption. Similarly, "Yizo Yizo" (1999–2004) presents male characters who oscillate between hyper-masculine violence and vulnerability, suggesting that masculinity is a contested and multifaceted identity. Hall (1997) emphasized that media representations are produced within systems of meaning that privilege certain interpretations over others.

Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of habitus and field further inform this analysis by highlighting how societal structures influence individual and collective performances. The South African film industry, as a social field, imposes specific expectations on how masculinity is portrayed and received. Additionally, Boal's (1979) Image Theatre expands the discussion by offering a model for challenging dominant narratives. While some media reinforce the stereotype of the violent black male, others attempt to subvert these portrayals.

Fanon's (1967) critique in "Black Skin, White Masks" is also relevant, as it explores how colonial narratives constrain black identity. Dramaturgy Theory thus allows for a nuanced interrogation of whether these media performances deconstruct or reinforce oppressive stereotypes, revealing how masculinity is shaped and redefined in South African audiovisual storytelling.

2.6. Structural Violence Theory

Johan Galtung's (1969) Structural Violence Theory offers a critical sociopolitical lens to examine systemic injustices such as racial inequality, poverty, and gender oppression. Structural violence, unlike direct violence, is embedded in social institutions and norms, making it less visible yet deeply harmful (Farmer, 2004).

Violent portrayals of black men in South African media often reflect broader structural issues—such as the enduring legacy of apartheid, socio-economic marginalisation, and institutional racism. Fanon (1961), in "The Wretched of the Earth," explained how colonial violence fostered a culture where violence became both a survival mechanism and a response to systemic oppression. These historical and socio-political forces continue to shape media representations of black masculinity.

For instance, "Yizo Yizo" illustrates how characters' involvement in violence is less about personal inclination and more a consequence of structural constraints. Ratele (2013) and hooks (2004) argued that black masculinity is often depicted through a hyper-aggressive lens that obscures the socio-economic and historical contexts informing such behaviour.

This study analysed whether South African media representations account for these structural dynamics or perpetuate reductive stereotypes. Stuart Hall (1997) suggested that media functions as a site where meaning is produced and circulated; failure to contextualise violence can result in the reinforcement of damaging narratives.

Bourdieu's (1990) concept of symbolic violence is also crucial here, explaining how power relations are naturalised through media representations. When portrayals of violent black masculinity become

normalised, they obscure the structural conditions underpinning them. Thus, this theory enabled the study to critique not only the representations themselves but also the systems that sustain them.

2.7. Masculinity Theory

Raewyn Connell's (1995) Masculinity Theory, particularly the concept of hegemonic masculinity, was pivotal in examining the social construction of masculinity in South African media. Hegemonic masculinity is characterised by dominance, emotional restraint, and the valorisation of violence. In media contexts, these traits are often central to representations of male protagonists. Connell situates hegemonic masculinity not as a fixed identity, but as a dynamic and socially negotiated ideal that maintains male dominance over women and marginalised men. It is sustained through cultural institutions, media narratives, and interpersonal relationships, making it both a personal and structural phenomenon. Connell further stresses that hegemonic masculinity is relational, gaining its legitimacy by contrasting itself against subordinate masculinities and femininities, thereby reinforcing systems of gender hierarchy.

Characters like Simon "Vader" Masire in *Kings of Joburg* exemplify hegemonic masculinity through their association with control and violence. Conversely, reformed figures such as *Tsotsi* represent challenges to these norms by embodying more empathetic, non-violent masculinities. Connell (2005) also theorised multiple masculinities—complicit, marginalised, and subordinate—each positioned concerning the dominant ideal. These categories demonstrate that masculinity is not monolithic, but rather a spectrum shaped by power relations, race, class, and culture.

Morrell (2001), in *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, argued that South African media often fail to reflect this multiplicity, opting instead for simplistic portrayals that overemphasise violent and dominant traits. By applying Masculinity Theory, this study interrogated whether media texts reinforce traditional, rigid masculinity or offer space for alternative, progressive forms. The framework enabled a critical analysis of how violent male characters contribute to, or disrupt, cultural understandings of gender and power.

2.8. Conclusion

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study conducted a multidimensional analysis of media violence, addressing its symbolic, performative, and structural dimensions. Representation Theory provided the foundation for understanding how violent depictions shape societal perceptions of black masculinity. Audience Reception Theory further illuminated how viewers actively interpret and respond to these portrayals.

Applied Theatre and Dialogic Spaces underscored the role of participatory engagement in critically examining media narratives. Dramaturgy Theory framed violent masculinity as a performative construct, while Structural Violence Theory contextualised such portrayals within systemic inequalities. Masculinity Theory allowed for an interrogation of how these representations sustain or challenge hegemonic norms.

Through this integrated theoretical approach, the study contributed to media, gender, and performance studies by offering insight into the complex ways media representations of violence inform social understandings of masculinity. It also advocated for ethical storytelling that transcends stereotypes and promotes multifaceted, humanising depictions of black male identity in South African film and television.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for this study. Given the complex and multi-layered nature of media representations, a qualitative Case Study approach has been selected to facilitate an in-depth exploration of how violence is portrayed in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*. This study is situated within an interpretive paradigm, which aligns with my understanding of the world, its functioning, and the human experience (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 24). This paradigm acknowledges that reality is shaped by individuals' perceptions and social constructs, emphasizing the importance of capturing participants' views alongside my own experiences in analyzing the portrayal of violence in film and television. Therefore, through gathering data from case studies and participants, I developed interpretations and constructed knowledge informed by the chosen theoretical frameworks. In doing so, this study highlights how specific ideologies influence meaning-making and shape audience perceptions.

Additionally, the interpretive paradigm operates on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Willis, 2007, p. 583). This chapter details the research design, including data collection methods such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and audio recordings. Furthermore, particular emphasis is placed on the use of Applied Drama and Theatre techniques in the interviews, allowing for embodied and participatory engagement with the subject matter. This chapter further discusses data analysis strategies and ethical considerations. Through this methodological approach, the study seeks to generate a nuanced understanding of the portrayal of violence in South African film and television, as well as its broader cultural and social implications.

3.2. Case Study

According to Crowe et al. (2021), a Case Study is a research method involving an in-depth investigation and analysis of a particular individual, group, event, or phenomenon. It is situated within a qualitative research approach that enables researchers to explore complex issues within real-life contexts. Case studies often involve collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, and archival records, providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Scholars often employ case studies to examine complex issues in real-life settings, enabling a deeper understanding of the subject. In the case of *A Case Study on the Portrayal of Violence in Black Male Characters and Characterization in South African Film and Television: In Applied Drama and Theatre*, I have chosen this method for several reasons. Firstly, a Case Study enabled me to explore this topic in great detail by analyzing my two selected films, *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*, providing rich and detailed data on how Black male characters are violently represented. Furthermore, this study focuses on the portrayal of violence among male characters in South African film and television, helping to uncover underlying themes, motivations, and the impact of such portrayals on the audience. A Case Study is suitable for this research as it allows for the examination of complex and multifaceted issues within their natural setting. Therefore, by immersing myself in the context of the study, I was able to capture the nuances and intricacies of the subject matter, providing a holistic view of the phenomenon under investigation. Overall, I selected the Case Study method because it allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific subject, providing a thorough understanding of complex issues. This approach enables the collection of detailed information from various sources, offering a comprehensive view of the topic (Vaughan, 2021).

3.2.1. How I Carried Out My Case Study (Yin, 2014, p. 28)

1. **Define the research question:** I began by clearly defining my research questions and the problem I wanted to investigate through the Case Study.
2. **Select the case:** I chose specific phenomena that aligned with my research questions (*Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*).
3. **Collect data:** I gathered relevant data from various sources—interviews, workshops, observations, documents, and archival records—ensuring the data collected was comprehensive and addressed the research question.
4. **Analyze the data:** I analyzed the collected data using appropriate qualitative research methods, in this case, content analysis. I looked for patterns, themes, similarities, and relationships within the data.
5. **Interpret the findings:** I interpreted the findings of my analysis concerning the research questions, considering the implications and how they contributed to existing knowledge.
6. **Write up the case study:** I presented my findings clearly and organized, following a structured format that includes introduction, background, methods, results, discussions, and conclusions.
7. **Draw conclusions:** I drew conclusions based on my analysis and interpretation, discussing implications and recommendations for future research or practice.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Interviews: A Dialogic and Applied Theatre Approach

Interviews involve conversations with individuals to gather information, insights, and perspectives on a particular topic or research question (Gill et al., 2008). In this study, interviews took a dialogic and applied theatre approach, engaging participants in participatory methods drawn from Applied Drama and Theatre practices.

3.3.2. Facilitated Interviews Using Applied Theatre Techniques

To gain deeper insights, I facilitated interviews in an interactive, embodied, and participatory manner, incorporating the following Applied Drama and Theatre techniques:

- **Sociometry:** Developed by Jacob L. Moreno in 1953, sociometry measures social relationships and group dynamics, especially emotional and intellectual responses to stimuli. In this study, sociometric exercises gauged participants' responses to statements about violence in film and their personal experiences, positioning their perspectives within a broader social and emotional spectrum (Boal, 2002). Techniques such as spectrograms, sociometric circles, and mapping exercises allowed participants to physically and verbally express their viewpoints on portrayals of male violence in South African film and television. Sociometry helped identify underlying social structures, patterns of agreement or divergence, and the influence of lived experiences on media interpretation (Moreno, 1953; Burton & Bartlett, 2020). These exercises uncovered how individual perspectives on filmic violence are shaped by social positioning and emotional connections, providing deeper insight into audience reception and interpretation.
- **Hot Seating:** Rooted in Applied Drama and Theatre, hot seating involves placing participants in the “hot seat” to answer questions in role, allowing deeper exploration of character motivations and creative decisions (Neelands, 2009). In this study, hot seating was used to interview actors, directors, and producers by having them step into the roles they played or the characters they created. This method helped uncover insights into how violence was conceptualized, portrayed, and experienced within the creative process (Neelands, 2009). Engaging participants in role encouraged reflexivity and embodied knowledge, allowing a nuanced understanding of the intentions behind violent portrayals in South African film and television. It provided opportunities to examine how industry professionals negotiate personal, social, and cultural influences in their representations of violence. This aligns with Applied Drama and Theatre’s emphasis on critical reflection and dialogue, ensuring the research captures both artistic and ideological dimensions of media violence (Nicholson,

2005; Winston, 2013). Thus, hot seating illuminated the creative and ethical considerations behind violent depictions, offering valuable insights into the intersection of performance, media, and audience reception.

- **Image Theatre:** Developed by Augusto Boal (2002) as part of Theatre of the Oppressed, Image Theatre uses embodied expression to explore complex social issues. Participants created frozen images (tableaux) representing scenes of violence from *Yizo Yizo* or *Kings of Joburg*. This embodied reflection allowed deeper, non-verbal articulation of thoughts, which were discussed afterward (Boal, 2002). By externalizing their interpretations through physical representation, participants engaged with the material beyond verbal analysis, making visible underlying emotions, power dynamics, and societal implications embedded in violent portrayals. This method fostered critical engagement as participants constructed and deconstructed images through discussion, revealing how violence is perceived, normalized, or contested in South African film and television. Image Theatre aligns with Applied Drama and Theatre's participatory and dialogical approach, emphasizing experiential learning and collective meaning-making (Nicholson, 2005; Taylor, 2003). This technique enriched the study's understanding of audience reception and the embodied impact of media representations of violence.

This approach enhanced engagement and allowed participants to articulate their thoughts through verbal and non-verbal means. These interviews provided insights into why certain portrayals exist, how actors feel about them, and proposed representation changes.

3.3.3. Observation

George (2023) defines observation as a data collection method where the researcher systematically watches and records behaviours, events, and interactions in natural settings. In this study, observation involved watching *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg* and critically analyzing how violence unfolded—its contexts, causes, execution, and perpetrators. These observations were documented through detailed note-taking. Additionally, observation extended to participants during data collection activities, including interviews, Image Theatre, and hot seating. I observed participants' body language, facial expressions, and thought processes to gain deeper insights into their emotional and cognitive responses to violence in films. In Image Theatre, attention was given to how participants used physicality to represent and interpret violent portrayals. Similarly, in hot seating, observations captured moments of hesitation, conviction, or emotional intensity when actors, directors, and producers reflected on their creative choices. These non-verbal cues provided valuable contextual data, complementing verbal responses and enriching the analysis of audience reception and creative interpretation (George, 2023; Boal, 2002).

3.3.4. Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a structured tool used to gather information on respondents' attitudes, experiences, or opinions (Bhandari, 2021). In this study, questionnaires collected audience perspectives on the portrayal of violence in media. The questionnaire explored the frequency of violent scenes involving male characters, types of violence depicted, viewers' emotional reactions, and potential influence on societal perceptions of masculinity and aggression.

3.3.5. Audio Recording

Gill et al. (2008) explain that audio recording captures spoken information and sound using a recording device. This method was used to capture interview responses, preserving the full depth of participants' insights, including tone, emotions, and non-verbal cues.

3.4. Data Analysis

I used content analysis to analyze and interpret my data. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is a method to analyze and interpret the content of written, verbal, visual, and digital communications. It involves systematically categorizing and coding text or media to identify patterns such as themes and trends. Content analysis has two main approaches: quantitative and qualitative. This study used qualitative content analysis, focusing on interpreting meaning, content, and underlying themes within the data. This involved coding content into categories based on themes, concepts, or ideas and analyzing the data to gain a deeper understanding.

Steps for content analysis:

1. Review the data: Familiarize myself with the dataset, including audio recordings, camera recordings, field notes, and journals. Note initial impressions, interesting patterns, and recurring themes.
2. Develop a coding scheme: Align codes with research objectives, using both deductive coding (based on theory and research questions) and inductive coding (allowing new codes to emerge).
3. Organize coded data into themes based on similarities and patterns, noting variations, exceptions, or outliers and their significance.
4. Interpret the findings.
5. Provide evidence: Support interpretations with data excerpts or quotes illustrating key themes and patterns.
6. Write up the analysis: Structure clearly, starting with an introduction outlining the research question, methodology, and purpose; then present findings by theme with explanations and

interpretations; discuss implications related to theory and practice; conclude by summarizing key findings and their significance.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) by submitting a detailed research proposal outlining objectives, methodology, potential risks to participants, and risk mitigation strategies (American Psychological Association, 2017). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring understanding of the research purpose, potential risks, and data use. Confidentiality was maintained through data anonymization and non-disclosure of identities. As a researcher, I took responsibility for minimizing harm by providing support services and continuously monitoring ethical implications throughout the study. These steps align with guidelines from organizations such as the Wits University Non-Medical Human Research Ethics Committee.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter described the qualitative methodological framework of the study, emphasizing the use of Image Theatre and Applied Drama as key approaches to examine participants' views on violence and masculinity in South African television and film. Grounded in the interpretive paradigm, the study enabled comprehensive, contextual knowledge of how audiences interact with these representations through dialogic and participatory processes.

Techniques such as Image Theatre, Hot Seating, and Sociometry provided participants with engaging and introspective forums to challenge prevailing narratives and present alternative views based on personal experiences. The critical and transformative goals of Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Drama align with this participatory approach.

With the methodological foundation established, the study moves on to data analysis and interpretation. Chapter Four, *Applied Drama and Image Theatre as Tools for Critical Engagement with Masculinity Issues in Film and Television*, will present and discuss the workshop results. Chapter Five, *Media Influence: What Do the Viewers Say?*, will examine how media representations affected participants' views on violence and masculinity.

CHAPTER 4

Applied Drama and Image Theatre as Tools for Critical Engagement with Masculinity issues in Film and Television

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the interpretation and analysis of the findings in the study. Through the use of content analysis, it was discovered that the role Applied Theatre played was critical in finding some of the key data. The chapter explores the use of Applied Drama, particularly in Image Theatre techniques, as dynamic tools for critically engaging with issues of masculinity in film and television. In contemporary media, portrayals of masculinity are often stereotypical, reinforcing traditional gender norms that can limit the understanding of male identity. By employing Applied Drama techniques and Image Theatre, this chapter examines how these methodologies provided a platform for challenging, deconstructing, and reimagining masculine representations.

This chapter examines how artistic approaches, such as Augusto Boal's Image Theatre, helped audiences and participants in the creative process engage in critical discourse and reflection by visualising and altering societal challenges. According to Boal (1979), Image Theatre is a type of dramatic expression in which participants produce still images with their bodies that depict feelings, concepts, or actual events. This allows for contemplation and conversation without the need for spoken words right away. Nicholson (2005) goes on to explain that Image Theatre uses physical embodiment to question prevailing narratives and investigate alternate viewpoints, allowing participants to become both creators and interpreters of meaning. Rohd (1998) supports this view by emphasizing Image Theatre's potential to promote empathy, conflict resolution, and civic dialogue, particularly in educational and community settings. Similarly, Cohen-Cruz (1998) highlights its transformative capacity to democratize storytelling by engaging marginalized voices and positioning the body as a central site of knowledge and resistance.

Since this study was rooted in Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientização*, which emphasized critical awareness and social transformation, we also see the important part that Image Theatre played in this study. Image Theatre shifts audiences from passive acceptance to active resistance. Furthermore, instead of just analysing the violent narratives, the participants became co-creators of meaning, which led to the uncovering of alternative, non-violent ways of resolving conflict. Due to this, this approach challenged dominant ideologies by questioning how the media reinforces or disrupts societal norms. Additionally, by using Image Theatre, audiences were not just spectators;

they became agents of change through the use of performance as a means of reimagining storytelling and disrupting cycles of violence in media representation.

Media representations of violence, specifically in South African film and television, usually show the broader societal struggles that are related to masculinity, systemic inequalities, and power. When we examined *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*, we discovered that they presented complex narratives in whereby violence is the main force of character development and plot progression. The participants argued that even though these portrayals offer a reflection of real-world challenges, they tend to risk reinforcing harmful stereotypes and normalizing aggression as a way of resolving conflict.

4.2. Fieldwork and Workshop Implementation

The fieldwork included conducting an Image Theatre workshop. The participants actively engaged with selected scenes from *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*. So, these workshops were designed to explore and navigate the psychological, emotional, and social implications of media violence through the use of embodied practice. Therefore, the participants were given the platform to recreate and deconstruct key scenes, using still images and improvisation to critically analyze how violence was framed and the impact that it had on the audience's perception.

4.2.1. Workshop Structure and Activities

The workshops were divided into three key phases:

1. **Warm-up and Introduction:** I started off by engaging the participants in different games and exercises as a way to familiarise them with each other and myself, to build trust and physical awareness. This was necessary as it was also preparing them for the embodied exploration.
2. **Scene Recreation:** We then moved to watching the specific violent scenes that I had selected from *Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*. After that was done, they chose scenes to physically recreate. As that was happening, the participants assumed roles of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.
3. **Deconstruction and Reflection:** After they performed their scenes and created tableaux, the participants then spoke back on their scenes and the characters they had taken on. They reflected their experiences through hot seating, interviews, and discussing themes of masculinity, power, and aggression.
4. **Transformation through Image Theatre:** Backing up the initial performances, the participants were encouraged to explore the reality of violence as represented in the scenes.

Through using Image Theatre techniques, they transitioned from depicting violence to imagining and embodying alternative realities where violence was absent. This transformation process allowed them to critically engage with the root causes of violence and envision new narratives of power and masculinity. Boal's (1979) principle of transformation in Image Theatre was central here, enabling participants to shift from passive observers to active agents of change, redefining the possibilities of non-violent masculinity in media representation.

4.2.2. Participant Reactions & Engagement

During the workshops, I noticed how the participants displayed a range of different emotional responses. Some participants had initially viewed media violence as mere entertainment; however, after embodying different characters, many expressed discomfort, particularly when assuming the role of victims. This shift aligns with Boal's (1979) assertion that Image Theatre fosters critical distancing for participants to reflect on internalized narratives, giving them the platform to question the normalization of aggression in media. This is unlike the traditional discussions, whereby violence may be analyzed in abstract terms. Therefore, this embodied approach forced participants to confront their emotional responses. Some participants reported feelings of unease when enacting aggression, while others recognized how quickly they adapted to the role of the aggressor, highlighting the subconscious ways in which media influences perceptions of power and control (Boal, 1995).

In line with Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which advocates for education as a means of awakening critical consciousness (*conscientização*), this exercise allowed the participants to move beyond passive viewership. Instead of merely recognizing media violence, they actively questioned its implications.

One of the participants, a university student (age 24), reflected:

"When I was playing the perpetrator, it felt disturbingly natural. It made me think about how often we see these behaviors normalized in the media. However, when I had to take on the role of the victim, I felt trapped, defeated, and powerless. This then changed the way I see violent scenes on TV."

This response underscores the power of Image Theatre to provoke deep introspection, forcing participants to move beyond intellectual critique and experience the emotional and psychological weight of violent portrayals firsthand. The exercise also encouraged discussion on alternative narratives—how conflict could be portrayed differently in media without relying on hyper-violent tropes. As Boal (2002) suggests, theatre is not just a mirror to reality but a rehearsal for change,

enabling individuals to explore new possibilities for storytelling that challenge rather than reinforce cycles of violence.

4.2.3 Emerging Themes from Content Analysis

Several key themes were revealed and will be further explored in the next chapter. These themes include the representation of masculinity and power, emotional and psychological impact, the influence the violent portrayals have on youth and behavioral modelling and narrative justifications and audience reception.

Through the use of Image Theatre, in this study, the participants engaged in a process of introspection and metamorphosis that went beyond simple passive viewing. This method is in line with Augusto Boal's (1979) Image Theatre, which uses embodied performance to enable people to critically examine and contest oppressive narratives, and Freire's (1970) educational philosophy, which encourages learning via active engagement and dialogue. Participants were able to dissect and reassemble violent scenes using this technique, investigating other depictions that subvert prevailing narratives in South African media. In addition to promoting a greater comprehension of the social and cultural ramifications of violent depictions, this process inspired participants to imagine fresh approaches to storytelling that put an emphasis on moral and responsible representation. The other findings from these workshops will be examined in greater depth in the following chapter, highlighting how the participants critically engaged with violent portrayals in South African media and their implications for storytelling and audience perception.

4.3 Image Theatre as a Tool for Reflection

One of the most important roles that Image Theatre played was encouraging participants to think critically. They were able to execute brief scenes and produce still photos with their bodies. They were also able to address and investigate violence from a variety of angles as offenders, victims, and bystanders. I became aware of how the participants were able to physically and visually challenge the ways in which media narratives uphold violent masculinity and create power dynamics. This supports O'Neill's (1995) focus on participatory forms of theatre that allow participants to investigate social institutions and cultivate a more profound critical consciousness through embodied narrative.

The participants used Image Theatre to not only deconstruct violent scenes but also to further engage in alternative storytelling, questioning whether non-violent resolutions could still generate dramatic tension. This interactive approach allowed for a deeper understanding and empowered the participants to critically analyse and reshape their perceptions of violence in media. Neelands (2009) argues that

dramatic action fosters critical thinking and social transformation, allowing participants to engage with complex issues in an embodied and reflective way.

According to Boal (1995), theatre should serve as a means to both reflect on and transform reality. The Image Theatre session encouraged spectators to become "spect-actors," active participants rather than passive consumers. Spect-actors are enabled to question their social realities and consider possibilities for change. In the session, they were given the agency to embody the characters, feel them, think with them and experience them such that when they were asked what they thought about the characters, they found it easy to analyse them. The moment of embodiment was crucial in enabling them to transform their thoughts about the violence on TV. The embodiment also became a moment of experiencing reality in a fictitious space.

Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasizes that education is a tool for critical consciousness (*conscientização*). Building on Freire's assertion, Boal (1992) argues that theatre is a "rehearsal for revolution," providing a space where individuals can experiment with actions, reflect on their social conditions, and envision transformative change. Through this process, theatre moves beyond representation to become an active tool for empowerment and social intervention. Nicholson (2005) reinforces this idea by highlighting how Applied Drama provides a platform for individuals to challenge dominant ideologies and imagine new ways of being. In this workshop, the participants did not merely recognize media violence but engaged in critical reflection, deepening their awareness of how violence in film and television shapes perceptions and societal norms.

One of the participants (aged 22) shared:

"I have never realized how much power is shown or brought forward just by the use of body language alone. For example, the way we stand, the way we position ourselves concerning others—it all tells a story about power and dominance."

Another participant (age 27) stated:

"It was so unsettling to step into the role of the aggressor. I thought I would struggle, have a hard time stepping into violence, but it came naturally. That made me think about how much we absorb from what we watch. And seriously, this helped raise awareness for me on the effect of consuming such content from the TV."

These reflections further reinforce Boal's argument that theatre is not merely a representation of reality but an awareness of reality, hence, a rehearsal for change. Schechner's (1985,

2002) performance theory strengthens this perspective, emphasizing that performance is not just a passive act but a way of enacting and rehearsing real-world action. Therefore, by physically enacting aggression and victimhood, the participants gained new insights into how media shapes perceptions of power, control, and social hierarchies. This experience challenged them to critically engage with media violence in ways that went beyond intellectual discourse, making the emotional and psychological implications more tangible.

This exercise also sparked conversations about alternative narratives, or alternate methods to depict conflict in the media that don't rely on too violent clichés. According to Boal (2002), theatre provides a forum for people to experiment with novel storytelling possibilities and create alternate realities that subvert prevailing ideas. The notion that Image Theatre not only dismantles damaging narratives but also stimulates fresh approaches to storytelling is further supported by Rohd's (1998) contention that theatre may be a participatory tool for promoting social awareness and action.

This was especially important during the workshop, as participants discussed how to tell gripping stories without feeding violent cycles. One group-created visual sequence, for example, started with a scene of a furious quarrel turning violent, evoking recognisable depictions in *Yizo Yizo*. Participants were asked to step in and change the image during the "rehearsal for reality" phase. One participant did so by substituting an open hand motion for a clenched fist, signifying vulnerability and bargaining. Another group depicted a Kings of Johannesburg gang fight, which was later transformed into a scenario from a community gathering where characters used music and storytelling to vent their annoyances instead of using violence.

These interventions sparked a powerful debate: some argued that media must reflect "reality," which often includes violence, while others insisted that by repeatedly showcasing violence as the only means of conflict resolution, media contributes to normalizing it. The outcome of this debate revealed a critical awareness among participants—many acknowledged the need for representations that still feel authentic but offer alternative, restorative solutions rooted in emotional intelligence, brotherhood, and community solidarity. What emerged was a collective realization that media could still be gripping and socially relevant without relying on violent tropes, especially if the emphasis shifts to internal conflict, moral dilemmas, or character transformation as narrative drivers.

4.4. Image Theatre as an Embodiment Tool

Using their bodies, the participants were able to externalise their internal reactions to media depictions of violence and masculinity through the use of Image Theatre, a powerful embodiment technique that was used in the workshop. Augusto Boal (1979) points out that the body may be both a place of oppression and liberation. By creating physical pictures, the participants can challenge prevailing narratives through embodied thinking. When a female participant reacted to a moment in *Yizo Yizo* that showed a male character in prison, this was evident. Another participant portrayed the prison figure, with shoulders squared, fists clinched, and posture conveying fear, while she conjured a frozen image of herself cringing, body tightly folded, and eyes averted. The stark contrast between the two bodies conveyed a visceral interpretation of the power dynamics and gendered violence that exist not only in the show but also in real-life social contexts. As Nicholson (2005) emphasizes that Applied Drama enables the body to become a site of learning and resistance, where emotional truths are uncovered through theatrical action rather than verbal discourse.

A male director, participating in the session, reflected on his work in *Kings of Joburg*, specifically the representation of Simon Masire as a brooding, power-hungry leader. So what happened was, during an image-making exercise, he first posed with a rigid, forward-thrusting chest, eyes hardened and hands mimicking the grip of a gun, mirroring the hypermasculine posture the media often promotes. In the re-imaging phase, a fellow participant softened the character's body language: the chest was relaxed, the arms opened, and the face was contemplative. This shift embodied what Johnny Saldana (2005) calls a "theatre of reflection," where participants engage with the symbolic and emotional implications of body language and consider how performance choices influence audience perceptions. For the director, this moment was transformative; he acknowledged that vulnerability and emotional conflict could be portrayed through physicality without weakening the character's depth. The embodiment made the critical dialogue personal and artistic, reinforcing Jonathan Neelands' (2009) assertion that drama becomes a space where the imagined and real intersect to interrogate ideology.

In another compelling moment, a female participant created an image responding to a domestic violence scene from *Yizo Yizo*. She placed a male participant in a towering stance above her, with one arm raised as if about to strike, while she crouched beside a couch, one arm shielding her head. The image immediately stirred emotional responses in the group. Yet, in the re-imaging, she stood upright, reached out her hand, and directly faced the aggressor—a shift Boal might describe as a moment of "rehearsal for the revolution." The physical re-positioning did not just represent resistance—it embodied it. Helen Nicholson (2005) reinforces the idea that Applied Drama practices enable participants to explore and rehearse real-world change through symbolic gesture and metaphor. These

acts of physical negotiation moved the discourse from passive spectatorship to embodied analysis. For directors and producers in the group, these exercises provided not just insight, but also a call to action: to re-evaluate how their storytelling choices reinforce or challenge dominant narratives of masculinity in South African media.

4.4.1. Reflections from Directors and Producers

For the directors and producers involved in the Image Theatre workshop not only provided a space to analyze but also to critically reimagine the portrayal of masculinity in South African media. One director, reflecting on *Kings of Joburg*, admitted that while the series intentionally portrays masculinity as powerful and dominant, the workshop made him realize how these representations might inadvertently reinforce fear and intimidation. He specifically recalled an image created by a male participant embodying Simon Masire's authoritative stance—arms crossed, legs apart, face set in an impenetrable expression. When this image was reshaped into one of openness, vulnerability, and negotiation, he found himself questioning his own directorial choices. "I've always directed men to take up space, to command a scene. But this made me realize that power can be expressed in ways beyond physical dominance," he admitted. This aligns with Jonathan Neelands' (2009) argument that drama education and theatre techniques challenge practitioners to rethink power dynamics and create space for alternative narratives.

Another participant, a producer working on crime dramas, reflected on the limitations of South African television in depicting male emotional complexity. He recalled the prison scene in *Yizo Yizo* that inspired a female participant's fearful image. "That scene was designed to show the reality of prison culture, but seeing how women in the workshop immediately associated it with danger in their own lives made me reconsider the weight of these images," he said. When participants reimaged the scene—where the imprisoned character was positioned not as a threat, but as someone broken and reflective—the producer acknowledged the potential of more nuanced storytelling. "Maybe it's not just about showing violence but showing its consequences. We need to make space for men breaking down, not just men breaking things," he reflected. This echoes Helen Nicholson's (2005) assertion that Applied Drama fosters an ethical engagement with representation, urging practitioners to consider the societal impact of their creative decisions.

A female director in the session, known for working on character-driven narratives, offered another perspective. She was particularly moved by the moment when a participant reshaped a domestic violence scene, standing up to face the aggressor. She remarked that, "We've become used to women in film being victims or survivors, but rarely agents of change within the moment,". She noted that

traditional media often relies on long-term narrative arcs for transformation, but Image Theatre demonstrated how immediate shifts in body language and positioning could convey resistance and change. She also said “This has made me think about blocking differently. Maybe resistance isn’t always verbal. Maybe it’s in the way a character moves, how they hold themselves, how they refuse to shrink.” Boal’s (1979) notion of the body as a site of both oppression and liberation was evident in her reflection—she left the workshop thinking about how she could visually communicate agency without relying solely on dialogue.

These reflections underscore how Image Theatre serves as more than just an analytical tool; it is a transformative space where media practitioners are challenged to rethink how they construct masculinity and power on screen. By embodying the themes of their work, these directors and producers not only gained deeper insight into audience perceptions but also left with new approaches for more responsible and layered storytelling.

4.5. Breaking the Cycle of Desensitization

The participants were able to explore alternative narratives that could challenge the normalization of violence in media. Therefore, through engaging in physical re-enactments, they were able to question how violent storytelling is constructed and reinforced. This experience which was participatory and embodied, shifted their engagement from passive spectatorship to active interrogation, allowing them to reimagine how conflict, power, and dominance are represented in South African media.

4.5.1. Challenging the Dominance of Violent Storytelling

One of the key realizations that came about was that tension, dramatic stakes, and compelling narratives do not have to be built on violence alone.

One of the participants (age 26) reflected:

"As we were doing this exercise, I realized that tension can be created in other ways."

This statement on its own underscores a fundamental shift in perception. When we look at the majority of mainstream media texts, particularly those in crime dramas and action genres, they mainly lean on violent confrontations to heighten the drama. Nevertheless, by using Image Theatre, the participants uncovered that tension can also be heightened through subtle elements such as silence, proximity, facial expressions, and restrained movement. This, therefore, aligns with Boal’s (1995)

argument that theatre can serve as a space for reimagining social interactions, providing alternatives to dominant ideologies. Another participant (age 23) echoed this sentiment:

"Previously, I thought that violence was the only way that power could be shown on screen, but now I see how silence, movement, and facial expressions can be just as powerful."

So, this realization proposes that power dynamics are often connected with violent portrayals but can be carried through non-violent methods. Rather than relying on physical aggression, participants were able to experiment with alternative ways to depict authority and control, such as through Image Theatre techniques like spatial relationships, frozen images, and embodied metaphors. By positioning themselves in still images that conveyed dominance, subjugation, or tension without physical confrontation, the participants explored how power can be visually communicated in more nuanced ways. This supports Boal's notion of spect-acting, whereby there are individuals who are both audience members and active participants, capable of reshaping narratives rather than passively consuming them (Boal, 2002).

4.5.2. The Emotional Weight of Violence: From Passive Viewing to Active Reflection

One of the most significant aspects of this exercise was how it disrupted the habitual desensitization to media violence.

A participant (age 29) stated:

"I realised that how violence is shown in media can make us numb to it. This is because when we recreated the scenes, it was different. I felt the weight of it in a way I never had before."

This statement mirrors the difference between watching violence on screen and embodying it in a participatory setting. Traditional media often distances the audience from the emotional and psychological consequences of violence, framing it as mere entertainment. However, the participants indicated that by physically stepping into these roles, they experienced the discomfort and gravity of these portrayals. Hooks (1994) asserts that learning becomes truly transformative when it involves emotional, experiential, and participatory elements – a pedagogical stance in Applied Drama. According to hooks, education should not only inform but also awaken, provoking learners to question dominant ideologies and make meaning through personal experience.

Greene (1995) further supports this perspective by arguing that the arts—particularly drama—have the power to awaken the imagination and disrupt the ordinary. Through aesthetic experiences, Greene

believes individuals can perceive the world differently, confront injustice, and envision alternative realities. In this sense, Image Theatre not only helped the participants confront media violence but also opened a space for imagining new, non-violent modes of representation and engagement.

Beyond merely analyzing media violence, the participants were able to actively reconstruct scenes. That enabled new interpretations that resisted aggression as the default mode of conflict resolution. By doing that, they were able to challenge the industry's dependency on extremely harsh tropes and instead put forward storytelling methods rooted in psychological depth and nuanced character dynamics.

These nuances include, for instance, showing characters grappling with internal conflicts, expressing vulnerability, or navigating tense social situations without physical confrontation—thereby adding complexity to character development and emotional resonance to the narrative.

Image Theatre placed them in the position of being co-creators of meaning rather than passive consumers. In line with Boal's (2002) argument that theatre is a "rehearsal for reality," the workshop enabled participants to question whether the narratives they consume reflect their own lived experiences or merely perpetuate outdated, harmful norms.

Through the participants' physically stepping into these scenes, they broke down the passive consumption of violent media and became critically aware of its emotional and social consequences. This embodied engagement allowed them to:

- To recognize the subtle ways in which media conditions audiences to accept violence as a storytelling norm.
- To ask questions when it comes to the necessity of violent portrayals in maintaining narrative tension.
- To explore alternative techniques for representing power, conflict, and resolution.

By using this process, Image Theatre served as a transformative tool, that enabled the participants to critically analyze, deconstruct, and reconstruct the portrayal of violence in media. Therefore, this experience reinforced the idea that representation is not neutral, but rather it shapes perceptions, influences social behaviors, and reinforces or challenges dominant ideologies.

Boal (1995) states that theatre provides a space where individuals can rehearse change before enacting it in the real world. Similarly, by engaging in this reflective and participatory practice,

participants took the first steps toward challenging the normalization of violence in South African media and advocating for more responsible storytelling.

4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how Augusto Boal's Image Theatre served as a transformative tool for critically engaging with media violence. Through the use of embodied practice, participants were able to move beyond passive spectatorship in order to actively interrogate the representations of masculinity, power, and aggression in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*. The workshops that were conducted revealed the emotional and psychological impact of violent portrayals. They further highlighted how deeply ingrained these narratives are in shaping audience perceptions.

These findings underscore the potential of Image Theatre as a tool to disrupt cycles of desensitization and promote alternative modes of storytelling that do not rely on violence as a primary driver of conflict. Therefore, by stepping into various roles and physically recreating those violent media scenes, participants experienced shifts in their perspectives. They started recognizing how power is communicated through body language, movement, and narrative framing. Additionally, this process aligns with Paulo Freire's concept of *conscientização*, as it fosters critical awareness and encourages participants to challenge dominant ideologies perpetuated by the media.

Additionally, the embodied nature of Image Theatre facilitated emotional engagement, as it allowed the participants to critically examine the psychological toll of violent representations. By shifting from passive consumption to active interrogation, participants were empowered to rethink their own media literacy and the ethical responsibilities of media creators.

Ultimately, this study affirms the role of Applied Drama and Theatre methodologies in fostering critical engagement with media content. The viewers and producers, alike, were empowered to question, reinterpret, and reimagine the narratives they consume and produce. Thus, paving the way for a more reflective and conscious media engagement. The next chapter will further analyze these findings, linking them to broader theoretical frameworks and discussing their implications for media representation and audience perception in South African film and television.

Chapter 5

Media Influence and Meaning: Voices from the Audience and Filmmakers

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from audience responses regarding the portrayal of violence by male characters in South African film and television, with a focus on *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*. This data was gathered through Image Theatre, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Their responses were then analyzed to understand how media representations of violence influence the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of the audience.

The South African media has always been a powerful tool for storytelling, reflecting the country's social realities, histories, and cultural dynamics. How violence is depicted in television and film has brought about ongoing debates about its potential impact on audiences, particularly regarding its influence on behavioral norms and attitudes toward masculinity. The participants agreed that *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg* work as prime examples of productions that engaged with themes of violence, power, and survival, bringing about complex narratives that resonate deeply with viewers. However, numerous concerns arose concerning the extent to which these portrayals contribute to the normalization of violence, while reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, and shaping societal perceptions of aggression and power dynamics.

Looking at the findings presented in this chapter, the focus is on exploring these concerns by drawing on audience/viewers' feedback, as a way of providing insight into how different demographic groups interpret and respond to violent media portrayals. By focusing on their reactions, this study aims to shed light on the broader implications of media violence in South African society and offer potential pathways for more responsible storytelling.

Violence in media has always been a subject of scholarly debate, specifically in South Africa, where its historical and social contexts shape the representations of masculinity and aggression. The participants argued that the country's history of colonialism, apartheid, and systemic inequalities has contributed largely to the narratives where violence is often shown as a way of survival and/or resistance. They contended that the South African film and television industry has sought to look back on these socio-political realities, yet the representation of male violence repeatedly reinforces existing stereotypes rather than challenging them.

On the other hand, previous studies have suggested that violent portrayals often contribute to social learning (Bandura, 1977), reinforcing hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), and influencing the audience's worldviews through cultivation effects (Gerbner, 1998). These theoretical frameworks provide essential lenses through which to interpret audience responses. Bandura's social learning theory suggests that individuals, specifically younger viewers, may model behaviors they observe in media, while Gerbner's cultivation theory posits that prolonged exposure to violent content may lead audiences to perceive the world as more hostile than it is. Additionally, looking at Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity it highlights how violent portrayals bring about traditional gender hierarchies through associating power with aggression.

The selection of *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg* for this study is significant because both these productions engage deeply with the themes of crime, masculinity, and power struggles. *Yizo Yizo* is particularly noted for its raw portrayal of township life, gang violence, and systemic failures in education and law enforcement. Conversely, *Kings of Joburg* blends crime drama with supernatural elements, portraying the power dynamics within a criminal syndicate led by dominant male figures. The series showcases different yet interconnected aspects of violence and masculinity, making them ideal case studies for understanding audience interpretations.

Therefore, by analyzing audience responses to these shows, this study will contribute to a growing body of literature on media influence, representation, and cultural identity. Additionally, understanding how South African audiences interpret violent portrayals is essential for media scholars, content creators, and policymakers. This knowledge can help foster more responsible and diverse representations in film and television.

5.2. Content Analysis Findings

The findings from the audience responses were put into categories based on key themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes brought insight into how different audience groups interpret and react to violent media portrayals in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*.

5.2.1. The representation of masculinity and power

The participants strongly agreed, according to the survey and interview results, that the portrayals of male characters in *Kings of Johannesburg* and *Yizo Yizo* were consistently congruent with domineering and frequently violent types of masculinity. The majority of interviewees characterised these depictions as "always needing to assert control," "aggressive," and "emotionally closed-off." Many of the participants connected this portrayal to what Connell (2005) refers to as hegemonic

masculinity, which is characterised by the display of aggression, power, and authority. Furthermore, it is generally at the expense of emotional vulnerability.

The participants characterised violent and emotionally aloof masculinities as being embodied by characters such as Simon Masire from Kings of Johannesburg, Papa Action, and Chester from Yizo Yizo. This is because these characters frequently used physical force and intimidation to settle disputes. Some participants claimed that this influenced their early conceptions of what it meant to be a man. According to other interviewees, viewing these shows as a child even strengthened the stereotype that being a man meant "... fighting your way out of problems," "not crying," or "taking control". As a young male filmmaker, I reflected:

"The characters I grew up watching were tough and silent. You didn't talk through your problems, you hit someone, or shut down. These shows never really gave us alternatives."

This statement echoes Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that individuals model behaviors they see repeatedly in media, especially when those behaviors are rewarded or normalized. Multiple participants said they felt validated watching men use violence to gain respect, with one noting that "strength and aggression were always rewarded, even if it caused harm."

Through both interviews and Image Theatre workshops, participants struggled to imagine alternatives to the violent male characters they had embodied. One participant said in an interview :

"I tried to imagine how Simon from Kings of Joburg could deal with betrayal without violence... but I drew a blank. It's like aggression is the only language these men speak."

Interestingly, some female participants expressed discomfort and fear when these portrayals were recreated in workshops. One participant recalled a scene where a male participant recreated a jail scene from *Yizo Yizo*, embodying a character who exerts dominance through intimidation. This brought up feelings of unease and reinforced the stereotype of men as threats. A female participant shared in her questionnaire:

"I created an image of a man hovering over a woman in fear. That's how I see men in these shows, they scare me."

These responses imply that viewers' perceptions of gender relations are significantly influenced emotionally by media representations. This is framed by Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, which holds that masculinity is reproduced through learnt behaviours rather than being intrinsic. The

workshops and thoughts from the interviews demonstrated how ingrained these acts have grown in South African media.

Several participants who were directors and producers also reflected on their own responsibility in shaping these narratives. One male director remarked:

“When I write male characters, I sometimes default to aggression without realizing it. These shows influenced my storytelling. I’m only starting to question that now.”

These insights align with Gaines’ (1990) notion that representation is a site of ideological struggle. The participants’ embodied experiences during Image Theatre enabled a deeper interrogation of these ideologies, one that went beyond academic discussion to engage memory, identity, and cultural norms.

5.2.2 Emotional and Psychological Impact on Viewers (Findings from Questionnaires and Interviews)

The data that was collected through questionnaires and interviews put to light that *Yizo Yizo*, in particular, had a strong emotional and psychological impact on participants. This came about as several participants reported feeling disturbed, triggered, or overwhelmed by the violent scenes. These reactions were rooted in the realistic aesthetic of the show - how its language, setting, and dialogue resonated deeply with the lived experiences of many participants.

One participant, who grew up in a township similar to the one depicted in the series, noted:

“Watching Yizo Yizo was like watching my own life. The fights, the screaming, the traumas, it wasn’t fiction, it was memory.”

This deep emotional engagement aligns with Hooks’s (1992) analysis of media as a site where trauma can be revisited or re-experienced, particularly for marginalized viewers. Unlike stylized violence in *Kings of Joburg*, the gritty, documentary-like style of *Yizo Yizo* blurred the line between entertainment and realism.

Another participant, through the interview process, described feelings of helplessness and emotional fatigue:

“There’s no escape. Watching these characters suffer—especially the younger boys who are trapped in cycles of violence- it made me feel like there was no way out for people like us.”

Several responses from the questionnaires highlighted the lack of resolution in these shows. The Participants said the narratives often portrayed violence as cyclical and unavoidable, offering no real alternatives or healing. This connects with Miller's (2003) critique of the media's tendency to aestheticize violence without engaging its socio-political context or providing a structural critique.

Others mentioned how emotionally desensitized they had become to media violence because of repeated exposure to similar portrayals. One participant stated:

"At some point, I just accepted that this is what South African men are like. Angry. Silent. Dangerous."

This normalization reflects the ideas presented by Gerbner (1976) in *Cultivation Theory*, which argues that repeated exposure to consistent messages in media leads viewers to adopt those messages as social reality. In this case, masculinity becomes equated with stoicism and brutality.

However, not all responses were rooted in trauma. Some participants, particularly those emerging content creators, expressed hope that such representations could be subverted. A young producer shared in her interview:

"We don't have to keep telling the same story. These workshops have helped me think about how to write male characters who are complex, soft, and still strong."

The Image Theatre sessions gave the participants the chance to process their emotional responses in a physical, creative way. Oddey (1996) writes about devised theatre as a space for "personal testimony," and in this study, several participants described the workshops as both therapeutic and enlightening.

One male participant, after revisiting a scene from *Yizo Yizo*, reflected:

"Performing that character again brought up a lot. But then changing the outcome, by giving him a different way to respond, was powerful. It made me realize I don't have to repeat what I've seen."

These findings illustrate how Applied Drama practices such as Image Theatre allow for affective, embodied engagement with difficult media texts. Participants moved from passive viewers to active interrogators of the emotional and psychological legacies embedded in South African film and television.

5.2.3 Applied Drama and Theatre: Processing the Impact Through Image Theatre

In order to process the emotional and psychological reactions raised during interviews and questionnaires, Image Theatre was used as a central point for the Applied Drama technique. Therefore, this method offered participants a non-verbal, physical vocabulary through which to explore, express, and interrogate their emotional connections to the violent portrayals in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*.

During the first Image Theatre exercise, participants were asked to create still images using their bodies to represent their emotional responses to selected violent scenes from both series. This included moments such as Chester's assault on fellow inmates in *Yizo Yizo*, and Simon Masire's violent leadership decisions in *Kings of Joburg*. Without speaking, participants sculpted their bodies into frozen postures.

During this exercise, some participants crouched, covering their heads and curling into themselves. Looking at those images, they communicated fear, helplessness, or trauma. Other participants stood tall with clenched fists, wide stances, and their arms outstretched, symbolizing anger, resistance, or the desire to retaliate. A few of the participants stood off to the side with their backs turned and their heads bowed. That represented bystanders who chose not to engage, an image many linked to how they and how others often respond in real life to violence: by looking away.

These sculpted images opened up a space for dialogue through the body. Drawing from Augusto Boal's (1979) method, I then invited the group to observe and interpret each image. Participants were asked:

“What do you see? Who might this person be? What story is frozen in this body?”

Through this shared reflection, participants began to name the emotions being communicated and connected them to real-world experiences and media representations.

In a second exercise, participants were placed in small groups and given a specific scene from *Yizo Yizo* or *Kings of Joburg* to reconstruct. Each group first created a still image to represent the original moment of conflict or violence, and then a second image that reimagined the scene with a non-violent alternative.

For example, one group worked on the iconic *Yizo Yizo* scene where a student is bullied and physically assaulted by peers. In the original frozen image, one participant played the aggressor,

towering over the victim, while others played bystanders, some watching passively, some laughing, and one walking away.

When asked to recreate the same moment with a non-violent resolution, participants struggled at first. One group kept reverting to minor acts of violence or intimidation. But with further prompting:

“What if the bystander stepped in and spoke out? What if someone reported it? What if there was a teacher nearby?”

Through doing that, participants began to shift their physical responses.

In the revised image, the participant who had previously walked away stepped forward and held up a hand between the aggressor and the victim, symbolizing intervention. Another placed a hand gently on the victim’s shoulder, representing solidarity. The aggressor’s posture softened, arms lowered, facial expression changed.

These moments of re-imagining and reshaping allowed the participants to reflect on the power of bystanders, not only within the narrative, but in their own communities. The Participants identified bystanders as “other learners,” “community members,” “teachers,” or even “viewers at home” who witness violence but often do nothing.

As one participant expressed:

“I always thought being a bystander meant you’re neutral. But through this, I saw that standing by and doing nothing actually supports the violence. It keeps the cycle going.”

A third, more advanced exercise involved "Image Transitions", where participants moved from the original violent image through three transitional images to arrive at a peaceful resolution. This exercise was particularly powerful in tracing the emotional journeys that showing how a character might move from rage to remorse, or fear to courage.

In one group’s reenactment, a scene from *Kings of Joburg* involving Simon Masire’s violent punishment of a subordinate was reconstructed. Initially, the participants found it challenging to imagine Simon as anything other than controlling and brutal. However, through the Image Transitions, they created a sequence in which Simon paused before acting, looked toward another character for guidance, and finally embraced a more diplomatic, reflective stance.

These exercises were supported by Boal's (2002) notion of "rehearsal for reality", where theatre becomes a safe space to test out new behaviors, confront dominant narratives, and rehearse social change. In all of these activities, the role of the bystander emerged as a pivotal theme. While the shows largely depict bystanders as passive or fearful, the workshops illuminated how bystanders could be repositioned as agents of change. The Participants reflected on how rarely bystanders are empowered in media narratives and how this reflects societal tendencies to avoid involvement.

As one participant concluded:

"It's not just about the hero or the villain. Sometimes the bystander has the most power to stop it before it gets worse. But our stories don't teach us that. They teach us to stay quiet."

5.2.4. Contrasting Emotional Detachment in Kings of Joburg

Unlike *Yizo Yizo*, *Kings of Joburg* elicited a more detached emotional response from some viewers. Some argued that the inclusion of supernatural elements, such as the mythical curse and shadowy forces, brought about the distance of violence from reality, making it feel stylized and exaggerated rather than deeply personal. This came mostly from producers and directors.

One producer argued that:

"For us to sell our stories, we have to exaggerate the style of these presentations. Otherwise, our shows will not get the viewership we want".

One of the participants explained:

"When watching scenes from Kings of Joburg, it feels different. The violence feels exaggerated, so I didn't take it seriously. It's more of an action-thriller than something that reflects real life."

Another participant took note that the cinematic techniques, such as slow-motion action sequences, dramatic lighting, and special effects, made the violence seem more like a spectacle than a representation of real struggles:

"It felt like watching an American gangster film, not something I could relate to directly. The fights looked choreographed, almost like a performance, so it didn't hit me emotionally like Yizo Yizo did."

This viewer's comment aligns with King's (2000) analysis in *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster*, where he argues that spectacle often displaces emotional realism in action-

oriented storytelling. According to King, stylization through visual effects, heightened action, and genre conventions creates distance from reality, encouraging aesthetic appreciation over emotional engagement.

5.2.4. Media Influence and Emotional Conditioning

Looking at the contrast in the viewer responses, it supports the idea that media realism intensifies emotional engagement, while stylized violence creates emotional distance. According to Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1976), when repeated exposure to violent media conditions audiences to accept certain portrayals as normal or expected, while heightened stylization may lead to desensitization. Participants who had been exposed to violent media over time noted that they felt less affected by the brutality in *Kings of Joburg*, seeing it as mere entertainment rather than a reflection of reality.

Interestingly, some participants initially felt detached from *Yizo Yizo* but later reflected on its lasting impact after the workshops. One of the participants shared:

"At first, I thought I was just watching a show, but after discussing it, I realized how much of it mirrored real life. That made me uncomfortable."

The Applied Drama methods used in the study helped the participants to rethink their initial reactions and process their emotional responses in a supportive environment. Through re-enactment and discussion, they were able to gain deeper insight into their psychological conditioning and how their environment shaped their reactions to violent media.

5.2.5. The Role of Drama in Emotional Reflection

The findings suggest that while realistic portrayals of violence in media can evoke deep emotional responses, stylized violence may lead to detachment or desensitization. By using an Applied Drama technique, particularly Image Theatre, it proved to be a powerful tool for helping participants process their emotions, as it critically engaged with media representations and explored alternative narratives beyond violence.

These insights reinforced the importance of media literacy and critical engagement, particularly in a South African context where exposure to violence is both real and mediated, and how it plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of masculinity, power, and justice.

5.3. Narrative Justification and Audience Interpretation

The Audience's response to the use of violence in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg* varied significantly, reflecting a tension between those who viewed the violence as a necessary narrative tool for filmmaking and those who saw it as gratuitous or excessive. While some participants condemned the violent portrayals as overdone or exploitative, others argued that these narratives justified the use of violence by grounding it in real-world struggles.

For the majority of the participants, *Yizo Yizo* was perceived as an authentic portrayal of township life, whereby violence was not sensationalized but rather depicted as a harsh reality that they could relate to. This perspective aligned with Social Realism, which emphasizes raw, unfiltered representations of life, particularly in marginalized communities.

One of the participants noted:

"Honestly speaking, I did not think Yizo Yizo was glorifying violence. It was showing us the harsh realities, even though those realities were hard to accept."

Although some participants felt that *Kings of Joburg* used violence as an aesthetic choice rather than a narrative necessity. The supernatural elements, which were combined with highly stylized action sequences, led some viewers to interpret the violence as sensational rather than meaningful. One of the participants stated:

"While watching some of those scenes, it felt as though violence was used just to keep things exciting, especially in Kings of Joburg. It was more about looking cool than saying something important."

5.3. 1. Style and Form: Social Realism vs Stylized Violence

Audience responses revealed two dominant narrative approaches to violence:

1. **Social Realism (Yizo Yizo)** – Violence in *Yizo Yizo* is shown authentically, mirroring real-life struggles and systemic issues. According to Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model (1980), audiences interpret media messages based on their lived experiences, either accepting, negotiating, or rejecting them. The Participants who accepted *Yizo Yizo*'s portrayal of violence as truthful often had firsthand exposure to similar environments, leading them to justify its inclusion as a necessary reflection of social realities. However, others found it

distressing, reinforcing negative perceptions of violence and its cyclical nature in marginalized communities.

2. **Stylized Crime Drama (Kings of Joburg)** – In contrast, *Kings of Joburg* employs violence as an aesthetic tool, often detached from real-life consequences. The participants argued that this stylization leads viewers to perceive violence as a narrative device rather than a reflection of social struggles. The ones who recognized this distinction were more likely to engage with the series as entertainment rather than critique its depiction of masculinity and aggression. However, some noted that the hyper-stylized portrayal, combined with the glorification of power and control, reinforced dominant masculine ideals, aligning with Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). This suggests that repeated exposure to such imagery could normalize or even glamorize violence in certain contexts.

The contrasting audience responses highlight the tension between representation and interpretation. While realism elicits empathy and recognition of societal issues, stylization distances audiences from the real-world impact of violence, potentially reinforcing aspirational yet problematic images of masculinity. This divergence in reception underscores the complex role of media in shaping cultural understandings of violence and power.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter critically analyzed the portrayal of violence by male characters in the South African film and television, focusing on its impact on audiences. Through an exploration of *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg*, this chapter examined how cultural, historical, and social factors influence these portrayals, as well as how they shape societal norms, gender roles, and stereotypes.

The findings reveal that media representations of violent masculinity are deeply embedded in South Africa's socio-political landscape. The way violence is performed and consumed contributes to broader discourses on power, identity, and masculinity. Audience reception indicates that while some viewers recognize the fictional nature of these portrayals, others internalize and normalize the violent behaviors depicted on screen. This highlights the media's significant role in shaping public perceptions of masculinity and aggression.

This chapter underscores the urgent need for critical engagement with violent representations in South African media. It calls for media producers, educators, and policymakers to foster narratives that challenge harmful stereotypes and promote alternative representations of masculinity that are constructive and multidimensional.

Furthermore, this research highlights the potential that Applied Drama and Theatre has as tools for engaging audiences in critical discussions about media representations. Augusto Boal's Image Theatre, for example, provided interactive and participatory methods that allowed the participants to question and reimagine dominant narratives in masculinity. Applied Drama techniques in this case were used as alternative approaches to interviews to challenge toxic portrayals of masculinity and encourage alternative ways of understanding male identity in an embodied way. Through performance, reflection, and dialogue, drama-based methodologies offered a transformative approach to media literacy, enabling audiences to become active participants in reshaping societal narratives rather than passive consumers of violent imagery.

Ultimately, this chapter contributes to the discourse on media, gender, and culture by offering a nuanced understanding of the intersection between violence, masculinity, and audience reception. Future studies could expand on this work by exploring additional genres, audience demographics, and emerging digital media platforms. Additionally, further research could investigate how Applied Drama interventions might be used to critically engage audiences, offering spaces for dialogue, resistance, and the re-imagination of masculinity in South African visual storytelling.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

6.1 General Conclusion

Using *Kings of Johannesburg* and *Yizo Yizo* as case studies, this study aimed to critically analyse how male characters in South African television and film depict violence. It explored how these portrayals influence ideas of masculinity and conflict resolution by interacting with audience and filmmaker viewpoints through the use of Applied Drama techniques, especially Image Theatre. According to the study, media depictions of violence are complicated; they can serve as reflectors of actual social problems at times, but they also frequently reinforce negative stereotypes of aggression and hypermasculinity.

The study discovered a dynamic interaction between representation, perception, and social impact by referencing theoretical frameworks such as Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), Connell's *Hegemonic Masculinity* (2005), and Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* (2001). Importantly, research illustrated the effectiveness of participatory approaches in challenging violence as the default manifestation of masculinity by co-creating alternative visions in addition to challenging preexisting narratives. The necessity for South African media to aggressively pursue moral and transformative storytelling is reaffirmed by this study.

This study's primary goal, examining how audience perceptions of masculinity are influenced by male characters' acts of violence in South African films and television shows, was presented in Chapter 1. It discussed the theoretical underpinnings and justification for critically engaging people through the use of Applied Drama. This study included semi-structured interviews, Image Theatre workshops, and textual analysis of *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Johannesburg* as part of its qualitative case study methodology in Chapter 2. The approach, which had its roots in interpretivism and Freire's *conscientização*, placed a strong emphasis on participation-based reflection and change. The use of Image Theatre to embody, challenge, and rethink violent depictions of masculinity was examined in Chapter 4. Participants offered alternate, non-violent narratives using Boal's tactics, and the body served as a space for resistance and storytelling. In Chapter 5, the voices of both viewers and media creators revealed diverse responses to violence on screen. While some audiences felt that violent narratives reflected social realities, others critiqued them for reinforcing harmful masculinity. Filmmakers expressed both creative responsibility and pressure to reflect or sensationalize violence, revealing a tension between storytelling integrity and audience expectation.

6.2 General Summary of Findings

6.2.1 Applied Drama and Image Theatre as Tools for Critical Engagement

Findings from the Image Theatre workshops showed how embodied engagement with violent media narratives allowed participants to interrogate and deconstruct dominant portrayals of masculinity and violence. Through re-enactments, the participants stepped into the roles of both perpetrators and victims, which heightened their awareness of the emotional and psychological impacts of violence. Boal's (1979) technique of Image Theatre proved effective in enabling exploration of alternative narratives, fostering empathy, and generating discussions around non-violent resolutions to conflict. These outcomes support the notion that Applied Drama is a valuable educational and social tool for addressing media influence.

6.2.2 Media Influence and Meaning: Voices from the Audience and Filmmakers

Audience responses to violent portrayals in *Yizo Yizo* and *Kings of Joburg* were complex and multifaceted. Some participants regarded the portrayals as a mirror of societal realities, arguing that they provide important commentary on crime, inequality, and power struggles in South Africa. Others expressed concern about the potential for desensitization—particularly among younger audiences—who may begin to view violence as a normative part of life. The study concluded that consistent exposure to violent narratives may contribute to shaping social attitudes toward aggression and reinforce hypermasculine ideals that equate strength with dominance and control.

6.2.3 Limitations of the Study

While the study generated rich qualitative data, it was limited by its geographic scope—primarily focusing on participants in urban Johannesburg. Broader inclusion of rural and linguistically diverse populations might have revealed different audience interpretations. Additionally, the number of filmmakers interviewed was limited, meaning that insights from the industry side remain exploratory rather than comprehensive. Time constraints also limited the duration and depth of the Image Theatre workshops, which could be expanded in future research for longer-term analysis.

6.3 Recommendations

6.3.1 Expand the Use of Applied Drama in Media Studies and Community Engagement

Given the success of Image Theatre as a tool for fostering critical engagement, Applied Drama techniques should be integrated into both educational and community programs. Participatory workshops can provide audience members with a hands-on approach to analyzing and reforming

media narratives, transforming them from passive recipients into active agents in their own media consumption.

6.3.2 Encourage Ethical Storytelling in South African Film and Television

South African filmmakers and content creators should strive for balanced representations of masculinity and improved conflict resolution in their narratives. While it is important to depict social realities, it is equally vital to present alternative narratives that challenge the normalization of violence. Industry regulations should support ethical storytelling practices that prioritize narrative depth and complexity over sensationalism.

6.3.3 Further Research on Audience Reception and Representation

Future studies should investigate audience reception beyond urban settings by including participants from rural and socio-economically diverse backgrounds. This broader approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how different communities engage with violent media portrayals. Additionally, researchers should explore the long-term psychological effects of violent content and examine how evolving representations of masculinity influence gender relations over time.

6.4 Final Thoughts

This study contributes considerably to existing conversations regarding media influence, masculinity, and the possibilities of participatory arts-based techniques. By combining Applied Drama with traditional media analysis, it created new avenues for rethinking what else is possible as well as for comprehending the impact of violent representations on viewers. It demonstrated how viewers and producers can work together to create a media landscape that is more critical, thoughtful, and caring when they are allowed to think, embody, and challenge narratives.

The results confirm that storytelling is a map as well as a mirror. A road plan that might guide us towards transformational pathways or destructive cycles. South African media must be deliberate about the masculinities it creates, the violence it normalises, and the humanity it either elevates or obscures if it is to realise its promise as a change agent. The industry has the chance to create stories that not only reflect society but also help to reconstruct it, one story at a time, through community participation, ethical storytelling, and participatory reflection.

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