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Rainbow Pride in The Rainbow Nation: The fictional representation of lesbians on the South African Broadcasting Corporation

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

July 2009

Declaration

I, Nthabsieng Monamodi, declare that this is my original work. It has never been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University. I am submitting it for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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(Name of Candidate)

____day of _____2009

Abstract

Diversity of representation is a key principle of the role of the media within a democracy. This responsibility is of particular importance to the function of a public service broadcaster as it is required to represent the diversity and the programming interests of all citizens including minority groups. The South African Broadcasting Corporation is charged with this task as well as overcoming its past as a restrictive and bigoted state broadcaster under the apartheid regime.

This negative past has forced the SABC to attempt to be inclusive of all groups that were formally marginalised within the South African society. The minority group that is of particular interest to this study are lesbians, whose representation in fictional television programmes on the SABC is critically examined for diversity. These fictional depictions are often reliant on negative stereotypes, which also encourage a limited form of lesbian visibility in the media.

Through an analysis of two different programmes *Hard Copy* and *Society* on SABC 3 and SABC 1 respectively, the fictional representation of lesbians is viewed critically. We see the manner in which notions such as heteronormativity, stereotype, normalisation, and visibility inform the depiction of lesbianism in these programmes. This analysis is achieved through the application of theories of representation and the critical political economy of the media.

A number of conclusions are made. Firstly, the programmes on the SABC in which lesbians are represented are heavily reliant on stereotypes although they are not always inherently negative. Secondly, diversity is limited and restricted as some of the roles are not multi-dimensional and one way in which this occurs is through the relative de-sexualisation of these characters. Finally, entertainment value outweighs the attempts made to depict diversity in the fictional representation of lesbianism within these programmes on the SABC.

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Abbreviations

GLBT	Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
PBS	Public Service Broadcaster
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Visibility in the South African media is something that is desired by members of various ethnic groups, which also includes a great number of national languages. Members of minority sexual orientations are by no means an exception to this struggle for representation. This is not just any type of representation, but representation that is fair and accurate. The possibilities for homosexual media representations, particularly those of lesbians, are on the rise within this growing and dynamic country. However, attention must be given to the manner in which this trend is taking shape, as it has implications for the current South African media representations, as well as the representations of the future.

It then becomes vital that we gain some insight into the developments taking place in society in terms of the manner in which lesbians are currently being represented. Although this research uses fictional media representations of lesbians as its basis, this should not detract from the attempt to view these representations critically. The progressive or detrimental potential of these representations does not hinge on the distinction between reality and fictional programming. This study critically analyses the manner in which lesbians are portrayed within society, through assessing the ideas and sentiments that are communicated or reinforced by the media amongst audiences about lesbians.

1.2 Brief History

Potgieter (2006:4) is quoted as saying: ‘I am not sure that everyone realises what it means to live in an open and free society’. This statement by Potgieter (2006) is expressive of the difficulty that is faced by the homosexual community within South Africa. In order to paint a brief history of the climate in which homosexuality was formerly experienced, one must highlight the apartheid period.

According to Leclerc-Madlala and Kearney (2006:11):

> 'When other parts of the world were sites of increasing liberal and often experimental sexual practices, as was the case in Europe and the United States during the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s , the apartheid regime in South Africa subjected sex and sexuality to heavy censorship and repressive policing'.

White nationalism was the basis of this political regime that resulted in the persecution of many individuals that did not fit in the desired mould. Isaack and Judge (2004:70) make reference to the Schedule 1 of the Criminal Procedure Act of 1977, which allowed for a private person to arrest any 'male suspected of sodomy'. This power that was given to private citizens not only expresses the perceived "unlawful" nature of homosexuality, but it also showed a willingness to permit persecution of gay men by the public. As Isaack and Judge (2004) so clearly state, the prohibition of homosexuality was taken to extensive measures as it was actively policed. This indicates that there was no distinction between what was done in the public and private spheres.

It should be acknowledged that these restrictions were for a long time reserved for gay men and excluded lesbian women. The reason for the difference between lesbians and gays was because lesbians were simply ignored during the apartheid period. According to Wells and Polders (2006), the denial that was formerly displayed by this government with regards to the prevalence or even the existence of lesbianism, resulted in a delay in the criminalisation of lesbianism. One might assume the reason for this neglect of lesbians and of lesbianism is because the government did not feel threatened by women who loved other women while conversely, men who loved men seemed to threaten the notion of white patriarchal society.

The control that was maintained by the political regime during the pre-1994 period was experienced in every sphere of life. Posel (2004:53) expresses the specific manner in which sexuality, sexual practices, as well as 'public representations' were censored. The media was also held to these levels of control and management, which prevented any representation of any sexual content of both a heterosexual and homosexual nature, which was manifest within legislation. Leclerc-Madlala and Kearney (2006:12) reiterate this point by stating that 'legislation prohibited the media from explicit depictions of sex or avowedly sexual conversation'.

The post-1994 period features as a part of history that has come to contribute immensely towards the current tone of discourses around sexuality in South Africa. There has been visible growth in terms of the level at which sexuality has spread throughout this relatively new liberal democracy. Even as early as 1996, the new Constitution has allowed for sexual preference to be both a right and a private matter (Posel, 2004). This provides the South African citizenry with the freedom to choose whether to keep their sexual orientation a private matter, or whether to make it public with legal protection against discrimination.

Potgieter (2006) alludes to the gap between the alleged development that is taking place within the South African legal framework and how society at large has continued to see lesbians as the victims of hate crimes. The presence of legal rights and protection has been a major step in the right direction. However, there still seems to be a day-to-day struggle for gays and lesbians as they continue to be both demonised and victimised. The victimisation of homosexuals is mentioned by Wells and Polders (2006:21) as they highlight a belief shared particularly amongst black South Africans, who regard homosexuality as an "unAfrican" practice. This widely voiced view is essential to understanding the historical struggle of homosexuals within this country, as it is often referred to as an unnatural sexual preference and outside of "real" African culture and customs.

This brief discussion of the key aspects of the homosexual struggle within South Africa should assist with the provision of a basis from which current homosexual challenges can be understood. The newly established boundaries of private and public matters with regards to sexual orientation have created new challenges for lesbians in terms of visibility issues. Lesbian visibility in the media seems be an important component towards advancing visibility within reality and this connection should be acknowledged. 'The liberalisation of sexual expression' and the freedom of sexual preference lend themselves not only to embracing the day-to-day presence of lesbians but to their representation in mainstream media as well (Posel, 2004:55).

1.3 Justification of the Study

The media has the remarkable ability to reach members of the public and this has an impact on shaping the views of this public with regards to whether negative perceptions are changed or reinforced. For this reason, it seems that a critical analysis of these media representations has become increasingly important due to the fact that this group forms a part of the democratic citizenry to which the media has a great responsibility.

For many of these citizens, the media is the only sphere where they have any "contact" with people who have alternative sexual orientations. Thus, it becomes crucial to evaluate the messages that are disseminated about these groups, as they can be applied to real life situations. The fact that homosexuality is constitutionally accepted in South Africa does not mean that this is the case in terms of public attitudes. The harsh reality is that public tolerance of the homosexual community continues to be a challenge for most people. According to Mthethwa (2008), a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council's Ben Roberts and Vasu Reddy, 'found that, between 2003 and 2007, more than 80% of the population consistently felt that sex between two men or two women was always wrong'[1]. This study also reflects the general perception shared amongst the South African public of homosexuality being "un-African".

This attitude has clearly been reflected through the numerous cases in which black lesbians have been the victims of hate crimes. In 2006, 19-year-old Zoliswa Nonkonyana was attacked by a mob, which resulted in her death. AIDS activist Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa were both found raped and murdered on July 8 2007. A former soccer player, Eudy Simelane, also suffered a brutal rape and murder on April 28 2008. A number of other women shared a similar fate, such as 23-year-old Thokozane Qwabe, Simangele Nhlapo, and 16-year-old Madoe Mafubedu. These are just some of the names that come up in relation to these publicised hate crimes but there are large number of incidences that are never reported.

[1] This quotation is taken from the Mthethwa (2008) article which is available online from: http://www.thetimes.co.za/PrintEdition/Insight/Article.aspx?id=890420.

The relationship between the homosexual and heterosexual communities can often be tense due to the media images that are used to reflect the lifestyles of homosexuals. It occurs quite often that homosexuals are portrayed as sexual predators that are indiscriminate about the individuals they choose to become intimate with. These portrayals can potentially impact public perception in a manner in which, not only are homosexuals perceived as unfaithful companions, but that they also impose their preferences on others who may not be interested.

It then becomes a challenge for the SABC to navigate these societal rifts between how the homosexuals are generally viewed and the manner in which they are represented in the media. Within the context of a democratic state, the SABC has admittedly had a relatively recent history as a public service broadcaster, and as a PBS, it does, in fact, have an obligation to all members of society. However, according to Kupe (2003:4), the responsibilities of the SABC are at risk of being compromised due the fact that 'advertising contributes over 80%' of its funding. He continues with this argument stating:

> 'The consequences of lack of public funding has had a negative impact on programming and the extent to which the public service broadcaster is universally accessible with programming that satisfies the public's wants and needs'(Kupe, 2003:4).

According to Kupe (2003:3) a PBS can be defined as 'both a value and a practice'. This position is representative of the challenges that faces the SABC as it seeks to represent the interests and diversity of all members of the South African public. The public 'must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer within the central communications sectors and be able to contribute to developing and extending these representations' (Murdock, 1992:21). In the instance that there is a tenuous link between the values and the practice of a PBS, this can result in media representations that are not reflective of the interests of the public.

Croteau and Hoynes (2001) emphasise the relevance of the responsibility that the media have within a democracy:

> 'In a democracy, the media should reflect the range of views and experiences present in a diverse society. Citizens using the media should be able to find cultural representations

> and political expressions that are both reflective of their own views and experiences and that diverge considerably from those views and experiences' (2001: 151).

The question then arises with regard to how accommodating these representations are, particularly when they relate to minority groups that are less visible within society. The production of these media products can serve as a reference or an indication of issues of interest within a particular context. There must be a level of vigilance applied to the manner in which these programmes are presented as the potential impact extends beyond just a form of entertainment to a possible perspective through which lesbians are viewed.

The possibilities for positive media representations of lesbians are abundant. However, it should be acknowledged that there is an economic imperative present that has a bearing on the tone of these programmes. It seems imperative to seek to uncover whether or not these programmes are making strides towards providing alternative views and perspectives or purely providing entertainment. Programming which is based on entertainment particularly in the form of sensational content is devoid of a 'sense of serving a larger public interest' (Croteau and Hoynes, 2001:157). The tensions between public obligation or responsibility and frivolous entertainment make all the difference in the manner in which this minority group is represented. Often, there are instances where economic imperatives and accurate representations are in conflict, which is of great interest to this study.

The two programmes that have been selected for this analytical process are *Hard Copy* and *Society*, which are both locally produced and broadcasted on SABC 3 and SABC 1 respectively. The relevance of these two programmes is that both contain lesbian characters that are a part of the main cast with a relatively high level of importance to the overall storyline at one point or another. SABC 2 is excluded from this analysis with regard to a specific programme simply due to the fact that there is no fictional representation of lesbians the channel.

1.4 Research Questions

1. In what ways or how are lesbians represented in programmes on the SABC?
   (a) Is there a diversity of representations of lesbians in these programmes?

2. What factors influence the transmission or scheduling of programmes in which lesbians are depicted on the SABC?

1.5 Hypothesis

This study has two core assumptions. The first assumption is that the manner in which lesbians are being represented is hyper-sexualised through limited characterisations. The second assumption is that lesbians are being utilised as a source of entertainment, particularly for curious members of the public.

1.6 Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation contains six distinct chapters. Chapter 1 fulfils the role of an introduction to the study, while Chapter 2 consists of the joint literature review and theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 explores the methods applied within the study. Chapter 4 illustrates the findings of the study, which are then analysed in Chapter 5. The final chapter, Chapter 6, contains the conclusions and observations that have been made as a result of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In order to address the questions raised in chapter 1, it is essential to explore literature and specific theories that will lead the analysis in the desired direction. There were difficulties experienced in relation to the acquisition of material. Efforts made to acquire readings related to the media representation of lesbians within the South African context revealed a scarcity of resources. The majority of the literature used within this research is from a Western perspective. The key theories that are applied in this study are the critical political economy of the media and representation.

The literature review and the theoretical framework serve as a foundation on which this study is based. There are a number of concepts and theories that are extracted from this chapter which are also used in the subsequent findings and analysis chapters.

2.2 Literature Review

Hart (2003) conducted a study that looks at the manner in which gay men are represented on American television. He uses some popular television programmes as references. The opening reference in his paper is the historical event of 1998-99 when *Will and Grace* became the first prime-time programme with a gay lead character. This momentous development in gay visibility in mainstream American television took place relatively recently, and South Africa still attempts to negotiate its way around the idea of similar programming.

The notion of 'symbolic annihilation' as Hart (2003:598) appropriately highlights, refers to the systematic non-representation of homosexuals within the media. This places pressure on the gay and lesbian movement to encourage visibility as they provide a watchdog by lobbying for media visibility. Hart (2003) draws on the ways in which reality and social movements can begin to

transcend into the fictional realm of media representations. This is a development that is also discussed in this study.

The representations of gay men according to Hart (2003) suffered quite a blow with the negative reinforcement of AIDS and homosexual men in the media. It would be interesting to assess whether or not lesbian media representations in South Africa are taking a similar path, possibly with another type of associated stigma.

In this reading, Hart (2003) examines the gay characters in each of the three programmes and he looks at how they are portrayed and the interpersonal relationships of each character as well. He mentions one noteworthy similarity that is shared by two of the three programmes; the disappearance of the gay character. This is something that should not be taken lightly as it is directly linked to the issue of visibility. The disappearance of a homosexual character can have a negative effect in a manner that is similar to negativity that is often associated with a complete lack of visibility.

Kanner (2002) expresses the view that the diversity that exists within the lesbian community is influenced by factors such as history, and location, which represents different manifestations of this dynamic community. The acknowledgment of difference is an ideal premise from which the methods used to represent lesbians on mainstream television can be assessed. Identity, according to Kanner (2002), can be decided upon on different levels, for some race comes first and sexual orientation is secondary, while others perceive sexual identity as the leading identity.

The notion of lesbianism is problematic as lesbians are often labelled in a number of ways; Butch-femme, butch qua butch, sports dyke, academic lesbian, New Age lesbian, leather dyke fall under the lesbian community (Kanner, 2002). There is one specific subgroup mentioned by Kanner (2002:2), which she pinpoints as the focus of a new interest within prime-time television dramas, which are “lipstick lesbians”.

This reading poses an interesting challenge with regards to understanding the ‘automatic and spontaneous identification’ of the various lesbian types, which is an issue that relates to the

manner in which lesbians are represented (Kanner, 2002: 3). The presence of some easily identifiable traits provides some level of ease, particularly for an outsider to the lesbian community. According to Kanner (2002) butch lesbians continue to remain the most visible. The perceptibility of the butch as a lesbian does not afford her the "luxury" of wearing a veil of heterosexuality.

The use of these categories by Kanner (2002) is applied to print images in relation to hair styles, body type, and activity. Participants seem to be in agreement with the features that relate to the butch lesbian, and the results of Kanner's (2002) study can provide a foundation for others who seek to use the butch label.

According to Ciasullo (2001), the emergence of the lesbian into the mainstream media was part of an ongoing struggle and eventually, over time, lesbians became visible through what she refers to as "lesbian chic". This has come to elicit a view of the lesbian as a fascinating object. The implications of this on the views of the public should be acknowledged. Ciasullo (2001) is wary of the manner in which the media frame issues which are then subsequently disseminated to the public. In fact, she poses what appears to be a good question: 'We must consider how the emergence of "the lesbian" is constructed, characterised, and framed by the media that are presenting it to middle America. What kind of lesbian has "come out" in the past decade?'(2001:578). These are issues and questions that should be raised in the South African context, in order to reflect on some of the possible disparities between reality and what is seen in the media.

The "butch" and "femme" labels that are often mentioned in relation to lesbians are questioned by Ciasullo (2001:579) as she suggests that it can be a rather limiting way of perceiving lesbian representations. The difficulty with the use of limited terms such as "butch" and "femme" can encourage the proliferation of homogeneous media representations of lesbians. Although this is a valid point, these labels serve as a helpful tool through which lesbian representations can be understood, albeit on a very broad and basic level. The use of these terms does not necessarily imply that there are only two types of lesbians within any given society. Ciasullo (2001:581) uses these labels in relation to mainstream culture, which is often the perspective through which

lesbians are represented, rather than through the perspective of lesbian subculture where lesbian labels continue to expand.

"Cultural forces", as they are referred to by Ciasullo (2001:580), influence both the formation of a lesbian identity and the "style" that is selected. It appears that this notion of "style" pertains to the manner in which lesbians chose to physically represent themselves to the outside world, in terms of their choice of clothing and grooming. According to Ciasullo (2001), "style" is informed by both straight and lesbian cultures, which in turn leads back to the degree of visibility in terms of whether a particular lesbian is recognisable as a member of the lesbian community. The concern over the proliferation of lesbian focused fantasies is legitimate as Ciasullo (2001) alludes to the "femme" as the primary target, whereas the butch according to her is a challenge to mainstream views of the "acceptable" lesbian.

Images of the butch are invisible, according to Ciasullo. This is because the "butch" does not seem to fit the mainstream ideal of the lesbian fantasy. Ciasullo (2001) attributes the appeal of the "femme" body to the process of heterosexualisation, which leads one to make the assumption that the "femme" is heterosexual. There is a highly adaptable nature within the "femme" label, which affords the "femme" the opportunity to move between lesbian and heterosexual, making her more "palatable" (Ciasullo, 2001:602).

The lesbian body with regards to this reading is a highly contentious issue, due to the seemingly unrealistic flexibility that is afforded to both the lesbian body and identity. According to Ciasullo (2001:593), the aim of mainstream media is to ensure that the lesbian body is consumable and thus, there are two main categories, the conventionally attractive and those that are not conventionally attractive and remain in the shadows.

The media example that is referred to in this reading is a film called *Chasing Amy*, in which a lesbian girl has a relationship with a boy. This fuels the notion that if a lesbian is consumable, there is always the possibility that she might become heterosexual. Hence Ciasullo (2001:592) asserts the trouble with 'mainstream cultural representations of lesbianism' by stating that the

media encourages the expectation that there is a probability that ‘she who is lesbian can “unbecome” lesbian’.

There is a struggle between the good and the bad lesbian, the “femme” and the “butch” respectively within this reading and this appears to stem from mainstream views. According to Ciasullo (2001) the butch lesbian is rarely made visible in the media, and when she is present, she is depicted as someone who is disturbed as she lives somewhere between ‘cultural imagination’ and ‘cultural landscapes’. An alternative way of articulating the point that is made above is by saying, that mainstream society is aware of the “butch”. However, they are not interested in making her a part of their fantasies and their “cultural landscapes”. The butch lesbian can be simplistically identified as ‘unfemininity’ and ‘nonfemaleness’, which are often based upon heterosexual ideals (Ciasullo, 2001:581).

Image and self-presentation weigh heavily in terms of prospects for visibility in the mainstream media, which leaves the “butch” further along the margins of recognition in these media representations. Ciasullo (2001) argues that the “butch” aesthetic is what makes her invisible and unattractive in the media, and very conspicuous in the real world. The fact that the “butch” body does not conform to societal expectations of what a female body should look like, she is tossed aside as inconsumable. The “de-lesbianizing” of the female body is what sets the “femme” apart from the “butch” who is confined to being a lesbian and thus she is ‘not palatable’ (Ciasullo, 2001:602).

Ciasullo (2001:586) speaks of the ‘packaging of the lesbian body’, which relates to the inclination amongst the heterosexual audience to want to adjust lesbian images in a manner that they can appreciate. The presentation of the lesbian in a manner that is aligned with mainstream ideals of desirability is achieved through ‘sanitising’ the lesbian by ‘feminising’ her as a ‘conventionally attractive’ woman (Ciasullo, 2001:586). This approach is what makes the lesbian body more acceptable as a media product to the mainstream, heterosexual audience.

The “femme” body is consumed in an enthusiastic manner, because she does not fit the traditional image of what a lesbian looks like. However, she has also come to conform to what

heterosexual audiences view as beautiful, glamorous and thus desirable (Ciasullo, 2001). There appears to be a degree of identification between the heterosexual woman and the "femme", which affords the "femme" a level of acceptance that the "butch" cannot attain in mainstream media. This observation then introduces more questions in relation to whether or not lesbian relationships are being represented or lesbian experiences and for what purposes. It is possible that the media are not representing lesbians at all; instead, they are portraying women in intimate relationships with other women, while simultaneously maintaining codes and ideals of heterosexuality.

Ciasullo (2001) suggests that the sexuality of the actresses that play these characters is also of concern to the manner in which lesbians are depicted. A heterosexual actress that has not had prior lesbian interactions or relationships will very likely portray a lesbian very differently than an actress who is in fact lesbian. According to Ciasullo (2001:597-8), 'there is a slippage between the characters that the actresses play and the actresses themselves, between their on-screen and off-screen lives'. It would be interesting to assess whether South African actresses suffer from the "slippage" mentioned above, as the actresses attempt to navigate their real life experiences with that of their characters.

Ciasullo (2001) provides some solid building blocks to facilitate research on this topic, which is needed due to the lack of serious inquiry with regard to lesbian media representations in the South African context. This is a challenge that will hopefully be lessened by some of the theories and approaches used not only by Ciasullo (2001), but Kanner (2002), as well as Hart (2003).

Berry (2001:212) focuses on the issues facing homosexuals of colour in East Asia. He argues that film representations of homosexuals do not explicitly reflect reality. He also firmly asserts that they can express the cultural meanings of homosexuality of a given context. This also has implications for what it means to be gay or rather, the gay identification process as specific cultural norms come into play. A link can be made to the representation of lesbians in the South African media, as there are a number of cultural forces present that dictate, not only the nature of these representations, but also how the public receives them, which is just as important.

Berry (2001:215) makes a pertinent point as he alludes to the struggle of marginal sexual orientations in relation to the adoption of homosexual identities and the impact in terms of how they affect one's 'ability to perform one's role in the family'. It would be interesting to see how this might be reflected in relation to a multi-cultural society such as South Africa. According to Berry (2001:224), mainstream representations of homosexuality within East Asia attempt to reconcile 'gayness with the obligations of traditional family roles', whereas their Anglo-American counterparts tend to cut their family ties.

Chowdry (1995) speaks to lesbians in the media who are of African and Asian decent about media representations of lesbianism. One South Asian interviewee mentions her desire to challenge stereotypes by creating alternative images, which is connected to the idea of diversity of images as a means of overcoming stereotypes. However, this also becomes challenging as some of the women in this reading do not want to be identified as lesbian and this could possibly have an impact on their media products (Chowdry, 1995: 134).

The question of the Black lesbian identity is one that is raised by Chowdry (1995) as it relates to the types of images that are created to represent lesbians in the media. One interviewee explains that her vision is to refrain from becoming objects, as she argues that Black lesbians are already objectified on the level of race and gender and should not add sexuality to the objectification process (Chowdry, 1995:139).

This raises some of the challenges faced by Black lesbian media producers as they try to negotiate their way through self–representation while challenging stereotypes. There is mention of the act of 'self-censoring', which according to this interviewee relates to an unwillingness to expose the "secret" lives of lesbians leaving them open to criticism (Chowdry, 1995:143).

Beirne (2006), in an article relating to the lesbian based programme *The L Word*, looks at the different roles and labels ascribed to lesbians on cable television. She argues that very little forward movement is being made with regards to the type of lesbian that is represented on television. Beirne (2006) also asserts that the fashion-focused lesbian on television currently, is

no different than what was previously seen in the 1990s, and *The L Word* according to her, is no exception.

Beirne (2006:3) mentions the growing prevalence of the lipstick lesbian, while also stating that these images 'have been constructed for a heterosexual media and populace'. She also acknowledges that there are economic and political constraints that clearly impact on the nature of these representations of lesbian women. The manner in which these forces are addressed within lesbian related programming is of great significance. Beirne (2006:3) cites *The L Word* as an example of how a lesbian is reflected in a manner that is 'historically invisible from the cultural imagination of what constitutes a lesbian via her frequent in-distinguish-ability from heterosexuality'. This quote expresses Beirne's (2006) frustration with the labelling of these characters as lesbian while the very same characters are hidden amongst their heterosexual counterparts due to the similar styling approach that is used.

Femme lesbians, according to Beirne (2006) fulfil the role of the culturally visible lesbian, and the superficial similarities shared between the femme and the heterosexual woman, in turn facilitates the indistinguishable difference between the two. This point is pertinent due the fact that it raises questions about whether or not the femme lesbian really makes an overall contribution to the struggle for "real" lesbian visibility particularly within mainstream media.

Another aspect of the notion of the visibility of lesbians in general, is discussed in this reading with reference made to courtship rituals, in the programme mentioned above. There is mention made of clothing, body movements such as "the walk", as well as reactions to intimacy between other lesbian couples (Beirne, 2006). The discussion is further complicated once other factors are incorporated such as juxtaposition of two different lesbian characters.

The malleability of lesbian style can be problematic as Beirne (2006) mentions through the proximity of any two lesbian characters in a scene. Jenny and Dana, as individual characters in *The L Word*, are represented in a particularly feminine manner. However, once they are put together, Jenny maintains the femme role, while Dana adopts the role of 'the butch in the scene' (Beirne, 2006:10). It seems that the manner, in which these two characters are contrasted, is

through the levels or degrees of femininity or lack thereof. This change does not only pertain to behaviour but it may also extend to clothing, which are both used in the attempts to attract the attention of a particular type of woman.

A good illustration of the butch style, according to Beirne (2006), is Candace, who places her hair into a slick ponytail, and enjoys wearing pants and tops that expose her well-defined arms as a reflection of her upper body strength. This is also related to her profession as a carpenter. However, it is possible that her dress style is a consequence of her occupation, which requires flexibility in order to do the job. In fact, Beirne (2006:18) mentions the fact that Candace in scenes outside of work wears more make-up and more feminine tops, which 'displays a somewhat more femme veneer,' although it does not differ too much from her usual style.

Shane on the other hand embodies the role of the "essential butch", when she is contrasted with the situation specific butch character Candace. According to Beirne (2006:21) Shane's "butchness" is ingrained in her 'clothes, walk, posture and mannerisms'. It seems that there is a distinctive quality to Shane's style that leaves very little ambiguity with regards to her sexual orientation. To a certain extent, one might argue that Shane poses as a challenge to the traditionally acceptable representation of a lesbian in terms of mainstream expectations.

In a programme such as *The L Word* where there are a large number of lesbian characters, the potential for several representations is relatively high. The opportunity for diversity in terms of the type of lesbians that are represented within a programme can be achieved for as long as there is no token lesbian that is responsible for representing all things lesbian (Beirne, 2006:15). There are many different components to what fully constitutes a lesbian persona and lifestyle, which would be difficult to embody within a single character representing an entire community of people. One might argue that this is what would distinguish a lesbian themed programme such as *The L Word* from a programme with a single lesbian character. The extent to which issues relating to lesbianism would be addressed could potentially be superficial as it pertains to an individual lesbian character rather than a group of lesbians.

Roles with regards to characters do not exist within a vacuum, as there are other factors that influence these interactions. One major factor that Beirne (2006:16) mentions is that of heteronormativity and the ascription of roles within the confines of this perspective. The analysis of roles, particularly in relation to lesbians, can be quite a complex endeavour in terms of assessing whether or not heteronormativity has informed the role assignment process. There is a difference between the representation of lesbian relationships in a manner that is familiar to heterosexuals and their own relationships, and the representation of lesbian relationships in a manner that is accurate and respectful to their unique experiences.

The representation of the interactions between two lesbian characters has the potential to exhibit more than just the assigned roles and dynamics between "the butch" and the femme" binary lesbian categories. It can also display the process of the expression of interest. There is a specific scene in which the expression of interest between two women is instigated by a male admirer, and the growth of the attraction facilitated by the approval of the male gaze (Beirne, 2006:19). This form of approval and subsequent action between the two women can symbolise a lesbian couple that has obtained validation from the voyeuristic heterosexual male.

Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives provides some great insights into the very private world of the African lesbian experience. Kheswa and Wieringa (2005) focus specifically on South African lesbians and their perception of self within the country. One woman included in the reading, expresses how her gravitation towards boys and male dominated activities such as taking care of livestock featured as the source of great contention where her mother was concerned. Kheswa and Wieringa (2005:210) describe this same woman who is now a police officer, as 'very butch-looking' to the extent that she often finds it difficult to convince people that she is a woman.

It is interesting to note when two different lesbian women are asked to identify themselves, they refer to themselves as lesbians, and they both steer clear of placing themselves in the femme and butch categories. In fact, one the two women says, 'I feel if I say I am femme, people will expect me to behave in a particular way' (Kheswa and Wieringa, 2005:211). This statement suggests

that this woman experiences some difficulty with placing herself within the confines of heteronormative ideals of what it means to be and look like a lesbian.

One of the respondents who is a self-identified lesbian also proclaims to have a manly attitude, which she feels, stems partially from her "manly" body type (Kheswa and Wieringa, 2005:212). It appears that there is an assumed connection between the physiological traits and butch/femme roles that are assigned to different lesbian women. Kheswa and Wieringa (2005) also mention the impact of inter-lesbian relations on the formation of a lesbian identity with regards to the butch/femme dynamic. In fact, one woman reveals that she could not decide whether she was butch or femme. However, through a difficult relationship with a butch, she then realised that she too was butch (Kheswa and Wieringa, 2005). It seems that interactions between lesbians do play a role in the development of an identity that is reflective of the greater lesbian community.

The notion of what it means to be a lesbian can be confusing, even for lesbians, as it is mentioned above, and a part of this confusion relates to the stereotype of lesbians being manly or masculine. Another respondent explains how she assumed that her attraction to women meant that she had to be butch and behave in a masculine manner, even though it wasn't who she was (Kheswa and Wieringa, 2005).

2.3 Critical Political Economy of the Media

Representations in the media, which are linked to market forces, are also a real threat to the images of minority groups. This position is related to the institutional biases, which reflect the challenges posed by the political economy of the media as Ferguson reveals:

> 'As we have suggested in the discussion of media markets, changes in representation may also reflect a response to an assessment of changes in the market, and the profits that might be gained by responding to minority tastes and sensitivities' (1998:165).

It is vital that this acknowledgment be made because it supports the position that there is possibility for change although it may not be for moralistic reasons. The critical political economy of the media is useful to this topic as it tries to explain why certain programmes are

made and whom they seek to appeal to with these representations. This theory is also concerned with the way that 'content reinforce, challenge, or influence existing class and social relations' (McChesney, 1998:3).

Gandy (2000) refers to a component of the political economy which relates to audiences being treated as consumers in the market. An extension of this position further suggests that programming is greatly based on profitability and the segmentation of audiences. Racial and ethnic identities are only part of the complex influences that inform the decisions of audiences in terms of the programming choices they make, according to Davis and Gandy (1999). The problem that arises out of this approach is that people are multidimensional and race and ethnicity are only some of the deciding factors in what informs their media choices.

2.3.1 Funding and Financing

Funding and financing of media products is closely related to market value, due to the importance of profitability in ensuring the vitality of in the media production industry. Lesbians and gays, according to Fejes (2003:213) have become equals 'as economic subjects'. Gandy (2000) relates this specifically to advertisers as he claims that advertisers have a leading role in deciding the value of certain segments over others. This could have greater implications which are unintended because if the segmentation is done along racial and ethnic lines, it can lead to the reinforcement, exclusion or marginalisation of certain groups. Gandy (2000) refers to the social reality of Latinos and Blacks being a part of the most impoverished populations, thus making them undesirable on two different levels. Latinos and Blacks tend to have lower market values as minorities and on this premise it is possible to assume that the same applies for homosexuals who are a minority in terms of their sexual orientation.

Ferguson (1998) makes a potentially powerful suggestion, which understands the use of stereotypes as an economically-based decision. This position explores the convenience and the ease with which the media can reproduce images through the use of stereotypes that are widely understood. The lack of depth that is involved with this approach to media production may make

economic sense. However, the potential to create harm is real as they can also further perpetuate negative stereotypes that may be present within any given society.

2.4 Representation

It should be acknowledged that representation as a concept is a social construct, and it often fails to reflect reality (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997). Croteau and Hoynes expand on this position by stating:

> 'Representations - even those that attempt to reproduce reality such as the documentary film- are the result of the processes of selection that invariably mean that certain aspects of reality are highlighted and others neglected' (1997:134).

According to Taylor and Willis (1999:39) and Bernstein (2002), representations are 'the practice of placing different signs together in order to render complex abstract concepts intelligible and meaningful'. Taking into account the manner in which these signs are put together is important. However, Meijer and van Zoonen (2002:327) state that representations are a 'distorted reflection of a certain aspect of reality'. This point emphasises the point that media representations are not only distorted reflections of reality, but also that only a small piece of an entire reality is distorted and finally reflected. Bernstein (2002:261) highlights that within theories of representation, 'it is necessary to draw a clear distinction between reality and its media representation'.

Reliance on 'readily available stereotypes' of minorities appears to be a means through which a group can be clearly identified (Ferguson, 1998:178). Hall (1997) is in agreement with this view. However, he also highlights the presence of a process of exchange where meaning is produced and shared amongst those with a shared culture.

Van Zoonen (1994:41) reiterates this point by saying that reality is represented in a way that reflects a process, which includes the selection and neglect of certain aspects within the construction process, and they play on 'collective hopes, fears and fantasies'. It should also be remembered that audiences are also a part of this process as they remain in the position to

interpret these images. This interpretation is often specific to a particular audience and thus, multiple interpretations can arise from a single text. Hart (2003) argues that a part of the selection process involves the domination of certain groups over others. This domination mentioned by Hart (2003) according to Borzello et al (1985:11) is enjoyed by men, as they appear to be in the position to elicit control over representations of women, which has contributed to 'the transformation of the woman into object'.

Hart (2003:598) engages with the concept of representation in relation to issues of 'nonrepresentation or underrepresentation' and how these decisions are in the hands of media heads. The theory suggests that the process occurs systematically in four stages, which compromises of a progression from nonrepresentation to eventually diverse roles, which are both negative and positive. The 'four chronological stages of media representation of social groups', by Clarke, which are mentioned by Hart (2003:598): 'nonrecognition', 'ridicule', 'regulation' and finally 'a complete range of roles, both positive and negative'. It must be made clear that these stages do not occur outside of the cultural and political context within a given society.

The media plays an important role in society due to the fact that many people see this as a forum through which society is reflected or represented. According to Hart (2003), the media informs the way in which gays and lesbians are both perceived and discussed. This view relates to the understanding of homosexuality as being something that is outside of what is commonly experienced and thus, the media serves as a tool of insight. However, there should be questions posed about who exactly is being represented and by whom and how. For this purpose, it becomes essential to this study to critically analyse the manner in which the media represents lesbians as minorities.

Croteau and Hoynes (1997) discuss the gaps between representations in the media and reality. It seems that the commonly shared position amongst these authors is the importance of diversity as it is a key component of the social world. There is a definite selection process that takes place with regards to the representation process. Kuhn (1985:19) eloquently expresses this position by stating the following: 'Representations are productive: …far from merely reproducing a pre-existing world, constitute a highly coded discourse…'.

Ferguson (1998) alludes to how the media is in a position to reproduce social ills such as racism and homophobia. This is related to how the media serves as a leading source of information and can have a fundamental role in the development of "opinions and beliefs". The impact of these media representations extends beyond just opinions and beliefs into ideologies which can reinforce myths and prejudices. With regard to ideologies, Avila-Saavedra (2009:7) suggests that through 'social structures and cultural production', a normalisation process can be fostered in a manner that adheres to what is socially dominant within a given period. This point seems to highlight the observation that domination does not always take an aggressive form. In fact, it is possible for the same result to occur in the absence of coercion.

The reason that this is of significance is due to the fact that the reproduction process can be positive or negative reinforcement. Taylor and Willis (1999) argue that the proliferation of negative media representations of gays and lesbians serve as a systematic depreciation of public perceptions of homosexuals. It should be remembered, however, that the meanings within a media representation are not necessarily manifest, and thus, the active role of the audience becomes clear as they extract various meanings from the texts (Meijer and van Zoonen, 2002).

2.5 Framing

The media's ability to capture reality is limited due to 'the complexities and intricacies' it would involve as Bernstein (2002: 261) claims. Bernstein (2002) raises the concern that it would take a large amount of information to construct an absolute replica of reality through the media. Macdonald (1995) relates this to one particular struggle, which is the manner that sexual orientation is reflected in magazines. She observes that often, when lesbianism is discussed, it is presented as a problem. This shows how the media can choose to frame issues in a way that seems problematic rather than a natural option.

The notion of "framing" of issues seems highly problematic and restrictive. Bernstein (2002:261) refers to framing as a contradiction with regards to the media's attempts to capture reality. A frame sets boundaries and limitations, which places focus on a particular aspect while

simultaneously and strategically ignoring others. The point made above also relates to the lack of 'meaningful discussion' around alternative sexualities in mainstream media, as there seems to be an inclination to over-simplify these representations (Macdonald, 1995:176).

There is also a distinction made between the representation in the news and fictional entertainment media. Race and other societal classifications, whether reflected in the news or in fictional material, have an impact on the way that society perceives this minority group. Thus, the issue of perceived relevance of the media type has a great deal to do with the expectations attached to the content that is produced. News and fictional media must be received in such a way that this is taken into account.

The 'mediation of representations' occurs both within fictional and news media and this influence must be recognized (Bernstein, 2002:261). The genre of the media product is of great significance to the actual content. Avila-Saavedra (2009:12) supports this view by suggesting that the depiction of 'gender-traditional interactions among gay men could be explained by their humorous potential for the television sitcom genre'. Thus, it seems necessary to view these fictional programmes critically in terms of the content that is selected. The indoctrination of the audiences is also possible through the production of media texts that reinforce social order and power of those that are already in control (Bernstein, 2002:262).

2.6 Representation and Stereotypes

Taylor and Willis (1999:41) state that stereotypes 'usually represent the values, attitudes, behaviours and background' of a specific group of people. However, this does not imply that all representations are by any means inaccurate. According to an alternative definition given by Bernstein (2002:265), stereotyping 'means that an assumption has been made that certain people are not individuals, but the same as each other'. Stereotypes as a form of representation portray generalised views or assumptions of a particular social group. The convenience of stereotypes within the representation process is problematic as there is a tendency to rely on 'shared knowledge', which can be limiting rather than progressive (Bernstein, 2002:262).

Hart (2003:597) makes mention of how gay characters are often represented as 'the stereotypical flamboyant queen'. Avila-Saavedra (2009:8) reiterates this point, although in this instance, he also speaks specifically about how 'gay men were consistently portrayed as effeminate in the media'. It seems that the conventions by which these groups are represented remain relatively similar with the odd exception that might seek to explore alternative forms of portrayal.

Within the lesbian sub-culture, certain groups of lesbians place emphasis on appearance and clothing, such as the butch that wears men's clothing (Ponse, 1998:250). Often, the media take it upon themselves to manipulate overt aesthetic choices and represent them as applicable to more than just a portion of the lesbian population. Bernstein (2002:262) addresses the reinforcement of media representations and the manner in which 'these representations will seem natural' and increasingly acceptable. Thus, one has to question whether or not these images are "fair" and truly representative of the broader lesbian community. Williams (2003) asserts that there is nothing fair about stereotypes. Instead, they are likely to impose generalisations that make distinctions difficult within these stereotyped groups. Part of what makes these stereotypes so problematic is that these representations often normalise homosexuality through 'heterosexual ideals' (Avila-Saavedra, 2009:12).

Williams (2003:130) makes the questionable argument that stereotypes are necessary 'in order to process the vast array of information flowing around modern society'. It is an alternative approach to understanding the role of stereotypes in media representations, which claims that stereotypes, in addition to restricting perceptions, provide people with a framework with which they can view society. Ferguson (1998) clearly suggests that this framework mentioned by Williams (2003) tends to emphasise the negative while ignoring more positive and progressive representations.

Van Zoonen (1994:38) makes reference to the basis on which stereotypes are formed and according to her, this occurs through the development of a norm so that anything beyond this norm is regarded as 'otherness' or 'deviance'. Hall (1993) elaborates on this concept of deviant behaviour, by making the assertion that the focus lies in the labelling of this behaviour, while relating it to what is referred to as "social problems".

This perception of "otherness" can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes in media representations, due to the possibility that these are images that are used to understand certain members of society. Again, there should be recognition of the point that there is a selection process involved in the labelling of certain behaviours, which means that deviance pertains, not only to context, but to historical period as well. According to Hall (1993:67), an appropriate definition for deviant behaviour is related to actions that remain on the periphery of the 'consensual norms'.

Stereotypes are essentially social constructions just as media representations, which entail a process through which certain traits are chosen over others in terms of what is shown in the media. Williams (2003) and Taylor and Willis (1999) assert that stereotypes find themselves in the midst of power dynamics in society, which certainly has an impact on the nature of these images. Taylor and Willis (1999:41) expand on this point by stating that 'stereotyped groups have been defined as such, not by themselves but by those who hold greater social power'. This reflects the development of normalised views, which come from a 'focus on broad similarities and identifying characteristics', which serve as social indicators of dominant views within a particular society (Taylor and Willis, 1999:41). Ferguson (1998:179) adds that these stereotypes are sustained because of their 'functional utility' which is not concerned with the impact or the ramifications of the continued usage of these stereotypes.

Shohat and Stam (1994) assert that all negative stereotypes are damaging. However, they also state that the power that they have within a society varies. This is a pertinent point as it brings into question how public responsibility should be managed in relation to representations that utilise stereotypes, particularly in respect to minorities such as homosexuals. An alternative way in which stereotypes can be perceived as negative is in terms of the harm that they cause. According to Avila-Saavedra (2009), a stereotype can ostensibly appear to be positive. However, they can also be harmful as they can 'trivialise and undermine' what it means to identify as a member of a particular group (2009:16).

2.7 Representations and Minority Groups

Ferguson (1998) looks at the media production process and how biases of those involved can be reflected in these programmes. Race, gender, class and sexuality are all affected by these biases, which can very easily lead to stereotypes. Williams (2003:124) mentions the propensity of the media to portray minorities such as gays, lesbians and women in general in a 'simplistic and derogatory manner'. The significance of an approach such as the one mentioned above is the notion of the 'palatable image' which Avila-Saavedra (2009:19) highlights as a form of reassurance to the heterosexual majority. They are exposed to media representations of lesbians that do not challenge their dominant views and expectations. The problem with this is that it supports the continued spread of prejudices and stereotypes instead of broadening horizons and representing alternatives to the norm.

The presence of stereotypical media representations can create certain expectations about what the subject of the representation 'can and cannot do, can and cannot be' which can be damaging to any efforts towards acceptance (Williams, 2003: 132). Ferguson (1998: 159) argues that this system of production 'oversupplies negative images of minority groups'. He also mentions another pertinent issue; the 'deficiencies in morality', which ensure that the minority groups seem like deviant members of society who are disruptive in nature.

Ferguson (1998) refers to earlier representations of homosexuals in the film industry and how they were portrayed as deviants, perverts, and comic figures. There was a lack of real life or accurate representations of these minority members of society. The portrayal of alternative sexual orientations in the media is historically based due to the fact that changes across time affect the nature of the representations in the media. During the 1960s, the dominant and conservative figures of society monitored and even censored the images that contain homosexual characters (Ferguson, 1998). The roles given to these characters in these products had a tendency to be disturbed, and even suicidal. The implications of such representations are greatly problematic due to the possibility that for many outside of this lifestyle, the media serves as the only source of information.

Hart (2003:598) argues that alternative lifestyles for many are experienced through the media because it is often the case that the interactions between sexual orientations do not necessarily occur. This raises questions about the role of the media and the difficulties that can be faced if the social responsibilities of the media are ignored and minorities are reflected in an unfavourable light. According to Croteau and Hoynes (2001), the possibility of the media being an isolated source of information can be problematic due to content becoming more commercialised. It is likely under these circumstances that the media will be less interested in managing its social impact than the accumulation of profit.

Diversity has been increasingly seen as a more desirable outcome in more recent productions of homosexuality. This illustrates how historical context has an impact on the manner in which a single issue is covered across time. The presence of homosexual media producers in the industry to produce content that pertains to their own communities provides alternative views, which can be more realistic (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997). This would require some transparency about one's sexual identity in order to facilitate a progressive contribution to these programmes which would hopefully represent aspects of one's lesbian experience.

The American GLBT movement served an instrumental role in championing the visibility and media representation of the broader GLBT community for a number of years (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). Croteau and Hoynes (1997) mention the specific historical period which was a turning point in the representation of homosexuals: 'As the gay and lesbian movement gained strength in the 1970s and 1980s, it more actively sought fairer television portrayals of homosexuals' (1997:159). The changes in this period served as a catalyst towards the promotion of the portrayal of more positive and realistic images within the media in the United States.

A trend that is of interest that can be observed in the South African context is the passing of the Civil Unions Bill, which legalised gay and lesbian marriages on November 16 2006, and possibly, also precipitated the broadcast of *Society* by SABC 1. Avila-Saavedra (2009) makes a link between legislation in relation to same-sex marriage and media representations of gays and lesbians. He suggests that, in a situation where there is an expressed aversion to the legalisation

of same-sex marriage, ‘one can expect that the range of queer media representation will be restricted even further’ (Avila-Saavedra, 2009: 19).

The role of activism in the challenging of offensive media products is central to the fight against stereotypes. Croteau and Hoynes (1997) use the examples of the African-American-led civil rights movement during the mid 1900s and the fight against stereotypes in the Native American community, which supported the changes in the media and pushed media producers into using stereotypes in a more obscure manner. The same applies to gay and lesbian activists who seek to challenge mainstream media in terms of the representation of homosexuals. Croteau and Hoynes (1997) still find some difficulty in dealing with the perspective from which the homosexual experience is being told because of the fact that the control lies in the hands of members of society who remain on the periphery of the homosexual community.

Progressively, the roles of gays and lesbians have become more realistic with time. This has contributed towards the interests of homosexuals but to the dismay of the conservative members of society. Croteau and Hoynes (1997:160) state that these conservatives objected to the positive portrayals of lesbians and gays and organised boycotts against advertisers associated with these programmes. Avila-Saavedra (2009:6) alludes to this struggle by highlighting ‘the perceived liberalism’ through which he is critical of the manner in which gay males in particular are represented on American television. He is analytical in his understanding of gay representations in the media as his evaluation is made on the basis of the nature of the representations rather than the number of the representations.

Restrictions placed on the media in terms of the portrayal of homosexuals, ensures that these representations are not too uncomfortable for conservative members of society. This explains why the depiction of homosexuals in intimate situations is still so limited (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997). These representations cause further complications because of the claim is made that homosexuals are incapable of having committed relationships. This may be attributed to a resistance amongst many heterosexuals that are not in support of seeing homosexuals being affectionate with one another. Avila-Saavedra (2009:8) asserts a similar, yet slightly different stance that, the representation of homosexuals is framed in a manner that is ‘acceptable for

heterosexual audiences by reinforcing traditional values'. He continues with this argument by stating that representations of gay men are acceptable within mainstream media for as long as there is an avoidance of inferences of 'any sexual desires and practices' (2009:8).

However, Croteau and Hoynes (1997:145) present an alternative position that there are some visible changes taking place in terms of the 'treatment of minorities' due to economic reasons. Even in the midst of change, the issue of producing homosexual media images that are "acceptable", particularly to the heterosexual man, is still a great challenge. This point relates to the caution raised by Avila-Saavedra (2009:8) to develop an awareness of the true nature of these representations so as to not overlook the presence of 'filtered versions' where 'sexuality, practices and desires' are restricted. Kuhn (1985:12) argues that the establishment of a comfort level within these images lies in the glamorisation of female sexuality through 'deceptive fascination', as 'sexuality is desirable exactly to the extent that it is idealised and unattainable'.

2.8 Identity formation

Bello (1995) acknowledges the tensions in the formation of identities for lesbians, especially for those who are not only minorities with regards to their sexual orientation, but their race as well. Jackson (2001) speaks of the struggle through which Asian homosexuals try to find themselves in the identities that have persisted within mainstream media representations of homosexuals, while highlighting that homosexuality is a term that is highly westernised. This borrowing of terms may lead to the assumption that homosexuality is a foreign phenomena.

One would assume that a part of identity formation in the lesbian community is connected to the representations that can be seen on television. Media representations of gays and lesbians have an influence on the manner in which these 'groups think about themselves' (Taylor and Willis, 1999:187). Moritz (2004:116) uses three main aspects to examine the representation of lesbians: 'sexuality, personal rights, and publicity or public disclosure'. According to the television shows evaluated by Moritz (2004), the characters tend to be desexualised and stripped of any real intimacy and they seem powerless due to the restrictive manner in which they are depicted. It becomes evident that the freedom to express one's sexual identity is not afforded on the basis of

whether the character identifies as homosexual. Moritz (2004:120-1) states that, 'obviously, the implied message in all these scripts suggest that it is not socially acceptable to be a lesbian, that caution is always advised in revealing these matters'.

Ponse (1998:249) argues that the formation of a lesbian identity is not without conflict, by explaining that 'role playing is a prevailing stereotype of lesbian behaviour in the heterosexual world,' and this is instrumental in the setting of a negative standard. It is evident from this point that the struggle to form a lesbian identity can be a process of great difficulty, partially due to the fact that it occurs in the midst of the constraints of heteronormativity. Avila-Saavedra (2009:13) alludes to these constraints by stating that 'heteronormativity is about the maintenance of the status quo', which confines these representations in a way that makes them appear to be common.

Identity formation, according to Ponse (1998:254), has five main steps, the first of which relates to the development of a sense of difference from heterosexuals, while also acknowledging one's attraction to people of the same sex. Secondly, understanding the relevance of the feelings and thoughts mentioned above within the context of the greater lesbian community. Once the third stage of acceptance and acknowledgment of being a part of the lesbian community is established, the coming out process must commence (Ponse, 1998:254-5). The lesbian then actively becomes a part of the lesbian community, which is the fourth stage, and then she enters the final stage of a physical and romantic relationship. Ponse (1998:255) acknowledges that the order of these steps is by no means fixed, although they are necessary. This point is supported by Troiden (1998:265) who states that identity formation is not 'a linear, step-by-step process', which permits some flexibility with regard to when each stage is completed.

Troiden (1998:261) also explores various models of homosexual identity formation while accounting for the tensions that may arise out of the fear of being stigmatised. In the first stage, which is sensitisation, there is an assumption of heterosexuality, as well as a feeling of being different from other girls within the same age group. According to Troiden (1998:266), this stage is reached before puberty, which leads to the second stage of identity confusion during adolescence. It is at this stage that certain feelings and thoughts begin to intensify. The

possibility of being lesbian is felt to a greater extent, and 'inner turmoil and uncertainty surrounding their ambiguous sexual status', ensue as they become increasingly aware of their sexuality (Troiden, 1998:267).

Identity confusion extends beyond just the initial 'lack of heterosexual interests' to the stigma associated with the acceptance of a homosexual identity. Troiden (1998:268) argues that society forces one to fit into one of two fixed categories one of which cannot be freely expressed amongst friends and family. Identity assumption, during stage three, is when an absolute acceptance of self is reached followed by a desire to reveal one's sexual identity to those within one's shared sexual community. One of the most important parts of this stage is the identification of self as a homosexual (Troiden, 1998:270-1).

Commitment is the final stage and it 'involves adopting homosexuality as a way of life' (Troiden, 1998:273). A feature of this stage is having a homosexual love relationship, while being open about one's sexual orientation amongst those outside of one's own homosexual community. The formation of a lesbian identity as the above models show underscores the fact that there is a long process through which the individual must face a great deal of conflict, internally and externally. Rejection and the fear of being stigmatised can impede the formation of a homosexual identity. Troiden (1998:277) suggests that the presence of supportive friends and family can ease the formation of this often condemned sexual identity.

2.9 Gender

There is a commonly shared belief that gender entails a simplistic division between men and women, which is spread by the media according to van Zoonen (1994). On a relatively simplistic level, the idea of masculinity and femininity seems to be ascribed along the lines of sex, but there is a degree to which the representations of gays and lesbians challenge these constructs. For example, Hart (2003:599) mentions the use of 'stereotypically effeminate' characters to represent gay men in the media. Williams (2003) opposes this position by stating that although this is how gay men were represented in the media, it realistically represents a large portion of the gay community. This gives support to the possibility that the labels of masculinity and femininity are

not fixed, rather, that they are fluid and can both be applied to men and women, especially those with alternative sexual preferences.

In using the media as a reference point in terms of assessing gender representation within a given society, women, in many instances, are objectified and limited in their roles. Anleu (2006:358) discusses this issue from the perspective of a contemporary western society, stating that 'femininity tends to be defined as the absence of masculinity, and gender norms specify separate roles and expectations for men and women'. Men and women, according to Strinati (2004:167) are represented by the media in a manner which reflects 'orthodox conceptions of femininity and masculinity'. This argument supports the notion that society and media are entwined and that social relationships that are represented in the media are filled with the nuances of discourses found in the broader society.

Meijer and van Zoonen (2002) suggest that although women as a group are quite diverse, this is not clearly reflected by the media. This is clear in the manner in which women appear to be in a similar struggle against underrepresentation along with other minority groups. Black people, obese individuals, as well as lesbians all fit into this category, and the 'black male body' in relation to the 'female body' with regards to the way that they are represented in the media, serves as an excellent illustration of this point (Meijer and van Zoonen, 2002:329). These two bodies find themselves embedded within the realm of fantasy, which evokes implicitly sexualised visions, which also encourages the further objectification of black men and women in general.

Inequalities with regards to both the perception and the portrayal of women and men are significantly related to the stereotypical media representations, which influence the terms on which gender is defined (Strinati, 2004). The women in these representations, in comparison with their male counterparts, find themselves between a rock and a hard place as they are left to negotiate their way out of not only misrepresentation but underrepresentation as well.

Another dimension to the discussion of female representations is that of credibility. Meijer and van Zoonen (2002) argue that the presence of credibility is associated with the effort that is made

towards the depiction of reality in relation to images of men. This observation is further highlighted by the argument that the public has become accustomed to the objectification of women and thus, the link between reality and credibility in terms of images of women becomes tentative. Van Zoonen (1994:87) makes the articulation between a patriarchal society and the 'display of woman as a spectacle to be looked at, subjected to the gaze of the (male) audience'. The perception of the woman as an object serves as a possible explanation for why women are so susceptible to stereotypes that encourage voyeuristic fantasies. Meijer and van Zoonen (2002) argue this point further by stating that the objectification of women is linked to the codes that were formerly specific to pornography, which have now become a part of everyday media representations of women.

Gender as a theory can also be extended to clothing, which can actively display the dynamics between articles of clothing that are considered to be masculine or feminine. Inness (2004:131) analyses a magazine advert where tough and rugged leather is juxtaposed with a 'model that is in a low-cut black dress and long hair'. There is a contrast that is made between the masculine qualities of the leather and the softer feminine qualities of the dress and the long hair. According to Inness (2004:131), due to that fact that the feminine qualities outnumber the masculine, the femininity of the model is not only affirmed but it is enhanced.

This observation by Inness (2004) suggests that masculinity and femininity can be assessed on a scale that seeks to uncover which of the two gender roles is more prominent. Clothing can serve as an indication of these gender roles as well as the assumed gender identity of the individual that is wearing the clothes. The expression of self through clothing, according to Inness (2004:136), can present different possibilities such as a masculine woman in men's clothing, and a feminine woman in costume.

Women that choose to wear men's clothing, according to the position taken above, may do so for fun or as a specific choice of style. This observation is a pertinent part of understanding the significance of clothing to the representation of lesbians, as they are styled in a manner that reflects their tastes and possibly even their sexuality. However, Ponse (1998:250) mentions gender role playing within the lesbian sub-culture as being diverse as she argues that 'different

groups of lesbians' embody these roles in various ways which include 'appearance and clothing styles' amongst others.

Gender relations must be exposed as the attachment of levels of power that have little to do with sexual classifications. These relations are based on the subordination of one group over another. Thus, it could have happened that masculinity and femininity were applied to women and men respectively, and this exchanging of roles can be observed in the homosexual community. Regardless of whether this phenomenon is applied to gays or lesbians, Avila-Saavedra (2009:13) asserts that with gender roles 'the non-traditional is always normalised by the implicit assertion that traditional is still better, even if non-traditional can be tolerated'. He perceptively highlights a pertinent point that media representations of homosexuals, even those that seem to challenge convention, are often cleverly managed by conservative ideals which eventually reign supreme thus maintaining the status quo.

2.10 Early Representations of Lesbianism

The introduction of an alternative lifestyle into the media cannot be assumed to be a transition that is well accommodated. Moritz (2004:107) explains that American television has not always been so receptive to the portrayal of homosexuals, and 'the three major networks' that could act outside the homosexual ban, refused to represent homosexuality on the basis of 'public taste'.

The 'fictional coming out' for lesbian characters occurred as recently as mid-1980s, whereas gay men "came out" during the early 1970s, according to Moritz (2004: 108). The substantial gap in the television "coming out" of men and women illustrates the power dynamics that were and still are present between the sexual orientation of minorities. Lesbians are still lagging behind their male counterparts. Gay men are better catered for in the homosexual market as lesbians remain in a marginalized position (Fejes, 2003). Borzello et al, (1985) support this notion of male dominance. However, they also make a link between past female images through the male perspective and how this tradition has continued to impact current reflections of women in the media.

This change can also be linked to some of the issues raised in the critical political economy of the media. The transition is attributed to the media institution, which resulted in a progression and entails the formerly unacceptable becoming 'potentially viable and sellable' (Moritz 2004: 108). The argument is that, if these portrayals are negative stereotypes, then they cannot possibly be an indication of a progressive trend in the production process.

The 1990s brought a visible shift in the representation of lesbians. According to Macdonald, (1995:184) and Kanner (2002), it has become more of a fashion statement to be known as a 'lesbian chic'. It is questionable whether or not these images were used to fulfil some private interests, or an attempt to open the minds of the public to lesbianism.

Macdonald (1995) introduces an interesting component of the representation of lesbians, which questions what purpose the image seeks to serve. Is it based on the expression of natural feelings or for the spectator value that is often enjoyed by men? She argues that the formation of these scenes that contain lesbians are often made with the male viewer in mind. However, from this perspective, the concern should be about how this impacts the general perception of lesbians within society. This practice can encourage the further objectification of lesbians and the association of this sexual orientation with recreational activities. Meijer and van Zoonen (2002:332) corroborate this point, although not in relation to lesbians, by arguing that media images of women are often 'framed as objects of male desire'.

The portrayal of both gays and lesbians in the media is quite regularly found within the context of violent relations (Moritz, 2004; Macdonald, 1995). Moritz (2004:109) refers to *Hunter,* a detective show where Sergeant Valerie Foster, finds herself in a love triangle, is depicted as the murderous lesbian. An articulation is made between being lesbian, killers and 'disloyal lovers' (Moritz, 2004:109). This illustrates the manner in which diversity can be present, although this diversity could be based on negative representations. It then becomes essential to be specific when questioning and expressing a desire for diversity in the representation of lesbians in the media. The following chapter outlines the methods that are used in the findings chapter in order to critically evaluate the attempts made by two programmes in terms of the manner in which lesbians are represented.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Introduction

This study uses qualitative content analysis as it evaluates the manner in which lesbians are fictionally represented in programmes on the SABC. This requires an in-depth look at specific content from programmes that include or focus on lesbian characters in the storyline. The other methods that have been applied are semiotic analysis and ideological analysis, both of which are discussed in detail at a later stage. The two programmes that were viewed and analysed, are *Hardcopy*, which was broadcast on SABC 3; and *Society* on SABC 1.

3.2 Qualitative content analysis

Within qualitative content analysis, it is understood that media texts potentially have multiple meanings and the meanings that are extracted are often specific to the viewer (Gunter, 2000:82). The notion of multiple meanings relates to the presence of hidden meanings that are embedded in the texts, which is a feature that sets qualitative content analysis apart from quantitative content analysis. Deacon et al (1999:116) recognise that a great strength of content analysis is that 'the statistics are used to make broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation'.

Qualitative content analysis also has the potential to function as a tool through which 'key characteristics in media texts' can be seen in terms of their 'relative prominences and absences' (Hansen et al, 1998:95). The extent to which lesbians are represented in the selected programmes is of great relevance, whether it occurs at an extremely high level, or conversely, at extremely low levels.

In assessing these representations of lesbians, it would be important to place focus on the types of roles that are given to these characters. A part of uncovering these roles should include gender issues and how they are incorporated into the representations of lesbian women as individuals and as couples.

The contexts in which the characters are placed are also of importance as they can provide a range of situations from which the characters can be viewed from the intimate to the professional. Such an approach can reveal whether or not lesbian identities are present in other spheres of life and how they are reflected. It also seems important for attention to be given to the manner in which a lesbian's sexuality is framed along other identities she may have. The character roles within the two programmes mentioned previously must be analysed with regards to how sexuality is broadly framed as well as how marginalised sexual identities are represented.

3.3 Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics is a method that looks at words and images as signs that are used in order to communicate, while it also examines how meaning is created (Seiter, 1987:17). This approach is helpful when dealing with media representations, as there are a number of conventions used in the formation process of media texts, especially within television, as it is both a visual and an aural medium. Seiter (1987:21) states that a component of what makes these signs so significant is the fact that they 'are all established through convention' and 'through repeated use'.

The value of semiotic analysis to this research is great as it seeks to address the meaning within the messages that are being proliferated through media texts. Seiter (1987:21) eloquently asserts that one must be conscious of the use of symbolic signs on television in order for one to appreciate the extent to which 'what appears "naturally" meaningful on television is actually historical and changeable'. This observation alludes to the notion that media texts are not created within a vacuum and that there are a number of conventions, ideologies, and interests that are involved.

Deacon et al (1999:135) reiterate the strength of semiotics by asserting its relevance to media research stating that, it supports 'a particular approach to showing how such texts work and have implications for the broader culture in which they are produced and disseminated'. These authors highlight the significance of the nature of media content and its potential for vast cultural contributions through the media on society at large.

Berger (2000:48) alludes to the use of signs in television and movies as a tool of suggestion. These signs serve to suggestively express a particular view of who a character is. This position subtly indicates that there are choices being made through the selection of signs with regards to the manner in which characters may be read. The construction of characters and their characteristics must be deconstructed in order for one to understand the latent meanings that are present. According to Larsen (1991), eliciting a range of possible meanings is indeed pertinent. However, the latent or "hidden" meanings are essential as 'the deciphering of latent meanings through qualitative content analysis implies a deconstruction of ideologies' (Larsen, 1991:122-3).

Discourse analysis also provides great support to the methodology together with semiotic analysis. The fact that discourse analysis is an approach that is based on multiple disciplines, suggests that the tools for analysis are able to explore different perspectives as well. A specific advantage of discourse analysis is that it is able to look at 'the structures of media messages' while also locating them within a 'socio-cultural context' (Van Dijk, 1991:108).

3.4 Ideological analysis

Ideological analysis is anchored in the Marxist approach and it seeks to highlight the importance of the messages that are being propagated through the media, as well as the 'hidden ideological messages' that often go unnoticed (Berger, 2000: 73). This notion that messages are hidden is an integral part of what is required in the deconstruction of the representations which is a key component of this research.

Domination with respect to ideology does not only relate to politics. The media as a social institution is also tied by these constraints. The link between ideology and hegemony is one that Marxists see as problematic as the very presence of the hegemonic ideas is unseen due to the absence of alternative views (Berger, 2000: 74). The SABC's close link to the government should be viewed critically as this is likely to have implications for the nature of programming

on the public broadcaster. The government is in an ideal position to take advantage of the ideological messages sent to the public through the programmes that are depicted on the SABC.

3.5 Thematic Analysis

Before thematic analysis is discussed, it should be introduced by the exploration of the meaning of thematic structure. According to Deacon et al (1999:169), thematic structure provides media texts with the cohesive elements that ensure that a story has a central theme. This notion of a connecting element within media texts does not exist in isolation. It is argued that themes reflect 'particular social forms of knowledge and social forms of perception and belief' (Deacon et al, 1999: 169).

Thematic analysis will be used to focus on the themes related to the fictional representation of lesbians in programmes on the SABC. The analysis of a range of themes should provide insight into the process of assessing the way that lesbians are represented on the PBS. Both programmes have been analysed in order to determine which types of themes are prevalent in order to answer the research questions. The selected themes serve as a central component of organising the different ways in which lesbian characters and identities are represented.

3.6 Selected Media

The two programmes selected as mentioned above, are *Hard Copy* and *Society*. The reason that these particular programmes have been selected is that they provide different contexts in which lesbians are represented. *Hard Copy* appears to have randomly chosen to include a lesbian character in its storyline, while *Society* takes a seemingly more purposeful approach in its inclusion of a lesbian main character and her partner. Although the formats used within both programmes are different, the fact that they are locally produced makes them more relevant to the South African context. Thus the fictional representation of lesbians in programmes on the SABC can be analysed in terms of content while making links to broader society.

3.6.1 *Hard Copy*

Hard Copy is a programme that is set within a South African newspaper newsroom. It is a locally produced thirty-minute programme that aired on SABC 3. There is a particular character within this programme that is lesbian and there are also episodes that deal with the theme of homosexuality. The show is primarily focused on the daily functions of a newsroom, and it deals with issues on an episode-to-episode basis. This programme also deals with personal and the professional issues in relation to its main cast members.

The manner in which lesbianism is approached in *Hard Copy* is such that one of the journalists has to contend with dealing with her sexuality at the workplace. It is interesting to analyse how the producers have chosen to deal with such a loaded issue within a limited thirty-minute programme. These content choices are also linked to the programming decisions taken by the SABC as they are directly involved with the commissioning of this programme.

There are two seasons in which this lesbian character is included. However, only every third episode has been analysed within the 2nd and 3rd seasons, which aired in 2006 and 2007 respectively. This should provide a representative picture of the tone that the programme takes in terms of the fictional representation of lesbians.

3.6.2 *Society*

Society is also a South African produced programme that was aired on SABC 1, which premiered on 18 January 2007. It is located in Johannesburg and based on the lives of five main characters and lesbianism is one of the central themes throughout the series. *Society* is classified as a mini-drama series as it only consists of four hour-long episodes. Due to the limited number of episodes included in this mini-series drama, all four of the episodes have been analysed. *Society* is a programme in which several indigenous languages are used in addition to English subtitles. It should be noted that the nuances within these languages may not be fully expressed through these subtitles, and this shortcoming should be taken into consideration.

3.7 Interviews

The interviews are semi-structured through the preparation of a few core questions, which provide a level of focus. The semi-structured approach is appropriate in that it permits the interviewer to ask questions that might arise during the actual interview. According to Berger (2000:112), semi-structured interviews support a 'casual quality', which can set the tone of the interview in a manner that can elicit trust and thus can encourage the interviewee to divulge pertinent information. However, this casual and open-ended approach can be quite challenging as well. The interviewer must maintain a balance between keeping the interview on course and relaxed while also rising above possible intimidation which may arise out of 'increased expectations that are tacitly placed upon them' (Deacon et al, 1999: 67).

Interviews pertain specifically to the second research question, which seeks to address the motivations of the SABC programming department as they promote programmes with lesbian themes and/or characters. The qualitative nature of interviews can foster the discovery of 'interesting new insight into the topic', which otherwise go unknown about the opinions of a corporation such as the SABC (Wisker, 2001:167). The aims of the SABC should be understood with regards to the growing number of lesbian characters in the programmes that they choose to include on their programming schedule. It seems that the interviewing process is an ideal tool through which 'private interpretations of social reality that individuals hold' can be better understood (Van den Bulck, 2002:69). Jensen (1991:33) supports this position by stating that interviews are a negotiation of understanding between the interviewer and the respondent, and materials yielded out of this process are the 'object of textual interpretation'.

Newcomb (1991:101) argues that 'multiple interviews can be used to increase information and broaden a point of view'. Another advantage of having multiple interview subjects is that it allows for greater possibilities in terms of any inter-departmental tensions with regards to attitudes and approaches to the fictional representation of lesbians on the SABC as a whole. However, a disadvantage with this method is that it relies greatly on the rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee as well as the reliability of the interviewee (Newcomb, 1991:101).

The desired result of using this method and these questions is to uncover some of the developments taking place within the South African media landscape in terms the fictional representation of lesbians. From this point, it should be clear whether current fictional representations of lesbians are static or are becoming increasingly diverse. The following chapter provides the detail that is necessary to facilitate this analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide rich detail in terms of the approach taken by both programmes with regard to how specific lesbian characters are represented and how the general topic of lesbianism is framed. The descriptive nature of this findings chapter also facilitates the subsequent analysis chapter in which the theoretical framework is used.

As it is mentioned in the methods chapter, the two programmes that have been selected have lesbian characters that are a part of the main cast. However, due to the fact that each programme has a different context in which lesbians are represented, it then becomes necessary to discuss them individually. Once the lesbian characters and themes are highlighted within each programme, then a deeper analysis is done on the basis of these themes. The aim here is that, through this process of uncovering some of the latent meanings within the texts, a general understanding of the approach taken by these programmes that are commissioned by the SABC can be made in terms of the fictional portrayal of lesbians on this national public broadcaster.

4.2 Introduction of lesbian characters within each programme

Both programmes have a unique approach in terms of the way that they contextualise their broader stories as well as how they represent lesbianism as a whole. Therefore, the provision of some background information on each programme can provide a good foundation on which the more complex intricacies of this analysis can be placed.

4.2.1 *Hard Copy*

This programme is interesting in the way that it deals with lesbianism in selected episodes through story ideas and the reactions and the decisions that arise in relation to these story ideas. These topics are typically dealt with on a general and a less personal level, or in relation to a particular character. For instance a particular story will be assigned to a reporter who is depicted as being either for or against a particular theme which may be the focus at a particular point. This provides a strong dramatic element to how the issue is discussed within the context of the newsroom and its occupants.

4.2.1.2 Kim

Kim is a twenty-something Jewish woman who joins the *Bulletin* in season two as junior entertainment reporter. She is the only main character that identifies as lesbian amongst the rest of the main cast members. There are a number of main characters with whom Kim interacts and her experience as the only identifiable lesbian is often in relation to these characters.

Kim is depicted as a sometimes shy, yet friendly young woman with great ambitions for her career. As the seasons progress, she becomes increasingly confident and vocal about the direction she wants to take in her career, as well as in her romantic interests and relationships.

4.2.1.3 Angel

Angel features in a single episode of *Hard Copy* as a romantic partner to another character, named Grace. The juxtaposition of these two lesbian characters serves as the full extent to which a lesbian relationship can be seen in this programme.

4.2.1.4 Grace

The second half of this lesbian couple mentioned above is Grace, who is a gospel singer. Although Grace does not make a physical appearance, she does feature as the focus of the lesbian theme within a particular episode. She is the source of great controversy due to her relationship with Angel. The extent of her visibility is established through a photograph of her and Angel that is sought after by Kim and Benny for their story.

4.2.2 Society

Over a number of years, a group of five friends lose touch and they are eventually reunited by the suicide of one of the five women. The character that commits suicide is Dineo and it is through attending her funeral that these four women are able to rekindle their friendship. They decide to make an effort to meet once a month to "hold society" in the hopes of maintaining regular contact and interest in each other's lives. The four women Akua, Inno, Beth and Lois all begin their journey of getting reacquainted and this is done through the backdrop of a past that was once shared by these women.

4.2.2.1 Beth

Beth is the primary lesbian character in this programme. She is a teacher by profession, which is interesting in the sense that she is the one who is also represented as having the "questionable" sexual preference. The fear of homophobia is a constant concern particularly in relation to her teaching position at a private all girls' school.

Beth contends with the difficult issue of keeping her personal life private as she is in a long-term relationship with her partner Thuli. Beth's friends are unaware that she is in fact a lesbian as she attempts to conceal her life with Thuli. Thuli on the other hand is not as comfortable with Beth's secretive ways. These women seem to be in what one might assume to be a healthy and loving committed relationship.

4.2.2.2 Thuli

Thuli, in contrast to Beth, openly identifies as lesbian to the extent that she struggles to understand why Beth feels the need to keep the nature of their relationship concealed from her friends and co-workers. Thuli who has other friends that are openly gay and lesbian shows her support for the lesbian community by participating in gay and lesbian pride parades. Although both of these women identify as lesbian, they have very different ways in which they choose to express their lesbian identities.

4.2.2.3 Ayanda

Ayanda is another lesbian in *Society* and she is friends with Thuli, Beth's partner. Although Thuli and Ayanda are not main characters in this programme, their lesbian identities make them relevant to this study. Ayanda and Thuli have been friends for a long time and they have very similar philosophies with regards to their sexuality. They are open and unapologetic about their love for women and this causes a great degree of tension between Ayanda and Beth.

Ayanda is highly disapproving of the secrecy surrounding Thuli and Beth's relationship and she makes this clear to Beth. All the three women provide an interesting variety of lesbian representation within this programme. Sexuality is generally well addressed in relation to these characters, which should provide a good basis from which comparisons can be made.

4.3 Themes

Themes serve as helpful way of organising some of the common methods of representation. The themes that are explored below are viewed in relation to each programme as well as in relation to specific characters. However, it should also be acknowledged that some of these themes do overlap which results in the repetition of certain scenes. This repetition of scenes is justified by the different contexts in which they are discussed, which also relates to the potential for diverse representations of lesbians.

4.3.1 Lesbians depicted as closeted

The closeted theme refers to the position of someone who is not open about their sexuality. This person may be aware that they are lesbian but they choose not to divulge this information to friends, family, and/or co-workers. The reasons for being closeted are numerous and they vary from person to person.

4.3.1.1 Lesbians as closeted in *Hard Copy*

Within *Hard Copy,* this theme is highly visible with regards to Kim. She is depicted as a repressed lesbian to the extent that she is unsure of her own feelings relating to her sexual identity. The discomfort that she feels when homosexuality is discussed within the context of her job is reflective of her desire to avoid any degree of self-realisation. In a sense, not only is she closeted to others, she is also struggles with her sexuality internally.

Kim's co-worker Mandy, albeit through teasing, is more open to the idea of being in a relationship with another woman, as illustrated here:

> (*Kim and Mandy are in a room talking about a suggestion made by a co-worker who has subsequently left the room*)
> Mandy: Hey bokkie, what do you say? (*Jokingly suggesting that the two women enter into a relationship, an idea which seems to make Kim feel uncomfortable*)
> Kim: Me?? Yeah right! (*As she walks out of the room while leaving Mandy behind*) (*Hard Copy,* season 2, episode 6).

As much as Kim gradually begins to come out to herself, she still feels the fear of rejection. This keeps her on the edge in any situation where homosexuality is discussed. She finds it difficult to negotiate between keeping her own personal interests a priority as well as identifying with the broader homosexual community. This is reflected in the following exchange:

> Benny: Come on she's a lean mean carpet-munching machine (*while clenching his teeth in a sexually suggestive manner*).
> Kim: Listen, I'm not a dyke ok! (*She asserts her non-homosexual identity while darting her eyes in Mandy's direction in order to see her facial expression*) (*Hard Copy,* season 2 episode 6).

The use of the word “dyke” in this instance is indicative of an attempt by Kim to create some distance in order to avoid being viewed as a lesbian by her colleagues. It is of great significance that she is the one that uses this derogatory term. This displays a possible interest on the part of the writers to delve into the complexities involved with the issues of how closeted lesbians can view themselves critically from a heterosexually based perspective. It is also interesting to see how, as she attempts to protect her sexual identity, she also displays homophobic tendencies of her own. The tension Kim feels with discussions of sexual preference is evident even if it is not in relation to her own sexual identity. She tends to remain silent when discussions around homosexuality ensue in order to avoid being asked for her opinion or about her own sexual preference.

In a particular instance when Kim is directly confronted by the question of her sexual orientation, she immediately goes into self preservation mode as she vehemently denies her feelings. What once started as a joke immediately becomes a race towards ensuring that she is not discovered as she scrambles to use any possible argument to eliminate herself as a lesbian prospect. This can be observed in the following conversation:

> Benny: Hey, girl-on-girl action! Kim, how’s about it?
> Kim: What, do I look gay to you or something Benny? (*Raising her arms in contempt*)
> Benny: I don’t know what do gay people look like, hey?
> Kim: Well, firstly, I don’t own (*a sarcastic chuckle*) my own pair of dungarees, and I don’t cut my own hair. (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

This situation causes a great deal of discomfort for this closeted character as she takes a particularly desperate measure in order to convince her co-workers of her pseudo-heterosexual identity. The struggle of being closeted that Kim engages with relates to Moritz’s (2004) analysis of the depiction of lesbians in other programmes as discussed earlier on. The ‘implied message’ tends to be that it is not socially acceptable to be a lesbian, that ‘caution is always advised in revealing these matters’ (Moritz, 2004:120-1). Kim refutes this accusation firstly by asserting that she is not a dyke, reinforcing her heterosexuality by using the derogatory term for a lesbian. She also uses stereotypes which support her in terms of supplying proof that she is in fact not a lesbian. These stereotypes would be expected of a homophobic heterosexual person and she uses

this as a defence mechanism to distance herself from some of what she believes to be revealing markers of lesbianism.

The significance of the stereotypes used by Kim rely on the position that lesbians are identifiable through their fashion and style choices such as wearing dungarees and cutting their own hair. Benny, Kim's homophobic co-worker, challenges Kim's argument of how a lesbian can be identified, as he is not convinced by Kim's feeble attempts to prove her innocence in relation to his accusation. She struggles with the idea that she could be outed by someone at work when she hasn't even come out to herself or to her family.

Kim's desperation to remain in the closet encourages her to behave irrationally as she struggles between concealing her sexuality and finding avenues through which she can express her sexuality. The manner in which Kim is closeted is such that emphasis is placed on the view that the coming out process is not without conflict. Typically, the conflict that one would expect to see in relation to a closeted character would be with another person. However, for Kim, her struggle is internalised as she openly expresses views of self-hatred. This is demonstrated through the following confession by Kim:

> (*Mandy and Kim are on the balcony as Kim attempts to explain her behaviour*)
> Kim: No I just, I saw these guys and they were loving each other and they were loving being themselves and, and I realised that's how I need to feel. And you were right before about what was bothering me, it's not about whether anyone else is OK with me. I'm not OK with me...yet (*Hard Copy* season 2, episode 6).

Once Kim comes out to her colleagues, she quickly remembers that she has a long process ahead of her due to her mother's persistent match-making efforts. She experiences a degree of romantic loneliness due to the fact that she is not completely open and out of the closet. Kim sadly confesses her frustration to Ivan at the office Christmas party:

> Kim: You know if I had someone to spend the holiday with I'd wanna be with them... (*Pause*) but I don't have anyone. Wanna know why?
> Ivan: Why?
> Kim: (*Pause*) Probably because I've always just been too scared of what other people think. (*Long pause*) How dumb is that?? (*While taking another sip of her champagne*) I'm gonna get more champagne. Its nice chatting to you Ivan (*Hard Copy* season 2, episode 11).

The second lesbian character that is closeted in *Hard Copy* is Grace who features as a closeted gospel singer. Although Grace never physically appears, she is represented as the type of character that expresses her traditional Christian views publicly through her music while in private, she attends lesbian night clubs with her girlfriend Angel. This story is used to explore the double life of a closeted lesbian as she tries to negotiate her way around her contradictory life choices and expressions. It seems possible that *Hard Copy* may have taken the approach of showing that the closeted lesbians can come from different backgrounds. These characters are also used to display how closeted lesbians may denounce feelings that they themselves have. This is also linked to the fact that lesbians are not as easily identifiable as some would assume and this is particularly true if they choose to remain in the closet.

4.3.1.2 Lesbians as closeted in *Society*

Beth struggles to reveal her long-term relationship with Thuli to her friends. During her relationship with Thuli, Beth is forced to negotiate between keeping Thuli happy while concealing their romantic relationship from those whose judgement she fears. Thuli finds it difficult to remain with a partner that seems to be ashamed of who she is as she is also forced to deny their relationship in order to ease Beth's apprehension. In this scene, Thuli walks in on Beth, removing a photograph off of the wall in preparation for her guests:

> Thuli: What are you doing?
> Beth: I'm just...
> Thuli: I made these photos for you.
> Beth: I'll put them back up... I was taking them down because we're having visitors.
> Thuli: And you'd quickly get rid of anything that smells cunt.
> [...]
> Thuli: I just need to understand why do I find myself here again! I'm too old for this! Just let me burn the damn thing. Give it.
> Beth: It's mine. What do you want Thuli? What do you want me to say? Do you want me to tell my friends that I'm gay! I'll tell them then! I'll tell them (*Society*, episode 2).

This conversation continues once the guests have arrived and Beth and Thuli are in the kitchen preparing drinks:

> Beth: Thuli... I can't do it. We have nothing to say to each other. We haven't seen each other in a long time. Chances are we'll never see each other again, after all this is done. It's not worth it. I just... I can't do it. I can't tell them.
> Thuli: Fine. I never believed you would in the first place. Move! (Society, episode 2)

The lack of resolve in relation to Beth's being in the closet causes a great deal of strain to this relationship. In fact, there is a point at which Thuli moves out of their home and ends their relationship due to Beth's refusal to tell her friends about their relationship. Thuli's friend Ayanda also places pressure on Beth to be truthful about who she is.

Beth makes the argument that being a lesbian is not all she is and that there is no real need for her to share that part of her life with her friends. She makes this argument based on her desire for her right to privacy and the separation of what she views to be public and a private matter. Thuli challenges this notion as she asks Beth where the line between being private and being in the closet lies. The conversation begins with Beth pleading for Thuli's return:

> Beth: Please come home Thuli.
> Thuli: No
> Beth: Why not?
> Thuli: You know why.
> Beth: What do you want me to do to get you to come back home? What do you want me to say?
> Ayanda: (*shouting from the next room*) Just get out of the closet already! Come on man!
> Beth: Is that what you want me to do Thuli?
> Thuli: (*shakes her head and shrugs her shoulders*) Maybe
> Beth: But being gay is not all that I am.
> Thuli: But why is it a secret?
> Beth: It's not a secret...it...it's private (*Society*, episode 3)

As Beth hides her sexuality, she struggles to find ways of explaining Thuli's presence. In her efforts to conceal her sexuality, she denies her relationship of three years as she reduces it to a simple friendship. She gives the standard response of Thuli being her housemate in order to divert any suspicions that might arise. This is depicted through Beth's reunion with Dineo:

> Dineo: Beth! (*Shouts out*)
> Beth: Dineo? (*In a panic she looks at Thuli then back at Dineo*) what are you doing here?
> Dineo: I heard that you teach here.
> Beth: Yeah, I do. How are you?
> Dineo: No, how are you? I've just missed everyone. You, Inno, Lois and Akua. So I decided to look for your details.
> Beth: Yeah

> Dineo: Yeah Beth, I know I should've called. What are you up to now? Can we sit down and talk? And just catch up?
> (*Beth and Thuli seem uncomfortable*.)
> Dineo: Oh hi, I'm Dineo. (*As she reaches out to shake Thuli's hand*)
> Thuli: I'm Thuli. How do you do?
> Dineo: I'm fine thanks.
> Beth: Yes, this is Thuli my... (*Hesitates*) my housemate. (*Thuli looks disappointed*)
> Thuli: I'll wait in the car (*Society*, episode 1).

It appears that over the years, Thuli has become accustomed to Beth's self-preservation tactics although it does not make it any easier to hear each time that it comes up. Once Beth is faced with dealing with Dineo, she panics as she fears the moment when she has to introduce Thuli and explain their connection. Thuli becomes a shadow figure in this scene as she stands hoping for some recognition. She later confronts Beth about being in the closet and how it is affecting her:

> Beth: I would have introduced you if you'd given me a chance.
> Thuli: Get a new line.
> Beth: I haven't seen her in years...
> Thuli: Don't lie Beth. You would've pretended like I wasn't there, like you always do. Every time you do this you deny me...us...everything. It upsets me. It hurts.
> Beth: So what do you want me to do?
> Thuli: Stop pushing me back in the closet with you.
> Beth: You knew I wasn't ready when we hooked up.
> Thuli: That was three years ago. You didn't tell me you'd never be ready (Society, episode 1).

The strain of being closeted continues to feature in the following episode as Beth and Thuli attempt to work through their differences. While Thuli and Beth are at the front door to their house, Beth tries to justify her reluctance to invite her friends to their home:

> Beth: I really don't need them. I really don't need them at my place on Friday coming over to bake.
> Thuli: I thought they were your friends.
> Beth: They were my friends. (*In frustration*)
> Thuli: Oh, I know what this all about. (*Long pause as she enters the house*) The only reason why you're pissed off is because you're going to have to tell them you're a dyke.
> Beth: Excuse me?
> Thuli: Yeah. You're scared your friends...no sorry... your ex-friends are going to judge you?
> Beth: I came out to my parents didn't I?!
> Thuli: You went straight back into the closet three years ago!
> Beth: You know what your problem is Thuli...
> Thuli: Yeah is that I fell in love with you. That's the problem. (*Beth looks hurt by Thuli's harsh words*) (*Society*, episode 2)

Beth and Thuli clearly have two very different ideas of what it means to be out, which illustrates the complexity of the coming out process. Although Beth has already come out to her parents, she is neither fully out nor fully in the closet and this makes her experience unique. It seems to suggest that coming out is a process rather than something that takes place over-night. It is clear that coming out to her parents is a big step for Beth. However, in other ways, Thuli experiences a regression as she wonders whether Beth will ever fully come out. There are two different scenes in which Beth's being in the closet at her place of employment becomes an argument. In the first scene, Thuli pleads with Beth to recognise their relationship:

> Thuli: Three years...we're celebrating our third anniversary...
> Beth: I know Thuli.
> Thuli: And we still can't be seen together...God forbid. You'll be called to the principals office to explain your dyke-self.
> Beth: Thuli not now, not today please.
> Thuli: Fine, then go. Go, otherwise you'll miss the bell.
> Beth: It's just a PTA meeting. (*Raising her voice*) don't make this about me coming out. (*Long pause*) I'm going to be late for school. (*Society*, episode 1)

The closeted theme in relation to Beth's place of employment continues in the following scene:

> Beth: As I was saying. Mandy is on this mission to rid the school of any lesbian tendencies.
> Thuli: So what happened when you got to the principal's office?
> Beth: I don't know I didn't go.
> Thuli: What not?
> Beth: Because I'm not getting involved that's why.
> Thuli: You're the teacher Beth. This kids reported this to you right?
> Beth: Thuli, I know my job thanks.
> Thuli: Kids are mean.
> Beth: Adults are mean too.
> Thuli: You should be protecting them!
> Beth: From what?! It was just a stupid little incident. Oh my God! I can't even come home and tell you about my day anymore.
> Thuli: There you go again you're sitting on the fence like a coward. (*Sternly*)
> Beth: (*sighs*) You know it's hard enough to be the only black person in a private school. How many other things do I have to stand for? How many hats do I have to wear? Young, black, female, and now lesbian? It's enough Thuli, it's enough! (*Society*, episode 2)

Beth's being in the closet prevents her from getting involved at school when two girls are accused of lesbianism. Instead, she makes light of the situation in order to avoid having to voice her support for her students. Being in the closet seems to compel Beth to preserve her own interests which Thuli finds highly frustrating as well as disconcerting.

Society as a programme makes it a point to use these conversations between the two women to address the controversy around being closeted. Beth is a great example of how someone can identify as lesbian but can make the choice to live her life publicly in a manner that suggests that she is heterosexual. The theme of living truthfully to those in your life and being unapologetic about who you love is carried through by Thuli and her friend Ayanda.

Both of these programmes in relation to the closeted theme highlight the difficulties one faces when confronted with coming out to one's co-workers and superiors. This also raises questions with regard to the point at which someone is really "out", and the role that denial often plays.

4.3.2 Lesbians depicted in illicit affairs

An illicit affair is a relationship that is forbidden and often shrouded in secrecy.

4.3.2.1 Lesbians depicted in illicit affairs in *Hard Copy*

This theme within *Hard Copy* does not relate directly to Kim although she is connected to another illicit relationship between two other women. Kim and Benny, in their desperation to find a story idea, stumble upon Grace and Angel's story. The relationship between these two women is used as a source of entertainment and Kim features as a leading force in the exploitation of this secret relationship. Kim and Benny explore the controversial story in the following scene:

> Kim: According to this, gospel singer Grace Mpefu got into a spot of bother at Stash with a photographer... (Cringes) eeks! She punched him in the face.
> Benny: Ok moving on...
> Kim: No, no hang on... Thursday night is gay night at Stash. If she tangled wit the photographer, it's probably because he took a pic she didn't want seen.
> Benny: She was with a girl. (*Showing some interest in the story*)
> Kim: She's like an icon of hetero-Christian family values... (*pause*) if we could get that photo. (*Smiling with excitement*)
> Benny: Get over to the club, find the photographer, I'll pay a grand, two. (*as Kim prepares to leave*)
> Benny: Kim, time is running out hey. Kim, don't blow it.
> Kim: I won't, I won't (*as she proceeds to leave*) (Hard Copy, season 3 episode 2).

It is interesting that Kim is the one that finds the story and she is the one that presents it as a possible "scoop". She distances her own identity as a lesbian as she shows excitement at the prospect of outing Grace, who is in the closet by, disclosing her illicit relationship. The illicit affair that is represented on *Hard Copy* shows how these relationships can fall victim to being a source of entertainment, both by lesbians and people within the heterosexual community. In this instance, the contradiction of a female gospel singer dating another woman causes an uproar, even for Kim who identifies as lesbian. *Hard Copy's* depiction of lesbianism in relation to the illicit affair theme is illustrative of the ways in which lesbian relationships that are held in secrecy have the potential to become sensational to the point of becoming newsworthy.

The controversy of a forbidden relationship between Grace who is a gospel singer and her partner, Angel, is treated as salacious gossip. Angel and Kim are alone in a room talking about Grace:

> Angel: What?! Excuse me? Do you have any idea what kind of trouble I would be in if Grace knew I was here to see you? (*She proceeds to walk away*)
> Kim: Angel, please can we just talk this through? (*Kim grabs Angel's arm*)
> Angel: No! (*pointing the envelope with the incriminating photographs in Kim's face*) I don't trust you! (*Hard Copy*, season 3 episode 2).

Kim actively participates in the perpetuation and the objectification of a lesbian relationship as a source of entertainment. She is instrumental in the betrayal that occurs within this illicit relationship.

4.3.2.2 Lesbians in illicit affairs in *Society*

The illicit relationship within *Society* relates to Beth and Thuli. These two women struggle to deal with their very different ideas of how their relationship should be managed. Thuli, with her "out and proud" disposition, finds it disconcerting to be with someone that behaves as though she is ashamed of who she is. Beth seems to treat their relationship as some sort of dirty little secret and she justifies her behaviour by claiming that she is a private person. Although Thuli loves Beth, she does not appreciate feeling like she is something that deserves to be hidden as it is expressed in the following scene:

Beth: I would have introduced you if you'd given me a chance.
Thuli: Get a new line.
Beth: I haven't seen her in years...
Thuli: Don't lie Beth. You would've pretended like I wasn't there, like you always do. Every time you do this you deny me...us...everything. It upsets me. It hurts.
Beth: So what do you want me to do?
Thuli: Stop pushing me back in the closet with you.
Beth: You knew I wasn't ready when we hooked up.
Thuli: That was three years ago. You didn't tell you'd never be ready (*Society*, episode 1).

Similarly to the closeted theme, the issue of the secret affair between Beth and Thuli features as a constant point of contention within their relationship. Once again the theme relates to Beth's struggle and fear of rejection from friends and co-workers. This fear interferes with the everyday interactions between the two women, as Beth becomes hesitant when she is faced with an opportunity to introduce Thuli to her friends:

(*Beth and Thuli walk into the kitchen where they find Akua, Inno and Lois.*)
Beth: Hi guys *(introduces her friends to Thuli*) this is Akua, Inno and Lois. This is Thuli. Thuli is my... (*Hesitation*)
Thuli: (*in support of Beth she interjects*) Her housemate (*Society*, episode 1).

The following scene has also appeared in the closeted theme. However, it also applies to the illicit affairs theme thus making repetition necessary. Beth remains fearful of her sexuality being discovered at school and she is challenged by Thuli while at home:

(*Beth is getting ready for work. Thuli is sitting on the bed.*)
Thuli: So baby why don't I pick you up afterwards...we can go out then?
Beth: Because these things take forever and I mean the parents are...
Thuli: Three years...we're celebrating our third anniversary...
Beth: I know Thuli.
Thuli: And we still can't be seen together...God forbid. You'll be called to the principals office to explain your dyke-self.
Beth: Thuli not now, not today please.
Thuli: Fine, then go. Go, otherwise you'll miss the bell.
Beth: It's just a PTA meeting. (*Raising her voice*) don't make this about me coming out. (*Long pause*) I'm going to be late for school (*Society*, episode 1).

A simple issue of Thuli picking Beth up from school becomes problematic. Beth is clearly sensitive to how the parents of her students will perceive Thuli's presence. She continues to suspect that Thuli's frustration is related to her not being out at work. Both of these women deal

with a great deal of tension as they struggle to come to a compromise in terms of ensuring that their relationship is not treated like a secret.

This argument continues as they discuss the confirmation of a planned visit by Beth's friends:

> (*Beth and Thuli in bed discussing the girls coming over to bake on Friday*)
> Beth: I just wanted to let you know that the girls are definitely coming on Friday to bake.
> Thuli: So?
> Beth: No, I was just letting you know. (*Thuli gets up to turn the lights on*)
> Beth: It's the truth. That's all.
> Thuli: No that's not all.
> Beth: We stay together I was just informing you.
> Thuli: So that I can do what? So that I can make myself invisible? I invited them, I knew they were coming.
> Beth: I was just telling you that...
> Thuli: For me to do what? Well forget it! Me and my dyke-self are going nowhere we'll be here all night. Hey and that Inno chick... very interesting. (Society, episode 2)

Thuli immediately assumes that Beth's warning of the pending visit stems from an attempt to hide their relationship in anticipation of having to explain their living arrangement. This frustrates Thuli as she expresses some resistance to prospect of being "re-closeted" in order for Beth to maintain her false identity amongst her friends.

In preparation of the arrival of her friends, Beth causes further tension by concealing any evidence relating to her relationship with Thuli. She is then confronted by Thuli about denial of their relationship:

> (*Thuli and Beth are at home. Thuli walks in on Beth removing a photograph off of the wall in preparation for her guests.*)
> Thuli: Then why are you hiding it. If we can't be together in our own home then let me just burn these pictures. (Society, episode 2)

In the following episode, the illicit affair between Beth and Thuli is discovered inadvertently by one of Beth's friends. The two women are outside of Lois' house talking about informing Beth's friends of the true nature of their relationship:

> Thuli: Did you tell them? (*Beth pauses and then she shakes her head*)

> Beth: I can't do it Thuli not today, please. Please don't make me do this. Please. Please come back home.
> Thuli: No (*as she begins to walk to the car*)
> Beth: No, please wait Thuli (*as she grabs Thuli's arm*) I'm begging you. Please. I beg you. (*Beth leans in to kiss Thuli, and as they kiss Ayanda honks her horn and Thuli and Beth continue kissing*)
> Lois: Beth! Are you going to be ok? (*As she comes outside and she sees Beth and Thuli kissing*)
> Lois: Oh my God. (*Beth and Thuli stop kissing and they both look up at Lois who is now standing with Inno. Lois is disgusted by the two women and she goes back into her house and Inno follows.*)
> Thuli: Well, I guess that's another way of coming out. (*Beth stands motionless and in shock, as Thuli leans in to kiss Beth on the cheek. Thuli gets into Ayanda's car and Beth goes inside the house. She finds Lois and Inno waiting in the kitchen*) (*Society*, episode 3)

While Beth is devastated by Lois' discovery, Thuli sees it as a fitting outing through which their relationship can be made public. It becomes a difficult situation for Beth as she is confronted with having to defend her relationship to the friends that she fought so hard to keep in the dark. The confrontation that arises out of the kiss between Beth and Thuli, forces Beth to redefine her relationship from being illicit to being a legitimate and loving union.

4.3.3 Lesbians depicted as predators

A predator in relation to this study is a person that imposes their sexual interests on another with no regard for whether the woman is interested or lesbian as well. This is someone who operates according to the whims of their sexual impulses and who is willing to take advantage of any unsuspecting woman who is usually heterosexual. Essentially, what the predator theme deals with is aggressive sexual behaviour.

4.3.3.1 Lesbians as predators in *Hard Copy*

Kim, in a sense, does fit in this theme as a result of her naivety and her inability to constructively channel her emotions. Kim takes advantage of Mandy's open nature by initiating a kiss that takes Mandy by surprise. The desperation of this character becomes increasingly apparent as she behaves in a juvenile manner. Kim does not seek to first establish whether or not Mandy shares her feelings. In fact, it isn't even clear whether Kim's attraction for Mandy is genuine.

The way in which she creeps up on Mandy, who is facing the opposite direction, leaves her defenceless and unable to consent to the kiss. Mandy's reaction to Kim's impulsive kiss is ambiguous in the sense that it is not clear whether she is upset that Kim is a woman or whether she is unhappy about the manner of the approach. The two women are alone having an open conversation when Kim uses this as an opportunity to test Mandy's sexuality as well as her own as this scene shows:

> Kim: Mands, do you have any gay friends, like girls?
> Mandy: Sure.
> Kim: I don't. (*with a look of concern on her face)* I don't even know any gay girls *(as she walks away from Mandy and towards the camera*)
> Kim: Like when you're with your friends, are you ever (*hesitation*) afraid that they're gonna, you know, try something with you?
> Mandy: No. (*Mandy turns towards a window sill in order to rest her foot as she ties her shoelace*)
> Kim: And if they did, would ...would it be a big deal to you? (*Kim begins to inch closer and closer towards Mandy*)
> Mandy: Nooo. People are just people you know and ... (*Mandy still has her back to Kim as she ties her shoelace. As Mandy turns around to finish her sentence, Kim kisses her on the lips*.)
> Mandy: What the hell are you doing!?! (*Kim backs away as Mandy defensively shields herself from any further contact.*)
> Kim: (*stutters*) I...I'm... (*and she shakes her head in disbelief of what she has just done*)
> Mandy: That was not cool (*she walks away from Kim, while giving her a highly disapproving look. Kim is left standing alone on the balcony, seemingly full of regret and frustration*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6).

Mandy walks away from this situation feeling violated by Kim and she struggles to understand why Kim would try and kiss her. So Mandy involves another co-worker by discussing the kiss rather than confronting Kim directly. In fact, Mandy chooses to confide in Benny about the kiss which proves to be problematic as it is evident within this scene:

> Mandy: And then she just all of a sudden tries to pull in...(*She tightens her face as she recalls the kiss*)
> Benny: Noo... (*in disbelief.) Mandy nods her head*)
> Benny: You got pics?
> Mandy: That's not funny. How would you like it if one of your buddies tried to grab you? How could she put me in that position? (*Kim approaches the doorway and neither Benny nor Mandy have seen her*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

Mandy uses the word "grab" as she explains what happened between the two women on the balcony. Her choice of words indicates that she feels sexually harassed by Kim who clearly plays into the predator theme and role. Mandy openly expresses her contempt for Kim's actions when Kim confronts her about her reaction to the kiss and attempts to explain her actions:

> Kim: I didn't realise you were homophobic.
> Mandy: Homophobic?
> Kim: You turned on me Mandy. (*Feeling betrayed she looks over her shoulder at Mandy who is standing behind her*)
> Mandy: Don't turn this around Kim. You took advantage of our friendship. If a man had done that I would've laid a complaint. Maybe if you'd just told me instead of keeping it a secret and trying to jump me...
> Kim: I wasn't trying to jump you. (*pause*) I was trying to tell you. (*showing some vulnerability*)
> Mandy: Well I got the message alright (*sarcastically nodding her head*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6).

Mandy expresses her disapproval of Kim's actions in terms of the manner in which Kim concealed her sexuality and impulsively acted upon her desires. The use of terms such as 'grab', 'took advantage', and 'jump me' by Mandy illustrate the predatory theme explicitly.

4.3.3.2 Lesbians as predators in *Society*

The manifestation of this theme within *Society* doesn't take such an overt and physical form as is the case with *Hard Copy*. A great deal of Beth's fear to come out to her friends is related to how they will react to the news after years of not knowing the truth. But the time comes when Beth is faced with having to defend her relationship to her friends who have always assumed that she is heterosexual. In this scene, Lois confronts Beth about her sexuality:

> Beth: What?
> Lois: What were you doing outside?
> Inno: Finally. I always knew. I don't need an explanation... I just needed confirmation. (*Akua enters the room and she stands behind Beth*)
> Akua: Confirm what?
> Inno: That Beth is gay.
> Akua: What?
> Inno: Lois just saw her and Thuli kissing outside.
> Akua: Thuli?
> Inno: Her lover, partner, life partner. (*trying to make things clear for Akua*)
> Lois: No I'm sorry Beth you should have disclosed.
> Beth: Disclose what, I don't have Aids!

Inno: Oh, on that note, maybe I should tell you guys I'm bisexual.
Lois: Oh (*sigh*)
Akua: You too?
Inno: Well, aren't all celebrities bisexual...?
Beth: I'm not bisexual I'm lesbian.
Lois: Answer the question! Since when!
Beth: Since always Lois! What is it? Say it, what is it?!?
Lois: It's wrong! Biologically, it's a chemical imbalance it's just wrong.
Inno: Ouch. Lois that wasn't necessary.
Lois: When were you going to tell us?
Beth: I'm telling you now!
Lois: Its ten years too late damn it!
Akua: Oh, guys please calm down. Beth, just...
Beth: I'm not going to leave her alone. I want her to tell me what her problem is...
Lois: You mean to tell me that all those years you were my roommate at hostel...you make me sick Beth.
Beth: I make you sick!?! I make you sick!?! Me, I make you sick Lois? Look, don't try that on me like a typical straight girl cause I don't want you, I'm not attracted to you.
Lois: I thought I knew you
Beth: Look here, we saw each other ten years ago, we've all changed! (*Society*, episode 3)

Beth is viewed as a predator by Lois as she argues that Beth has an obligation to tell her friends about her sexual orientation as though it is some sort of communicable disease. Beth is interrogated by Lois as she tries to establish how far back into their past did Beth realise that she is gay. Once Beth unapologetically asserts that she has always been lesbian, she is adamant to reclaim her identity as an out lesbian. Lois struggles with the idea that she had been around Beth for ten years and that she had no idea that she is lesbian, which she perceived to be a betrayal.

Lois then allows herself to respond with a degree of narcissism as she suggests that Beth might've been interested in her at one point. The fact that the two women were roommates in high school leads her to make assumptions about their friendship as Lois questions the innocence of the relationship. Beth becomes irate at the thought of Lois questioning her intentions as far back as ten years ago, which she refers to as a 'typical straight girl' reaction.

4.3.4 Lesbians depicted as experimental

The theme 'experimental', refers to someone that does not necessarily identify as lesbian but who is open to exploring a lesbian romantic relationship. Someone that is experimental is often unsure of their sexual identity and they tend to be fickle in terms of who they choose to approach in a sexual or romantic manner.

4.3.4.1 Lesbians as experimental in *Hard Copy*

Kim's journey to understanding her sexuality is a struggle as she become dependent on those around her to help define her sexual identity. She uses her relationship with Mandy as an opportunity to experiment. This causes major problems for Kim due to Mandy's negative response. In Kim's attempt to reach out to Mandy, who serves as her closest connection to the gay and lesbian community, she wrongfully assumes that Mandy would be an ideal candidate with whom she could test her sexual preference. Kim gingerly approaches the delicate subject in this scene:

> Kim: Mands, do you have any gay friends, like girls?
> Mandy: Sure.
> Kim: I don't. (*with a look of concern on her face)* I don't even know any gay girls *(as she walks away from Mandy and towards the camera*)
> Kim: Like when you're with your friends, are you ever (*hesitation*) afraid that they're gonna, you know, try something with you?
> Mandy: No. (*Mandy turns towards a window sill in order to rest her foot as she ties her shoelace*)
> Kim: And if they did, would ...would it be a big deal to you? (*Kim begins to inch closer and closer towards Mandy*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

This scene which is also included with the predator theme shows the build up towards Kim's futile attempt to experiment with Mandy. She misunderstands Mandy's comfort around lesbians as an opening to initiate physical contact. It is clear that as Kim questions Mandy about her lesbian friends, Kim uses this information to justify her need to explore her interest in women. Once she is confronted by the consequences of her presumptuous actions, she apologises to Mandy as she attempts to explain herself. Kim takes a private moment to in order to reach out to Mandy:

> Kim: Mandy I'm so sorry. (*Kim and Mandy move to the balcony to continue their conversation*)
> Kim: I just could not tell anymore, and I needed so badly to tell someone.
> Mandy: That's a hell of a way to do it! You gonna kiss everyone you come out to? (*Obviously still upset about what has happened between the two of them*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6).

Kim expresses to Mandy that she could no longer tell what her sexual identity was and that she saw Mandy as an outlet. It is clear from her explanation that she wanted to experiment as well as to come out to Mandy. Mandy does not feel that Kim's approach is reasonable and she finds it difficult to appreciate the self-doubt that Kim must have been feeling prior to the kiss. The lesbian character is not afforded the opportunity to appropriately deal with the question of her sexuality, which should have ideally led to a gradual process of finding an appropriate outlet for her feelings.

The point at which Kim is outed and is free to explore her newfound identity in her private, she ends up discussing her sexuality in the office setting once again. Benny seems to be a consistent part of Kim's journey to understanding her sexual preference. However, it should also be highlighted that this usually occurs in relation to his romantic interest in Kim. The exchange displayed below is suggestive of the possibility that Kim is unsure of whether she finds men or women attractive as she is open to testing her options:

> (*Kim and Benny are talking in the office coffee room*)
> Benny: So listen, do you think it's possible for um, a bender to become ah, straight?
> Kim: People aren't only one thing, sexuality is fluid. (*Hard Copy*, season 3 episode 14)

This conversation is used to contribute towards the breakdown of Kim's lesbian identity. Her response to Benny's question represents the shedding of her lack lustre past as a lesbian, while suggesting that she is open to assimilating to the heterosexual norm.

4.3.4.2 Lesbians as experimental in *Society*

Beth is relatively clear about her sexuality and she does not see her relationship with Thuli as an experiment. However, Beth's relatively late "coming out" seems to cause a great deal of speculation in terms of whether or not she is in fact lesbian. Thuli also reaches the point where

she also questions Beth's sexual identity because of the frustration that she experiences through Beth's apprehension with fully coming out. This scene shows the manner in which sexuality can be questioned, even after a three year relationship:

> Thuli: Oh, is that what you have been doing with me for the past three years?
> Beth: How and with whom I have sex with is nobody's business. I'm not saying it's a secret. It's just private.
> Thuli: I promised I'd never date someone straight. What attracted me to you? Maybe because you were a virgin... (*Clicks her tongue in annoyance*) Give me that photo. (*Society*, episode 2)

Thuli loses patience with Beth's reluctance to fully declare her sexuality which results in Thuli questioning the basis of their relationship. In fact, she implies that what initially attracted her to Beth was her virgin status, thus trivialising their relationship.

Beth's perception of self differs from the way that others see her as well as the expectations they place on her. For example, in a scene when Lois questions Beth about how long she's been a lesbian, Beth is taken by surprise. Beth recognises the possibility that Lois could also be suggesting that her relationship with Thuli may just be an experimental phase rather than a part of who she really is. This suggestion infuriates Beth who dispels the prejudices expressed by Lois:

> Beth: I'm not bisexual I'm lesbian.
> Lois: Answer the question! Since when!
> Beth: Since always Lois! What is it? Say it, what is it?!?
> Lois: It's wrong! Biologically, it's a chemical imbalance it's just wrong.
> Inno: Ouch. Lois that wasn't necessary.
> Lois: When were you going to tell us?
> Beth: I'm telling you now! (*Society*, episode 3)

It should be noted that this scene is also present under the predator theme, which serves as a link between the two themes. In this context the emphasis is placed on how Beth stands her ground in terms of her sexuality. She argues against the insinuation that she is confused or experimenting by reaffirming her lesbian identity. In this situation, the theme of being experimental is one that is represented, although not through the behaviour of the actual lesbian character. Instead, she is forced to challenge the assumption that her long-standing lesbian identity is a product of an

experiment. She makes it abundantly clear that this is not the case while asserting that their discovery of her sexuality does not change the person that they've known her to be.

The third instance in which this theme appears in *Society* is connected to Beth although it is in direct relation to Tania and Malinda, two students at Beth's school. The significance of the interaction between these students is that it is reported to Beth, who is then faced with addressing this controversial matter. Beth is approached by two students with a complaint:

> Child1: Ma'am, we, we you tell her. (*referring to child 2*)
> Beth: Tell me what? (*with concern*)
> Child 2: We caught Tania and Malinda kissing in the bathroom.
> Beth: Thank you very much girls you can go back to your classrooms.
> (*Beth's co-worker over hears and enters the conversation)*
> Mandy: No, no, no, no, no, no. What exactly happened?
> Child 1: We we're doing our prefect duty when we opened the toilet doors...
> Child 2: And found them grounching Ma'am
> Mandy: Where are they? Bring them here right now. Go, go, go, go. (*rushing them off*)
> Beth: Wait! (*calling after the children*)
> Mandy: Can you believe that? (*she asks Beth in disbelief*)
> Beth: They're just children, they're experimenting.
> Mandy: Unhealthy experimenting. This is a private girl's school.
> Beth: Yeah and we get paid not to over react.
> Mandy: No we get paid to tell the headmistress. (*Beth looks on in shock as her co-worker walks away*)
> Mandy: Now are you coming? (*she asks Beth as she leaves the room*) (*Society*, episode 2)

There is an assumption that the girls in question are not aware of whether or not they identify as lesbians and they are placed in the experimental role. The fact that they kissed each other rather than other boys causes a great deal of disruption in the school as Mandy reacts very negatively to the news. Mandy actually refers to the kiss between the two girls as being 'unhealthy experimenting'. This theme of experimentation continues in reference to this story and this particular incident is discussed with the parents of the girls and the staff at the school. The parents of two girls, the principal, and Beth sit around a table to discuss the kiss between the two girls who are not in attendance:

> Principal: Well the two girls will have to be suspended.
> Mother 1: Suspension?
> Beth: Isn't that a bit drastic?
> Principal: I don't think so.
> Mother1: They're just kids, they're experimenting.

Mother 2: Not with my daughter, thank you. (*Society*, episode 2)

The mother of one of the girls is not the only one that refers to the experimentation between the two girls; Beth is also guilty of subscribing to this notion of the kiss being an experiment. She continues to make this argument as she explains the incident to Thuli. A confrontation ensues between the two women as Beth refutes the idea of the two girls being lesbian. Thuli struggles to understand Beth's attempt to distance her identity as lesbian from the relationship between the two young girls. In this scene, Thuli questions Beth's solidarity to the lesbian identity:

Thuli: You're pathetic. You know that? You couldn't even stand up for those two lesbian girls at your school.
Beth: They're not lesbians. They were just experimenting (*Society*, episode 2).

4.3.5 Lesbians as subjects of voyeurism

Voyeurism relates to the objectification of lesbian relationships by heterosexual men and sometimes women. These relationships are often scrutinised and perceived from a sexually based point of view with regards to what two women might engage in sexually, which may be observed as scandalous.

4.3.5.1 Lesbians as subjects of voyeurism in *Hard Copy*

This theme is prominent within *Hard Copy* in terms of the ways that other characters relate to Kim, as well as how other lesbians are discussed. Kim's male co-workers, particularly Benny, seem to a get great pleasure out of exploiting the notion of two women being intimate. Lesbian relationships, according to Benny, serve the purpose of fulfilling male fantasies in a sexual manner while being disregarded as genuinely loving relationships. Steven makes a comment in passing to Kim and Mandy which piques Benny's interest:

Steven: Maybe you two should marry each other and make both your moms happy... (*as he leaves the room*)
Mandy: Hey bokkie, what do you say??? (*nodding her head at the idea*)
Kim: Me?? Yeah, right. (*Kim walks out of the room and Mandy follows her*)
Mandy: Hey, you could do worse, I'm a good provider.
Benny: Hey, girl-on-girl action! Kim, how's about it? (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

Benny's choice of words "girl-on-girl action" implies that he sees lesbianism as some sort of activity or sport that is meant for visual consumption. It does not seem to occur to Benny that if Kim and Mandy decide to enter into a relationship, then it would not be for his enjoyment. It is possible that he sees a relationship between Mandy and Kim as a possible avenue through which he can fulfil this 'girl-on-girl' dream.

Another instance where voyeurism arises in relation to Kim is in the scene where Kim defends herself against being called a lesbian. As she uses stereotypes of what a lesbian looks like, she lists unattractive traits in order to distance herself which elicits what seems to be a voyeuristic response from her colleagues:

> Steven: You get some really hot lesbians these days... Tracy Chapman
> Mandy: Portia de Rossi
> Benny: Honestly, hey, you prefer a game of doubles with Navratilova... (*he asks Kim*) (Hard Copy, season 2 episode 6)

Steven's response to Kim's defence suggests that lesbianism can be quite appealing or attractive if it is associated with a certain type of woman. Mandy and Steven both take this approach as they list the names of different lesbian celebrities that they find attractive. There seems to be an element of voyeurism coupled with the opinions expressed by Kim's colleagues with regards to the instances in which lesbianism is acceptable and even appealing. Steven shows a degree of arrogance as he speaks as though he has the authority with which he is permitted to ordain a lesbian as being "hot" 'these days'.

Benny features a second time in relation to the voyeurism theme during his discussion with Mandy about Kim's attempt to make an advance on her. Mandy tells Benny about the kiss which he finds amusing and his voyeuristic inclinations are reflected as he speaks about the kiss in a lascivious manner. He asks Mandy whether she has pictures of the kiss so that he can have some physical verification. This is a great example of voyeurism as Benny probes Mandy further by asking her what "position" Kim put her in. The sexual connotation with which he asks the question relates back to his request for photographs of the kiss. In this scene Mandy voices her frustrations:

> Mandy: And then she just all of a sudden tries to pull in...(*she tightens her face as recalls the kiss*)
> Benny: Noo... (*in disbelief Mandy nods her head*)
> Benny: You got pics?
> Mandy: That's not funny. How would you like it if one of your buddies tried to grab you? How could she put me in that position? (*Kim approaches the doorway and neither Benny nor Mandy have seen her*)
> Benny: And what position was that eh? (*with a smirk on his face. At this point Kim is within hearing distance. Mandy turns around to find Kim standing in the doorway, visibly hurt by what she has heard. Mandy looks at Kim's face and seems to feel some regret for gossiping with Benny*.) (*Hard Copy* season 2, episode 6)

The voyeurism within this scene is directly linked to the predator theme. Benny's position as a potential spectator is very different from that of Mandy who is the victim of Kim's predatory behaviour. This scene sends mixed messages about whether lesbians are entertaining or problematic.

4.3.6 Lesbianism depicted as a stigma

The theme of stigma pertains to the treatment and perception of lesbianism as an ailment or a disorder. Lesbianism is not understood as a natural alternative to heterosexuality because it is often viewed as unnatural and contrary to what is acceptable.

4.3.6.1 Stigmatisation of lesbianism in *Hard Copy*

Kim also struggles with the stigma of lesbianism being treated as an illness to the extent that she aligns herself to that notion. She is desperate to convince Benny in particular that she is not a lesbian as she fears the repercussions of the adoption of a lesbian identity. Kim attempts to assert her non-homosexual identity through a homophobic remark:

> Kim: Listen, I'm not a dyke ok! (*she asserts while darting her eyes in Mandy's direction in order to see her facial expression*)
> Benny: Just asking. (*teasingly making a biting motion inn Kim's direction*) (*Hard Copy* season 2 episode 6).

Once she begins to come to terms with her newfound sexual identity, she also contends with the stereotypes and stigmas to which she formally subscribed. Kim finds it difficult to even use the

word lesbian which she confesses to Mandy. The negativity associated with this word is represented through the distress displayed by Kim at the repeated used of the word by Mandy. Kim expresses her vulnerability and reluctance to accept her new identity:

> Kim: You now, I never told anyone before. No one (as *she shudders at the thought of it*)
> Kim: I can't even say the word...
> Mandy: What word?
> Kim: The l word.
> Mandy: Lesbian, lesbian, lesbian, lesbian
> Kim: Don't! (*shaking her head as she struggles to hear the word lesbian being said repeatedly*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

Once Kim's sexual identity becomes public knowledge, she has to deal with the repercussions of being forced out of the closet in the workplace. Kim experiences the stigma of being a lesbian first hand through her interactions with Benny as well as another male co-worker. Benny's use of the term 'koeksister[2]' is based on the sexual connotations which are immediately understood by Kim. This harassment occurs at the reception desk as Benny shouts out Kim's name:

> Benny: Kim! (*Kim comes back and Benny sticks a half eaten cake in her face*) Koeksister?
> Kim: (*Kim pauses for a moment as she looks down at the cake*)
> Go to hell Benny (*she walks away and Benny begins to chuckle, Kim looks back at him humourlessly*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

Within the same episode, the victimisation and stigmatisation continues. Unaware of the extent to which office gossip has spread, Kim faces further challenges. Kim comes down a flight of stairs in the office as a male co-worker passes on her right avoiding any bodily contact:

> Kim: Hey... (*she greets the male co-worker with a smile, which begins to fade as he does not return the greeting. Once she reaches the bottom of the stairs she seems confused*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

The male co-worker displays the severity of the stigma attached to Kim through his body language as well as his refusal to return her greeting. He avoids touching her as though she has an infectious disease, and Kim becomes increasingly sensitive to the chances taking place around

[2] Koeksister is the Afrikaans term for a twisted doughnut that has been dipped in syrup. In English a koeksister is referred to as a cruller.

her. This leads Kim to investigate the extent to which she is the topic of office gossip. Kim approaches one of her male co-workers:

> Kim: Hey, Shabbs.
> Shabba: Heita
> Kim: Shabba? Have you heard anything about me? (*while she nervously plays with her hands*)
> Shabba: Like what?
> Kim: Like are people talking about me?
> Shabba: No (*he replies while avoiding any eye contact*)
> Kim: You'd tell me if people were talking behind my back, right? (*she smiles at him while Shabba looks at her for the first time over his right shoulder. Kim tries to make eye contact which he is unable to return*)
> Kim: What?
> Shabba: It's just that some of the subs are talking. (*Kim hangs her head and nods as her fears are confirmed. In that moment she is confident that she is in fact the topic of office gossip.*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

The situation in the office quickly begins to escalate as Kim becomes embroiled in dispute between Shabba and Steven. Shabba attempts to protect Kim from the stigma of being labelled a lesbian although he is not sure of whether or not she is a lesbian. The negativity surrounding Kim's sexuality compels him to shield her from office gossip as the stigma begins to intensify:

> Benny: (*interrupts*) Eh. You guys are fighting over the wrong chick man she's "sideways", its cool. (*he sarcastically remarks*)
> Shabba: She's not gay!!! (*he shouts out across the room at Benny*)
> Kim: So what if I am Shabba!!! (*she bursts out and all parties involved walk away as the rest of the office looks on in shock*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

The use of term "sideways" also illustrates the manner in which lesbianism can be stigmatised. Benny consistently utilises these derogatory expressions and labels in reference to Kim within this programme. Another scene which depicts this tendency is also a part of the closeted theme. However, the focus in this instance is in relation to the reference made about lesbians as "lean mean carpet-munching machines". In this scene Kim is ridiculed by Benny:

> Benny: Come on she's a lean mean carpet-munching machine (*while clenching his teeth in a sexually suggestive manner*).
> Kim: Listen, I'm not a dyke ok! (*She asserts her non-homosexual identity while darting her eyes in Mandy's direction in order to see her facial expression*) (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6)

Kim's fears of being singled out due to her lesbian identity are realised as a large number of her co-worker bare witness to her public outing. As a result, she decides to take decisive action. Kim goes to her boss' office:

> Abby: Yes Kim?? (*as Kim enters the office*)
> Kim: I wanna lodge a complaint
> Abby: About what?
> Kim: Harassment in the workplace.
> Abby: Who's harassing you?
> Kim: Well, everyone's talking about me, I, I feel victimised.
> Abby: Well, what are they saying?
> Kim: (*becoming frustrated*) It doesn't matter. (*Hard Copy,* season 2 episode 6)

Within this scene, Kim feels the pressure of being at the centre of office gossip, which leads her to attempt to file a complaint. Although Kim does not get the desired result out of her complaint, she reveals the discomfort that she feels as a victim of stigma.

4.3.6.2 Stigmatisation of lesbianism in *Society*

Beth's experience in terms of being stigmatised is interesting due to the fact that it is inflicted by her friend. She feels victimised by the judgement placed upon her by Lois, her high school boarding house roommate. Once Lois discovers Beth's lesbian relationship, Lois makes Beth's sexual identity about her own fears in relation to the "sexual perversions" of lesbian attraction. Beth is quickly labelled as someone that is assumed to be attracted to all women. Stigma as it is represented in this scene is connected to two other themes, which are the predator and experimental themes. This scene is laden with stereotypes, as it supports three of the six themes in the findings. It is based on a confrontation between Lois and Beth:

> Lois: It's wrong! Biologically, it's a chemical imbalance it's just wrong.
> Inno: Ouch. Lois that wasn't necessary.
> Lois: When were you going to tell us?
> [...]
> Lois: You mean to tell me that all those years you were my roommate at hostel...you make me sick Beth.
> Beth: I make you sick!?! I make you sick!?! Me, I make you sick Lois? Look, don't try that on me like a typical straight girl because I don't want you, I'm not attracted to you (*Society*, episode 3).

Lois expresses her disgust as she argues that, not only is lesbianism wrong, it is also a biological disorder. Beth is quick to pick up on Lois' concern in relation to her presumptuous assumption that Beth may have been attracted to her at some point. It is clear that Lois is regretful of all the time in her past when she naively trusted Beth's intentions as innocent.

The stigma associated with words such as dyke serve as part of the difficulty with coming out of the closet. Beth contends with this issue as she fears the prospect of being perceived differently once her sexual identity is revealed. In fact, her discomfort when Thuli uses the word exhibits the impact of this stigma that she so deeply fears. Whereas, Thuli uses the words in order to take ownership of what it means to be a "dyke". This scene depicts the tension between the two women as Thuli and Beth are at the front door to their house while in conversation:

> Beth: I really don't need them. I really don't need them at my place on Friday coming over to bake.
> Thuli: I thought they were your friends.
> Beth: They were my friends. (*in frustration*)
> Thuli: Oh, I know what this all about. (*long pause as she enters the house*) The only reason why you're pissed off is because you're going to have to tell them you're a dyke.
> Beth: Excuse me?
> Thuli: Yeah. You're scared your friends...no sorry... your ex-friends are going to judge you? (*Society*, episode 2)

This same argument features in the closeted theme, although in this situation the emphasis is placed on the fear of judgement and stigmatisation in relation to "coming out". The fear of the stigma is dealt with again within *Society* through the parents of the two young students that were caught kissing in the school toilets. During a meeting between the school staff and the girls' parents, an argument ensues as the parents become defensive in order to protect their respective daughters from the stigma of being labelled as lesbian. The blame and stigma in relation to the kiss shared by the two girls is shifted from one side of the table to the next:

> Father 1: How do you know it wasn't your daughter that kissed our Melinda?
> Mother 2: Are you insinuating that my Tania is a lesbian?
> (*Beth is visibly uncomfortable*.)
> Father 1: Look, our daughter comes from a real home with a mother and a father. Where on earth would she have learned such ghastly habits?
> Mother 2: Obviously from your daughter (*Society*, episode 2).

4.4 Depiction of gender roles

The representation of gender roles features as a part of the way that these lesbian characters are represented in these programmes. However, these roles are not always clearly defined or readily recognisable. It is interesting to see the manner in which *Hard Copy* and *Society* chose to represent lesbians in this regard.

4.4.1 Gender in *Hard Copy*

The characters within *Hard Copy* do not seem to overtly ascribe to gender roles. One similarity that is present within this programme is that, of the two main lesbian characters in *Hard Copy*, neither Kim nor Angel can be easily categorised. Both of these women are physically depicted as being somewhere in between the traditional binary gender roles of "butch" and "femme". Their clothing and mannerisms do not emphatically fit into the feminine or masculine categories.

However, through an interaction between Kim and Mandy, the gender role dynamic does arise. Although in this scene Kim has yet to come out, she is propositioned with the possibility of gender role adoption within the context of a relationship. The following scene is based on a joke made by Mandy in the form of a marriage proposal to Kim:

> Mandy: Hey bokkie, what do you say??? (*nodding her head at the idea*)
> Kim: Me?? Yeah, right. (*Kim walks out of the room and Mandy follows her*)
> Mandy: Hey, you could do worse; I'm a good provider (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 6).

Even though Mandy is not serious about her offer, she places traditional roles within this fictitious relationship. Mandy promotes herself by stating that she is an able provider, a declaration which is aligned to traditional gender roles. She immediately assumes the dominant role of provider while the subservient role of a dependant is allotted to Kim.

4.4.2 Gender in *Society*

Gender within *Society* is represented through all three lesbian characters. However, the majority of the gender focused interactions are shared between Beth and Thuli. Beth features as the more feminine woman of the three while Thuli and Ayanda tend to have similar behavioural and styling choices which seem to be more masculine.

There are some distinct parallels that can be drawn between the representation of Beth's feminine tendencies and Thuli's masculine tendencies. One situation that reflects these roles is when Thuli sends Beth flowers at work for their third anniversary. The traditionally feminine role of receiving flowers is held by Beth while Thuli the sender adopts the male role. This is further reinforced through Beth being picked up and dropped off by Thuli who drives a "masculine" bakkie.

Thuli's friendship with Ayanda supports the masculine role as the two women behave in ways that would be traditionally or typically expected of men. There are two separate instances in which this friendship is aligned with masculine-based behaviours. The first of the two instances occurs with a late-night outing between Thuli and Ayanda while Beth is at home waiting for Thuli's return. Thuli is depicted as having a "late night out with the boys" while her dutiful partner awaits her return home.

The second instance occurs when Thuli and Ayanda are invited to Lois' baby shower by Inno. Both women decline the invitation as they are clearly uncomfortable with the setting. It should also be highlighted that there are no men in attendance, not even Lois' husband who is in another room. These two women are set apart from the other women and they appear to be more comfortable around other lesbians and possibly other men.

Thuli's affinity for masculine behaviours is also reflected in the manner that she deals with conflict within her relationship, which is depicted in this scene:

> Beth: How and with whom I have sex with is nobody's business. I'm not saying it's a secret. It's just private.
> Thuli: I promised I'd never date someone straight. What attracted me to you? Maybe because you were a virgin... (*Clicks her tongue in annoyance*) give me that photo (Society, episode 2).

The link between the "femme" role and the closeted theme is articulated through this scene. Thuli seems to suggest that her lesbian identity is genuine while in relation to Beth she expresses the concern that she might in fact be heterosexual. Beth's more feminine role provides Thuli with the platform with which to question the authenticity of her lesbian identity. Thuli's insecurities surface as she implies that her interest in Beth may have been related to the fact that Beth was a virgin. The objectification of Beth's sexuality in terms of her virginity when they first met is represented in a manner which appears to be chauvinistic and symbolic of a male-like attitude.

4.5 Interviews

The three interviews conducted with the programming managers at each of the SABC channels should provide an indication of the position of the SABC in terms of the fictional representation of lesbians. Although SABC 2 does not have a programme that directly relates to the fictional representation of lesbians, it remains relevant to this research. In a sense, the very fact that there are no fictional representations of lesbians on SABC 2 can be even more illustrative of the difficulties associated with representing lesbians on the public service broadcaster.

One thing that becomes immediately clear is that each channel has its individual approach in terms of the extent which lesbians or homosexuals in general can be represented. Although all three of the channels are in service of the public there are more specific sectors of the public that they each aim to cater to.

4.5.1 SABC 2

The absence of the fictional representation of lesbians on this channel is by no means a coincidence. Ed Worster, the programming manager of SABC 2 attributes this shortcoming to the channel's historical positioning as the family channel. The constraints associated with the

notion of family are understood by Worster as being based on a particular historical period which has been subjected to change over time. He elaborates on this point by stating that 'SABC 2, until fairly recently, was positioned quite firmly as the family channel and while for most people that may be the typical nuclear family, we recognize that it had to embrace really any definition of family - it might be you and your dog, or it might be your gay partner or might be your lesbian partner' (Worster, 2008).

This realisation by SABC 2 has not necessarily translated into the actual representation of fictional lesbian characters in programmes on this channel. However, Worster mentions a documentary based on the experiences of a Pretoria judge who is a lesbian. The programme seems to serve as a sort of vindicating element to the conservative channel with regard to its short-comings in relation to lesbian visibility. Be it fictional or documentary representations of lesbians, one cannot deny the limited visibility that lesbians are afforded on SABC 2.

While Worster concedes to the inadequacies of the channel, he also argues that the representation of lesbians or gays is not something that they are entirely against. The delicate subject matter, as it pertains to the admittedly conservative channel must be handled with great care and finesse. According to Worster, audiences on SABC 2 are very sensitive to any type of programme that might be to any degree controversial and they tend to be vocal about their disapproval.

The hesitation to include lesbian characters and lesbian themed programming seems to emanate from, not only the preferences of conservative audiences, but from the choices made by the programming department of SABC 2 as well. It is possible that, given the desire and some initiative within the channel, lesbian characters can be appropriately incorporated into the fictional programming in a manner in which audiences can begin to become desensitised to a lesbian presence. The reality is that, a single documentary will not achieve this integration process and there needs to be more visibility given within some of the more popular programming.

Part of encouraging this process along should ideally be taken on by gay and lesbian rights groups vocalising their desire for representation and in particular, representations that are fair

and accurate. According to Worster, there have not been any requests or feedback from the public in terms of the lack of representations of lesbians on SABC 2. It appears the more vocal group in relation to their interests on the channel are, in fact, the more conservative audience members, which in a sense can explain the reluctance on the part of the programming department to challenge the views of their core audiences.

Worster reiterates the position that SABC 2 is not against the idea of incorporating programming that includes a lesbian character, although they concede that it will not be easily achieved. This difficulty is evident from the failed gay magazine programme that did not come into fruition because 'it was never concretised' (Worster, 2008). The failure of this programme idea puts to question whether SABC 2 has a sense of urgency in relation to the representation of the homosexual community as a whole. Worster (2008) mentions a gay character on a local soap opera, *7de Laan,* as an example of how the channel has engaged with the issue. However, he is also quick to admit, 'we really haven't shown him in a relationship'. With the exception of the documentary with the lesbian judge, SABC 2 has undeniably come short by not making use of alternative methods such as water shed periods where there is more freedom to explore programming that would ordinarily elicit any negative feedback.

With regard to advertisers, Worster (2008) does not anticipate any negative response. In fact, he suggests the possibility of niche advertisers in relation to a programme that would not necessarily have mainstream appeal. This might be true for a lesbian-based programme but one would expect that the presence of a single lesbian character would not have the same impact in terms of advertiser response.

4.5.2 SABC 1

SABC 1 has a more aggressive approach to programming in comparison to SABC 2 as it is more youthful and more willing to take risks in terms of its programming choices. The positioning of this channel is such that, it not only appeals to the needs of their audiences, it also remains conscious of the broader competitive media environment, according to programming manager Clara Nzima. She confidently explains that SABC 1 is very forward thinking in terms of how

they assess their programming choices in order to keep themselves relevant to developments taking place within society.

Society, as a mini-drama series, serves as a great example of this endeavour made by SABC 1 to take risks and explore something different in a manner in which their audience can both learn and appreciate. In terms of the brief given in relation to *Society,* there was no specific request for the inclusion of a lesbian character. However, it was indeed a welcome component to the drama's storyline. According to Nzima (2008), the aim with this programme is to represent the 'challenges that young women are facing today', which should also encompass sexuality, be it homosexuality or heterosexuality.

In relation to *Society,* SABC 1 has explored the boundaries of what would have formally been seen on the channel in this display of a diverse group of black women. The significance of this diversity seems to lie in the bold representation of a lesbian couple who are continually challenged by a society which is based upon notions of heternormativity. In the backdrop of these challenges, Nzima highlights the need for encouraging diversity and tolerance with regards to lesbians and other related issues within society amongst the audiences of SABC 1. The conscious effort to bring lesbians out of the shadows of society, as well as the shadows of limited media representations, serves as a declaration on the part of SABC 1 to emphatically state that lesbians should be recognised as a relevant part of society.

The intentions behind the programming choices made by SABC 1 are not taken within a vacuum as there are forces at work which direct and sometimes even govern the approach taken by the PBS. There are four central forces mentioned by Nzima (2008) which are as follows: the Constitution, Broadcasting Act, ICASA, and finally the corporate goals of the SABC. These internal and external forces compel the SABC to engage in a precarious balancing act as both public and corporate responsibility play a fundamental role in the legitimacy and overall survival of the broadcaster.

One of the four mentioned forces that govern programming choices of the SABC and SABC 1 that is specifically discussed is the Constitution. The timing between the passing of the Civil

Union Act and the premier of *Society* seemed to be so closely linked. Nzima (2008) explains that the scheduling of *Society* and the Civil Union was in fact a mere coincidence but she adds that 'it also just reflects the foresight that we have'. The alignment of the discourses taking place within society and the introduction of this programme makes one wonder about what impact this new legislation had on the manner in which *Society* was received.

The actual representation of lesbians entails more than just a basic level of visibility in terms of what Nzima communicates as the aim of SABC 1. It is understood within the channel that sexual orientation is a sensitive issue and the way in which it is handled must be such that it supports the progressive ambitions of SABC 1. This objective is guided by the desire to normalise the representation of lesbians by eliminating the fascination and objectification of images of women who love other women while also allowing the depiction of intimacy between lesbian characters. The 'normalisation factor with a formally taboo issue' is the general aim at SABC 1 in relation to these fictional representations in addition to avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes in this regard (Nzima, 2008).

A great component of the normalisation process involves not making a spectacle of the representation of a lesbian character or the manner in which others relate to this character. Although the angle taken by producers ultimately determines the tone taken in relation to characters within a given programme, the SABC are not without an influence as well. In fact Nzima (2008) admits this as she reveals that 'we say to people working on the programme it's not a spectacle –it's a normal everyday part of life'. This request on the part of the SABC in relation to their commissioned programmes can serve as a kind of continuation of an effort made on the part of the broadcaster to remain accountable for the effect that they have in terms of how marginalised groups are perceived.

The response of advertisers in relation to *Society* was nothing out of the ordinary, according to Nzima. However, she acknowledges the fact that the programme did not achieve its return on investment. Nzima (2008) also makes the assertion that this shortcoming was not due to 'an aversion from the industry to the programme'. She attributes this failing to the genre, rather than the subject matter, as she explains that one-hour dramas have the tendency to be expensive which

makes profitability a challenge. According to Nzima, *Society* proved to be quite popular, which could seem to suggest that the financial drawback is not a result of a negative response to the programme's lesbian subject matter.

Nzima's (2008) view of *Society* as having been positive is partially related to the fact she does not recall receiving any negative feedback from viewers or any gay and lesbian rights groups. This is somewhat surprising due to the sensitive nature of the lesbian representation. It is a difficult challenge for the channel in terms of avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes while also remaining cognisant of the lines of "taste and decency" as they are understood by others outside of the homosexual community. The feedback received by SABC 1 although limited, with regards to *Society* consists of a number of emails which acclaims the channel for the work done within this particular programme.

4.5.3 SABC 3

SABC 3 is the most sophisticated of the three channels as it is also the commercial division of the PBS. However, this sophistication does not seem to prohibit it from taking risks in terms of representing controversial issues that are reflected within society at large. In fact, as programming manager, Pat Kelly explains the representation of homosexuals is not something that SABC 3 shies away from. Testing the boundaries and thresholds of their audiences is a function that SABC 3 actively pursues in terms of its programming choices.

Although *Hard Copy* deals with the controversies related to homosexuality, this is by no means the focus of the programme. Kelly emphasises this point as he views the programme in relation to Kim, the only main character that is a lesbian. He finds it important to keep in mind that the programme centres around the newsroom. Essentially, what this means is that the topics or issues that arise within the programme are somewhat secondary to the experience of being privy to what takes place within a newsroom. According to Kelly, it is also important to remember the impact of the genre on the manner in which certain topics are discussed or addressed within *Hard Copy*.

The fact that *Hard Copy* is a drama has a bearing on the build-up of a particular storyline through to the climax and plateau of a theme within a particular episode to the next. The impact that this may have on the manner in which lesbianism is represented is contemplated by Kelly as he considers the story progression of the lesbian character. It becomes clear that the way in which Kim is viewed within this programme is subject to other interests as she is not central to overall story arch, rather, she is one of several elements that make up the newsroom.

Kelly attributes this approach of representing a fictional lesbian character within the programme as an attempt to represent what might actually happen within a real newsroom. He explains this further by stating that any given newsroom might have a member of staff who is lesbian, although it may not be evident or discussed as openly as it is within *Hard Copy*. The lesbian character in this programme, similarly to any other lesbian, is not easily visible and could simply blend in with the other heterosexual identified women. According to Kelly, our knowledge of her sexuality identity could indeed be a result of the dramatic element that is discussed earlier, as she comes into the forefront of the storyline in order to surprise unassuming viewers.

Kim is a character that Kelly openly defends in terms of the development of her story with regards to her sexuality and how it is represented within *Hard Copy*. In his defence, he suggests that Kim is not simply a lesbian but rather, she is a young woman struggling with her sexuality, just as any other woman in her position might be. The significance of her story in terms of what *Hard Copy* is trying to achieve is that Kim experiences her journey in a relatively public manner which would not necessarily be the case within reality.

Kelly quite explicitly expresses the position taken by SABC 3 in relation to programming in which lesbianism is explored which explains why representations of lesbians are not so prominent on the channel. “We don’t make it a point of looking for programming that we feel is a lesbian programme or deals with a lesbian character” (Kelly, 2008). However, he gives the impression that a lesbian character(s) would be welcome as the channel is not against the idea, rather that they are wary of being exploitative of the topic. Kelly (2008) asserts that the aim is not to make a spectacle of the fact that a certain character is a lesbian but to normalise it to the extent that it is somewhat representative of what is taking place within society.

SABC 3 is admittedly known for taking risks in terms of programming choices and pushing boundaries. However, this risk taking to a great extent has been limited to increasing the visibility of gay men rather than lesbian women and Kelly openly concedes to this fact. He makes reference to the highly controversial gay couple formerly depicted on the local soap opera *Isidingo* in which an intimate onscreen kiss caused a major stir amongst viewers. The resistance to this gay relationship, as well as an unnamed variety show with a drag queen host which was also broadcasted on SABC 3, according to Kelly (2008), forced the channel to be more mindful of how far they push boundaries in terms of taking programming risks.

Hard Copy in terms of advertiser response is not unlike any other programme without a lesbian character in the sense that advertisers did not express any hesitation in terms of being associated with the programme. This is likely related to the fact that the lesbian character and theme within this programme is not overt. In a sense, Kim's representation is safe and it does very little to challenge the comfort levels of viewers because her sexuality can be forgotten. Kelly (2008) reiterates that the lesbian character in *Hard Copy* encourages viewers to see that identity is not purely defined by a single aspect such as sexuality. This dismissive approach translates in the manner in which the character develops in relation to her sexuality.

4.6 SABC Programming Preamble

The SABC programming preamble serves as a documented source through which the SABC's programming choices can be evaluated. As a PBS, one would assume that the interests of the public would be paramount to the programming objectives of the SABC. This assumption is supported within the SABC programming document in terms of its responsibility to audiences. Ensuring that audience expectations are met according, to the broadcaster is a priority while also promoting 'programme makers to explore, to innovate and to take risks' (SABC Programming Policies, 7). These are some of the principles that should ideally support the decision making process with regard to 'programme commission, planning, scheduling and transmission' within the SABC (SABC Programming Policies, 7).

It appears that these guidelines can be too difficult to negotiate while staying within the limitations of "taste and decency" which is a subjective notion that is also subject to interpretation. However, the SABC claims that a way in which they circumvent the challenges related to controversial programming is by taking the approach of 'sensitive scheduling' (SABC Programming Policies, 10).

4.6.1 Approach to Programming

Some of the core editorial values that are expected to govern programming are equality, nation building, diversity, and human dignity. According to the SABC, it is these very values that 'influence the production, commissioning, and acquisition of all its programmes' (SABC Programming Policies, 7). It still remains to be seen the extent to which these values are actually upheld by programmes that are commissioned by the SABC such as *Hard Copy* and *Society*, particularly in relation to fictional representations of lesbians.

The SABC, according to its programming policies, are relatively open to the exploration of controversial content. However, it also seeks to appropriately frame this exploration in manner that is constructive. Essentially, the SABC claims that controversy is acceptable as long as it remains within certain limitations and in doing so, 'have creative or social merits' (SABC Programming Policies, 8). There is also acknowledgement that when given appropriate notification, viewers have the option of deciding for themselves whether or not these programmes appeal to their tastes.

Towing the line of controversial and yet tasteful programming is the professed aim of the SABC. However, it is essential that they be held to task in this regard. In fact, according to the Programming Policies 'challenging accepted world views', and providing 'new experiences and opposing perspectives are the hallmark of successful public service broadcasting' (10). It seems that the SABC has set very high standards in terms of the service that it seeks to supply to the public. However, it still remains to be seen to what extent these goals have been achieved. Fulfilling these objectives becomes increasingly complex once other issues are taken into account such as race, gender, sexual orientation and disabilities. There is a delicate balance in

terms of the representation of the different social groups in a manner in which does not discriminate or perpetuate stereotypes.

The importance of avoiding offensive programming which might include stereotypes or discriminatory content according to the Programming Policies (11) is related to fulfilling the purpose of 'healing divisions'. These divisions, which are a result of the past political regime and the allied media of that period, have created unique challenges for the present media environment. In recognition of this past the SABC takes the following position:

> 'We undertake to include in our programming non-stereotypical representations of the disabled, women, black and homosexual people, and of any other South Africans who have often been marginalised by the mainstream media, or represented in narrow and stereotypical terms' (Programming Policies, 11).

This approach taken by the SABC demonstrates a desire to purposefully address the representation of formally ignored groups within society and expanding upon the limited characterisations, which tend to be standard within mainstream media. According to the Programming Policies (11), the SABC understands the nature of the challenge associated with broadcasting programmes that go against the grain which they argue can be overcome by "proper scheduling". Although to a point, it can be agreed that scheduling plays a significant role in the successful integration of controversial programming. The reality is that there are other factors also at play.

Within the Programming Policies document, the depth with which sexual orientation is discussed in very limited. Other categories such as race, gender, violence, sex and nudity are explored individually while sexual orientation is mentioned briefly under a couple of these categories. This could signify a deliberate dismissal of the homosexual community terms of the outlook of the SABC, thus pushing the homosexual community even further along the margins.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of evaluating the themes and images within *Hard Copy* and *Society* is to uncover the manner in which fictional representations of lesbians in programmes on the SABC are approached. This analysis chapter utilises theories and findings which are located in the previous chapters in order to facilitate the critical analysis of the fictional depiction of lesbians on the SABC.

When a specific group of people are represented, there are certain assumptions made about the manner in which they should be viewed. This is typically done through a reliance on 'shared knowledge' (Bernstein, 2002: 262). This notion of 'shared knowledge' is one which to an extent, attempts to justify the usage of generalisations and stereotypes in the representation of specific groups of people. Lesbians as a community are on the fringes of mainstream society and in their representations, they are often subject to being framed in questionable ways. The ways in which these lesbians are framed within these fictional representations will be discussed further in relation to some theoretical concepts.

5.2 Visibility

Visibility in terms of media representations is an ideal that is often mentioned. However, it should be viewed from a critical perspective. Moritz (2004:108) mentions media visibility in relation to the 'fictional coming out' within the United States, where the gay male fictional coming out process preceded that of lesbian women by an entire decade. Within the South African context, a similar development can be observed in terms of the visibility of gay men versus lesbian women as gay male representations within popular local programming has been explored more widely. In fact, one particular programme mentioned by SABC 3 programming manager Kelly (2008) is the locally produced programme, *Isidingo*.

A basic presence in the media for the homosexual community is not enough in the sense that there is still the issue of the nature of this presence to take into consideration. Ferguson (1998) alludes to the significance of a framework in relation to representations, suggesting that the framing of a topic is instrumental to whether the visibility is positive or negative. Viewing visibility on the basis of being positive or negative requires the use of a critical perspective.

Avila-Saavedra (2009:6) analyses this broader theme as he is critical of what he refers to as 'perceived liberalism' as it pertains to the representation of gay men. He makes the proposition that an increase in the number of gay male characters is not intrinsically a good thing as the desired result is quality rather than quantity. With the exception of the efforts made on *Society*, the SABC to a certain extent is indeed guilty of 'perceived liberalism'.

The illusion of liberalism in the representation of lesbians is problematic, due to the fact that, for the minorities, having a presence in the media is of great importance. Macdonald (1995:176) indicates that this requires critical and 'meaningful discussion' within these representations. The encouragement of 'meaningful discussion' is achieved through the manner in which lesbianism is engaged in relation to the representation of the lesbian characters as well as the challenges that they face.

5.2.1 Visibility through the identity struggle

The struggle of identity is one that features quite prominently with both SABC programmes. *Society* explores the challenges of the different levels of identity in relation to the struggle associated with being out in one's private life while being closeted elsewhere. This representation expresses frustrations related to the expectations of society in terms of the categorisation of different identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. Kanner (2002) reiterates the notion of different layers of identity and how certain identities are more important than others be it race or sexual orientation.

Bellos (1995) highlights the difficulties associated with having multiple identities that are also subject to discrimination and judgement. We see the conflict related to fitting into two minority groups and how this can cause great personal turmoil as depicted through the lesbian character within *Society*. We also see the manner in which identity can be subject to change or censorship, depending on whether self-identification is proclaimed in public or private space.

Berry (2001:215) refers to the private element which relates to conflicts that can arise when culture and sexual orientation collide, which hinders one's 'ability to perform one's role in the family'. The lesbian character in *Hard Copy* finds it difficult to deal with her mother's traditional Jewish expectations, which involve getting married to a successful Jewish man. The cultural and religious constraints placed on this character lead her to resist her newfound sexual identity as it is contradictory to her religious and cultural identities. The process related to the acceptance of a lesbian identity as problematic is not unique to the lesbian depiction in *Hard Copy*. In fact both programmes rely on this stereotype, in which the lesbian identity is viewed to be problematic.

5.2.2 Visibility based on stereotypes

There is a strong link between the issue of visibility and the use of stereotypes which has an impact on the quality of these lesbian-focused representations. Williams (2003:132) states that a reliance on stereotypes can be very limiting as these representations suggest to the viewer the limitations of the character in terms of what the character 'can and cannot do, can and cannot be'. For example the lesbian character on *Hard Copy* is forced out of the closet and then she is subsequently re-closeted. This occurs once it becomes clear that identifying as a lesbian and acting in accordance with that identity is problematic forcing her to then adopt a heterosexual "veneer".

Continuing along this argument leads to the next component of the nature of this problem. Van Zoonen (1994:38) notes the negative role of 'otherness' and 'deviance' as notions that influence visibility in relation to what is understood to be the norm. This form of visibility strongly relates to the manner in which a kiss that is shared between two female students is handled within *Society*. There is an immediate inclination to place labels on these characters in terms of their

sexual orientation. This kiss insights panic as the adults seek to established who is to blame for the "deviant" interaction between these students. These young girls are used to portray a negative form of visibility as it pertains to how lesbianism is often rejected at home as well as within the school system.

According to Avila-Saavedra (2009:16), visibility that is based on stereotypes 'trivialise and undermine' the lesbian experience. This point relates back to the articulation made between meaningful discussion and visibility. The manner in which the exploration of a lesbian identity is represented in *Hard Copy* is undermined by her feeble attempt to make an advance on her female co-worker. However, the same character's more "appealing" interest in a male co-worker is handled in a more restrained and dignified manner which eventually results in a relationship. This character's endeavour to explore her sexuality is sensationalised rather than being appreciated as a difficult and private matter.

Visibility to an extent causes the lines between what is private and what is public to blur, thus complicating the representation of a lesbian sexual orientation. Posel (2004) touches on a pertinent point that relates to the private versus public theme in relation to the right to choose when and under which circumstances to identify as lesbian. In *Society* this tension can be observed through Beth's desire to love her partner in private, while in public she remains closeted as she fears the prospect of being discriminated against at work.

5.2.3 Visibility through gender roles

Gender roles are closely related to two of the sub-sections explored above. These two sections inform the manner in which gender roles are explored within the representation of the lesbians in both programmes.

The difficulty of gender roles in lesbian representations is related to the restrictive nature of how the lesbian identity is expected to form. Ponse (1998:249) attributes this to her argument that 'role playing is a prevailing stereotype of lesbian behaviour in the heterosexual world'. This position asserts that lesbians are represented in a manner that is not representative of roles that

are necessarily common within their community. The inclination on the part of mainstream media is to force them to ascribe to roles that resemble the expectations of heterosexuals. *Society* definitely in certain instances concedes to this form of stereotyping. We can see this through the actions taken in the relationship between Beth and Thuli in terms of who the "man" is as well as the "woman". Although these stereotypes are familiar and even convenient for heterosexual audiences, it is not particularly helpful in terms of representing the lesbian community as a community of difference and diversity.

Ponse (1998:250) alludes to gender role playing within the lesbian sub-culture as being diverse as she argues that 'different groups of lesbians' embody these roles in various ways. This posture made by Ponse (1998) takes the discussion of difference in the lesbian community further by stating that these differences are also expressed in different ways for different lesbians. The expression of these roles are not necessarily fixed or limited to physical appearance or mannerism or even private and public situations for that matter.

These roles are in fact fluid although this is not how they are typically represented. For example, according to Anleu (2006:358), 'femininity tends to be defined as the absence of masculinity'. This suggests that a particular role is often perceived in relation to the next. Inness (2004:131) also concurs with this argument by stating that, when, for example, feminine qualities outnumber the masculine, the femininity of the person in question is not only affirmed but it is enhanced. We see this in *Society* through the lesbian couple as they are both used in order to define the relative masculinity or femininity of the other partner.

The ascription of the "butch"/"femme" label is found to be problematic, according to Ciasullo (2001), although it cannot be entirely dismissed as it continues to be a consistent part of the manner in which lesbians are represented in mainstream media. Having made this observation, she concedes to the definition of the butch label within a heterosexually based perspective which simplistically identifies "butch" as 'unfemininity' and 'nonfemaleness' (Ciasullo, 2001:581). We can see the extent to which this depiction of the "butch"/"femme" roles is dependent on the absence or the increased presence of one of the two roles in *Society*. The reason that this is so difficult to observe within *Hard Copy* is due to the fact that the primary lesbian character is not

represented within a lesbian relationship. Her relative femininity or masculinity cannot be effectively confirmed or denied.

Femininity or the “femme” lesbian label is viewed differently from the “butch” lesbian label, which allows the “femme” more mobility. Ciasullo (2001:602) states that the “femme” label provides the “femme” with the opportunity to move between being lesbian and heterosexual, and thus making her more “palatable”. This role can be misleading as it permits this type of lesbian to conceal her sexuality in a manner which the “butch” is incapable of. In *Hard Copy* and *Society*, we see how the two characters in these two programmes are able to remain in the closet as a result of their perceived femininity. In *Society*, however, the depiction of the flexibility of the “femme” role is represented relative to the open and restrictive position of the “butch”. In order to preserve her heterosexual veneer, the “femme” limits the exposure of her “butch” partner whom she fears is an indication of her queerness. Ciasullo (2001:602) asserts that the ambiguity of the “femme” is due to the fact that she can go through a process of ‘de-lesbianizing’ while the butch remains in the position of being ‘not palatable’.

5.2.4 Visibility through voyeurism

van Zoonen (1994:87) eloquently refers to the objectification of women as the ‘display of woman as a spectacle to be looked at, subjected to the gaze of the (male) audience’ which is also related to her palatability. Visibility which is based on voyeurism and male fantasies is likely to play into the representation of lesbianism for purposes such as entertainment. Although neither of the two programmes analysed are implicitly guilty of this, *Hard Copy* does appear to an extent to be on the fringes of the misuse of the “big lesbian surprise”.

According to Avila-Saavedra (2009:12), the manner in which lesbians are represented and viewed is often dependent on the type of media genre. He rightfully proposes that the humorous genre of the sitcom may in fact be linked to the negative representation of gay men. Through working from this premise, one can see the manner in which *Hard Copy* as a drama presents some challenges in terms of how the lesbian character is treated. In fact, Kelly (2008) admits that

drama as a genre has a bearing on the way that the coming out process unfolds for the lesbian character.

5.2.5 Visibility through styling

According to Beirne's (2006:3) observations, styling in relation to lesbian characters is achieved through the creation of representations of lesbians that encourages an 'in-distinguish-ability from heterosexuality.' Ciasullo (2001:580) refers to 'cultural forces' as being a pivotal part of how a lesbian is styled and the degree of visibility hinges on the extent to which heterosexual and lesbian cultures feature relative to one another in relation to these characters.

Visibility through styling in these SABC representations appears to be linked to a desire to present the lesbian in a manner that does not infringe upon what is appealing or even attractive. There is also an attempt to represent lesbians such that they remain accessible, thus suggesting that the possibility for a shift towards heterosexuality can occur.

The ambiguous way in which Beth and Kim are represented, in particular, suggests that they do not seek to explicitly mark themselves in a way that reflects their true sexual orientation. Both characters seek to publicly hide their lesbian orientation and one might assume that this has impacted to their styling choices. In a particular episode of *Hard Copy* which is mentioned in the findings, Kim makes direct reference to her styling in order to distinguish herself from other lesbians. The characters within *Society* do not make any direct reference to styling choices in terms of the expression or repression of their sexuality.

5.2.6 Visibility in the context of favourable legislation

It may be possible that expectations are set too high due to some of the Constitutional developments that have taken place within the South African context. However, Avila-Saavedra (2009:19) makes an insightful correlation between legislative restrictions in relation to gay and lesbian rights and the opportunities for diverse media representations of homosexuals. Media representations of gays and lesbians are potentially only as liberal as the legal framework in

which it is located. Looking at the South African context and the Civil Unions Act, even in what is believed to be a favourable environment, the correlation does not necessarily transpire as strongly. The SABC have been somewhat slow or even reluctant to visibly respond to the Civil Union Act through programming as no significant efforts have been made with the exception of *Society* and the brother show *After-Nine*.

5.2.7 Visibility subject to resistance

Croteau and Hoynes (1997: 160) highlight the influence that conservatives exercise through the mobilisation of 'boycotts against advertisers' that are connected to these programmes. Not a single one of the three SABC channels expressed any concern over advertiser disapproval. Instead, the focus of their concern was in relation to an adverse reaction from audiences. SABC 2's failure to contribute towards the visibility of lesbians and gays is, according to Worsted, partially attributed to adhering to the expectations of conservative audiences. Thus, we can see how the difference in levels of activism between conservatives groups and those that seek to promote gay and lesbian rights is substantially one-sided in favour of the vocal conservatives. This result is reflected through the programming choices made on SABC 2.

5.3 Normalisation

The very notion of the normalisation of lesbian representations, according to Avila-Saavedra (2009:8), is founded on whether they are 'acceptable for heterosexual audiences by reinforcing traditional values'. These traditional values are located in the ideals of the dominant members of society. The lesbian character within *Hard Copy* illustrates the covert manner in which the normalisation process can occur. This is evident through her dramatic outing, and her seemingly natural gravitation towards her homophobic boyfriend who helps "set her straight". Ciasullo (2001:592) refers to this type of lesbian as 'she who is lesbian can "unbecome" lesbian'. The idea that a lesbian identity could be so whimsical implies that the character was, in fact, never really a lesbian. Her sexuality is represented as a deviation from the norm as she subsequently reclaims her "true" heterosexual nature.

5.3.1 Normalisation through voyeurism

Normalisation through voyeurism relates to what Beirne (2006:19) views as the role of the male admirer and the male gaze as a part of the approval of a lesbian relationship. The influence of the male approval of a lesbian relationship is depicted in *Hard Copy*. Although in this situation a male co-worker proposes the relationship between two women as a joke, it displays the manner in which the media can use the wishes of a man to explore the possibility of a lesbian relationship.

Kuhn (1985:12) refers to female sexuality as being glamorised due to 'deceptive fascination', which is a notion that relates to what makes lesbian depictions acceptable to some. This 'deceptive fascination' is particularly evident through a lesbian character in *Hard Copy* that is labelled as attractive by the men. Her attractiveness as well as her lesbian identity are a source of a great deal of frustration amongst her male co-workers. There is a particular scene where a male co-worker expresses frustration over the fact that 'the only hot chick in the office is gay' (*Hard Copy*, season 2 episode 11). This male co-worker represents the male perspective of how lesbianism can be attractive while simultaneously restrictive. It seems that in this case, what makes this character so attractive is that her lesbian identity eventually becomes tenuous as she goes through the normalisation process by dating a man.

According to Avila-Saavedra (2009:19), the desirability of a lesbian character is depicted through a 'palatable image' and this in turn contributes towards the flexibility of her sexuality. The idea that a woman can eliminate her lesbian "tendencies" is a part of what can make her appealing. Beirne (2006:3) refers to the way in which representations of lesbians are made palatable because they 'have been constructed for a heterosexual media and populace' and possibly through exploiting the "lesbian fantasy". This point relates to the notion of heteronormativity with regards to the process through which lesbianism makes the transition to being viewed as acceptable, such as a momentary lesbian inclination to a committed relationship with a man.

5.3.2 Normalisation through heteronormativity

Heteronomativity in relation to the depiction of lesbians is clearly rooted within a set of restrictions. According to Avila-Saavedra (2009:13), 'the maintenance of the status quo' uses heteronormative ideals and the control of lesbian behaviours in the media through guidelines that are set by heterosexuals. In *Hard Copy,* there are no particular attempts made to disrupt the status quo with regard to the familiar way in which lesbians are represented in this programme.

Taylor and Willis (1999:41) refer to one particular component that makes lesbian representations that are based on heteronormativity problematic; which is that stereotyped groups are defined, not by their own accord 'but by those who hold greater social power'. Thus, even in relation to issues surrounding the depiction of intimacy, lesbians are subjected to views and interests of those who seek to maintain ideals that are aligned with the notion of heteronormativity.

5.3.3 Normalisation through desexualisation

Croteau and Hoynes (1997) allude to the restrictions placed on the depiction of intimacy between homosexual characters. This deficiency in the holistic representation of lesbianism impedes the development of diversity in terms of the roles and more specifically, it promotes the desexualisation of these characters. In *Hard Copy*, intimacy between lesbian characters is almost non-existent with the exception of when a controversial kiss is shared. *Society* does attempt to push the boundaries with the intimacy depicted through a long-term relationship between two characters. This is further explored in terms of intimacy and how it is negotiated in private and public spaces.

Normalisation, as it is viewed within this analysis, illustrates the manner in which characters within both programmes move quite easily between being heterosexual as well as lesbian. It is only through their disclosure that their lesbian sexuality becomes evident. However, it is also through their ability to "play" both sides that they become acceptable and even appealing to some heterosexuals.

5.4 Motivation behind these representations

The Programming Policies document that is discussed within the findings chapter serves as a great basis from which the general aims of the SABC can be understood and evaluated. Although the three separate SABC channels were explored previously in relation to programming choices through the interviews, it is within this chapter that a general analysis of the channels is undertaken.

SABC 2 is clearly lagging behind the other two channels, both which seem to be relatively receptive to including lesbian representations within their programming schedules. The reluctance on the part of SABC 2 is connected to the station's philosophy as a family channel rather than a fear of the financial implications of making such a major shift in programming choices. In fact, Worster (2008) suggests that the introduction of more gay and lesbian characters and programmes might attract niche advertisers. This suggestion shows a slight willingness to explore new and alternative programming options. This is aligned with Gandy's views (2000) in which audiences are increasingly being viewed as consumers and thus, highlighting the potential profitability of these segmented audiences. One can assume that this alternative approach to programming is not viewed as particularly viable which may partially account for the delay in the exploration of this sort of programming on the part of SABC 2.

The inadequacy of SABC 2 in terms of its non-existent fictional representations of lesbians is indeed noteworthy. However, it seems unfair to completely place the blame on the channel when society also has a role to play. In the same manner in which the conservative members of the public voice their disapproval in connection to "inappropriate" programming, the voice of the lesbian community must be heard. According to Worster, the lack of lesbian representation on the channel has not elicited any form of protest from the lesbian community. As a result, there is no significant degree of external pressure being placed on the channel in this regard.

SABC 1 and 3, whether intentionally or inadvertently, have come a great deal closer to adhering to the ideals presented in the SABC Programming Policies. However, between the two channels, the representation of lesbians on SABC 3 seems to be less purposeful. The presence of the

lesbian character within *Hard Copy* appears to be a mere coincidence rather than an attempt to increase the level of lesbian representation or visibility on the channel. Kelly (2008) is quite frank about the fact that the channel does not actively seek to represent lesbians. However, it raises the question of whether this sort of nonchalant approach is conducive to the representation of lesbians in a manner that is positive particularly in the way of contesting stereotypes.

SABC 1 conversely has a very pro-active attitude towards the continued inclusion of lesbian characters on the channel. This does not imply that programmes on the channel such as *Society* are devoid of stereotypical forms of representation in terms of the depiction of lesbians. However, while keeping these faults in mind, SABC 1 does seem to be mindful of their role and their responsibility as a PBS.

Nzima (2008) places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of providing representations of lesbians that is normal rather than sensationalised. This position is linked to Macdonald's (1995:176) notion of 'meaningful discussion'. The view that these representations serve a greater purpose is one that seems to emanate from the SABC Programming Policies and is best attempted by SABC1 through the broadcasting of *Society*.

Generally speaking, according to the SABC Programming (11), the SABC has an obligation to fulfil the purpose of 'healing divisions'. This is a very specific instruction in terms of type of programming that the SABC is expected to deliver, in relation to minimising the gaps between lesbians as a formally marginalised group and the heterosexual majority. We can see how a lack of lesbian representation on SABC 2 might be understood to be a form of avoidance in dealing with these divisions. While SABC 3 appears to be forgetful of the significance of the responsibility to these heal divisions, the lesbian depiction in *Hard Copy* serves as an example of what can occur once the responsibility to heal divisions is not actively encouraged.

Croteau and Hoynes (2001) highlight another factor which is perceived to be harmful in terms of encouraging the healing of divisions, which is the commercialisation of content. The focus on commercialisation is one that stands to compromise the very nature of these fictional representations of lesbians. SABC 3, as the more commercially driven entity of the three

channels, is more likely to concede to this temptation. It is possible that the lesbian representation in *Hard Copy* is a victim of this struggle by placing more focus on profitability rather than public responsibility.

Having a sense of responsibility to the public is also linked to encouraging dialogue around issues such as same-sex marriage. Avila-Saavedra (2009:19) asserts that in a context where there is an aversion to the legalisation of same-sex marriage, 'one can expect that the range of queer media representation will be restricted even further'. If we are to apply this logic to a positive response to same-sex legislation, then we should be seeing a great deal more from the SABC in terms of the representation of lesbians. However, the reality is that the Civil Unions Act at this stage has not had a substantial level of impact on the fictional representation of lesbians in programmes on the SABC.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Minority groups within most societies have a difficult challenge in terms of ensuring that they are not only heard and seen, but that they are also given the respect and dignity of any other social group. Sexual minority groups have one unique quality relative to other minority groups as their visibility is often reliant on their own disclosure of their identities. The struggle for acceptance this group faces is one that is on-going and it is not without a significant loss of life. South Africa has been plagued by the victimisation of lesbians who have been brutally attacked in provinces all over the country. Even with all the favourable legislation in terms of equality for all citizens, the struggle for equality for homosexuals continues. It is evident that society has yet to make the necessary changes that are required to reflect the theoretical ideals of liberalism that can be found in our constitution.

The media has a fundamental obligation to encourage dialogue in order to foster a climate of acceptance of homosexuals by the heterosexual majority. This responsibility extends not only to the news, current affairs, and documentaries; it is also pertains to the fictional depiction of gays and lesbians. A central part of this responsibility requires the media to create a delicate balance between challenging the discriminatory past while avoiding a future of misrepresentation lesbians. This research has critically analysed the fictional representation of lesbians in programmes on the SABC, in order to critically view the possible messages that may be reinforced to the public through these lesbian characterisations.

At a very rudimentary level, visibility is one of the focal points of this research. The reality is that visibility within the media is not something that is afforded to everyone all the time. However, marginalised minority groups have had an exceptionally difficult time with simply establishing a basic level of presence in the media. Lesbians on the SABC, specifically in relation to fictional depictions, are still fighting for this basic level of visibility. If one were to judge based on media presence whether or not lesbians are a part of the broader South African society, the resounding response would be that lesbians are in fact rare. The current level of

visibility for lesbians is at a bare minimum on the SABC which also explains why there are only two programmes discussed within this research.

The fact that there are three different channels on the SABC, one would assume that there would be ample opportunity through which lesbian characters could be represented. However, there seems to be some reluctance in terms of actively seeking and engaging the fictional representation of lesbians on the public broadcaster. While SABC 2 is guilty of non-representation, the other two channels have made their contributions although some more humble than others. These contributions in terms of actual content are reliant to a great extent on stereotypes. I realise that this may be a sweeping statement and that further elaboration is necessary. This discussion in relation to the specific programmes also requires that specific attention be given to the individual channels which should also be viewed as part of a collective.

Through SABC 1 and *Society*, we see the representation of lesbians in a manner in which stereotypes are utilised, although in a seemingly positive way. The stereotypes used in this programme that also relate to the themes explored within the findings chapter, are not always used in a traditionally negative manner. The characters engage with these issues in an effort to reflect the widely shared views of society while concurrently challenging them. One great example of this is illustrated through the predator theme. The lesbian character refutes the stereotype that lesbians find all women attractive. Her coming out process is marred by her friend's assumption that being a lesbian makes her a danger to all women. We see how this particularly negative stereotype is represented in a positive manner in order to challenge this myth.

The lesbian characters within *Society* use stereotypes in order to represent and rebel against some of the challenges that they face. We see the extent to which the coming out process is in fact a process that occurs in stages. For example, a lesbian can be out to her family while still be closeted at work and amongst her friends. The difficulties related to coming out for the lesbian character represented in *Society* is often related prejudices held by others rather than her own issues. Overall, there is strong theme which persists through the programme in terms of the manner in which these characters are represented that seeks to reflect and promote self love.

Restrictions that are represented in relation to these characters in *Society* are self-imposed as it also reflects the struggle for acceptance in the midst of a fear of rejection. The lack of intimacy in this relationship is linked to being closeted at work while in other situations where the characters feel free to express their affection they are represented as doing so openly. This is also one of the ways through which gender roles are also depicted within this programme.

Both women in this relationship are depicted as ascribing to specific gender roles through their behaviour, more so than through their clothing. We see this through different actions and choices such the sending and the receiving of flowers, and how the refusal to attend a baby shower can be illustrative of these roles. However, these roles are explored without attempting to suggest that through the adoption of these roles that either of the two women is rejecting her female identity.

Another interesting element to the representation of lesbianism in this programme is that it is not problematised. The struggle does not lie in the adoption of a lesbian identity as something that is abnormal, but rather, it questions whether others can show a degree of tolerance. This approach presents an alternative which suggests that the problem does not remain with those who are lesbian, but those who are unable or unwilling to accept lesbians.

An alternative approach is taken in *Hard Copy* on SABC 3 in relation to the predator theme. Here, we see the traditional predatory lesbian role, although it was not depicted in an excessively aggressive manner. This character is represented as a typical television lesbian in the sense that she is represented within the confines of heteronormative ideals. Her presence is a fallacy in the sense that she can be physically seen on the programme but her presence as a lesbian is fickle and eventually eliminated. We see how this quiet character realises she is lesbian, attempts to kiss another woman, is subsequently outed in her workplace, stigmatised and eventually "sanitised" once she becomes romantically involved with a man.

Hard Copy appears to be guilty of using the "big lesbian surprise" rather than making an honest attempt of representing lesbianism beyond a forced first kiss with another woman. In this

depiction, there are numerous stereotypes used and none of which seem to challenge the negativity that is often associated with lesbianism. Instead, she is restricted and disempowered as she is pushed out of the closet and once this occurs, the subsequent journey in terms of her sexuality is neither depicted nor discussed. She is essentially re-closeted while we await the news of how Jewish her parents react to her confession if she in fact ever comes out to them.

The imposition of these restrictions in terms of the re-closeting of the character leaves this representation incomplete as we are not privy to her journey into the broader lesbian community. This reflects an observation made by Croteau and Hoynes (1997:159) in which they state that 'television almost always presents homosexual characters in isolation, not as part of a gay community'. The depiction of this character corroborates this position as she is in fact an isolated lesbian character and she is restricted from having a relationship with another lesbian. As a result this character is also not afforded any degree of intimacy with anyone with the exception of one man.

The fundamental shift in the representation of lesbianism in *Hard Copy* appears once the lesbian character is "de-lesbianised". She is represented as the deviant lesbian who eventually finds the right man to rid her of her perversions and her questionable lifestyle choices. What makes this representation so unbalanced is that no reasonable explanation is given for this change, such as the possibility that she may in fact be bisexual. The lesbian label remains while the only meaningful relationship in which she is depicted is with a man, therefore reinforcing the stereotype.

Hard Copy's failure to depict this character within a lesbian relationship also deprives the audience of seeing the representation of gender roles, which are often featured as a staple component of the fictional representation of lesbians in mainstream media. This lesbian identity is represented as incomplete as we are not shown how she either challenges or adopts traditional gender roles.

By virtue of the genre, both of these programmes rely on entertainment value in terms of the respective stories. However, this does not exempt these lesbian characterisations from scrutiny.

Hard Copy seems to fall victim to most of the pitfalls related to the stereotypical representation of lesbianism in order to elicit a reaction from the audience rather than to challenge any misconceptions.

In viewing these representations in terms of diversity, it becomes immediately evident that potential for diverse representation is limited. It is limited in terms of the number of programmes on the SABC in which fictional representations of lesbians are present. No contribution is made by SABC 2 in this regard as it contains no fictional representations of lesbians. As a result the SABC's potential for diverse representations is entirely dependent on the two other channels.

The representations on the two programmes are at polar opposites which does provide for some diversity. We do see how the SABC as a collective has provided some level of diversity in these fictional representations. However, the difference between the two programmes is extreme in terms of approach as well as the split between content that is progressive and static. The programme on SABC 1 clearly seeks to challenge and refresh the limited manner in which lesbians have often been represented. For example, the representation of the private versus the public debate in relation to disclosing one's sexuality is explored through two separate characters in this programme.

Society provides the majority of the diversity that is seen on the SABC in terms of lesbian representations which is also achieved through the presence of three relatively solid lesbian characters. Even though *Hard Copy* also depicts three lesbian characters, none of them appears to have a meaningful presence. However, in *Society,* we see a range from the partially closeted to the completely "out and proud" lesbian within a relationship. We witness a degree of balance in terms of the representation of "normal" interactions such as the sharing of a loving home as well as something as simple as going grocery shopping together. This representation allows the viewer to see the ups and downs related to a long-term relationship between two women as being similar to any other relationship between two people who care for one another.

The lesbian relationship on *Hard Copy* between Grace and Angel reflects negative qualities such as hypocrisy and betrayal, which is in direct contrast with the relationship in *Society*. There is

diversity although it exists primarily within *Society* whereas *Hard Copy* remains heavily reliant on the use of stereotypes.

It appears that one of the greatest factors influencing the fictional representation of lesbians in programmes which air on the SABC is the positioning of the specific channels. As much as there are general policies which govern the SABC as a whole, the PBS in its separate components also has individual influences that impact its programming choices. This is illustrated through the interviews with the three programming managers on the three different channels.

According to Nzima, the SABC 1 programming manager, the channel is aware of the responsibility that it has to its viewers to represent their diversity. This endeavour to represent all members of the public is also guided by an imperative to do so fairly. This interest to encourage fair representations is not something that is only afforded to a certain group. Those who were formerly marginalised such as lesbians are also part of this channel's vision in terms of visibility.

The constitution is also referred to by the programming manager which illustrates an awareness of how legislation has an impact on the type of representations that should be seen on the PBS. It seems that there is an attempt made by the channel to align its media representations with the progressive provisions within the constitution. SABC 1 attempts to take its programming choices beyond the channel's own objectives by making programming choices in relation to developments that are taking place externally.

SABC 2, formerly branded as the "family" channel, has yet to shed this limiting label and this is reflected in the programming choices. The conservative audience continues to guide and even limit the extent to which boundaries can be tested. According to the programming manager, Worster, the channel has been slow in terms of responding to some of the changes taking place within society. SABC 2 programming has yet to reflect these developments, which explains why there is no programme available on the channel in which lesbians are fictionally represented.

SABC 2 serves as a great example of the manner in which the SABC programming policies and the constitution cannot fully ensure the representation of certain groups. The fear of alienating

core loyal audiences seems to have been of greater concern to the channel. This is something that the channel continues to deal with as there is acknowledgment that changes need to be made. Pushing boundaries is something that SABC 3 has been well known for although it is not always done constructively. Of the three channels, it is both the most liberal and at times, seemingly cavalier in terms of its programming choices. These programmes do push the boundaries with regard to content although this positive trait can also be mitigated by the implications of the perpetuation of stereotypes. The programming policy which calls for the fair and positive portrayal of minorities is not entirely upheld by SABC 3. *Hard Copy,* specifically in relation to the representation of the lesbian character, falls short of ensuring that negative stereotypes are not reinforced, as well as in term of promoting diversity in these representations. Entertainment value comprises a substantial component of what governs this commercial division of the SABC.

The fictional representations of lesbianism in programmes on the SABC as a collective have generally been superficial and entertainment focused. With the exception of *Society,* there is a great deal of room for improvement. There is a need for more multidimensional roles in which lesbian are relationships are not depicted at two extremes of either being hyper-sexualised or de-sexualised completely. Although the scope of this research did not permit, it would be of great interest to find out from the writers of these programmes how their personal views and experiences may have had an impact the representation of these lesbian characters. The presence of production staff that are a part of the homosexual community could also be helpful by imparting their unique views within these representations. It would also being interesting to find out from the production staff whether they experienced any interference from the SABC in which they either encouraged or opposed the exploration of the lesbian characters or themes.

It is essential that it be remembered that the concern is not only about basic visibility, it is also about positive and progressive visibility. In a sense, it is understandable why SABC 2 has been so slow to respond in terms of the fictional representation of lesbians, as negative representations are not encouraging to the lesbian community or helpful in terms of dealing with conservative audiences. The SABC has all the right ideals guiding them, but then the critical question that should be asked is whether they will choose to adhere to these guidelines. Hopefully,

programmes such as *Society* will serve as the template through which the integrity of the fictional depiction of lesbians can be better achieved, as well as diversity.

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