

# **The influence of television on adolescent girls’ sexual attitudes and behaviour in Mabopane Township**

**By**

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## Declaration

I declare that the work on which this dissertation is based is original, except where acknowledgement indicates otherwise, and that neither the whole work nor part of it has been, is being, or will be submitted for another degree at this or another university or tertiary education institution or examination body.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how television influences the sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls in Mabopane Township. Though the area of adolescent sexual behaviour has been researched to a considerable degree elsewhere, there seemed to be lack of information regarding adolescent sexual behaviour and attitudes relating to Africa, especially South Africa, which inspired the researcher to embark on this study. The researcher explored the adolescent girls' experiences using qualitative approach and in-depth individual interviews, and undertook a content thematic analysis of the textual data she gathered from girls who participated.

A qualitative research design was adopted for this study as it allowed the researcher to obtain rich data from the participants. Purposive random sampling was also used to select participants. The four participants were between age 16 and 17, studying in grades 11 and 12.

The results of this study indicated that adolescent girls from Mabopane Township feel that television does influence their sexual attitudes and behaviour. They also indicated that television does not display the consequences of sex, thus influencing adolescents to engage in such behaviour. Related to this was the finding that adolescents view characters on television as their role models because the latter are 'in the limelight', therefore enhancing the possibility of them doing what they see their role models doing. Furthermore, the participants indicated that television alone is not the only influence in their lives; other factors such as parental guidance and peer pressure also contribute to shaping their sexual attitudes and behaviours. They also indicated that frequent viewing of television is more likely to result in adolescents altering their sexual beliefs and adopting what is being done on television.

**Keywords:** adolescent, television, media, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviour, sexuality, peer, pressure, parental guidance, violence, body dissatisfaction, social learning theory.



## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction

Television, radio, films, newspapers, magazines, books, and other media are increasingly persuasive and influential in people's lives around the world. New technologies such as the Internet, cellphones and chat rooms, have changed the nature of the media experience in significant ways. According to Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi (1990, p. 58),

People of the world spend more than 3.5 billion hours watching television everyday. Some scholars explain this enormous expenditure of time and mental activity by arguing that television viewing involves a transfer of information that enriches the viewer's store of knowledge. Others emphasise that television provides viewers with much needed entertainment, relaxation and escape. To which degree these other things happen when people view television is the cause for much debate.

### 1.2 Description of the Research Problem

The research question the researcher is setting out to answer is "how does television influence the sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescent girls in the Mabopane Township". The study is based on Mabopane Township because research has indicated that sexual activity and consequently HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy are highly prevalent in townships (Bakker, de Graaf, Hawk & Vanwesenbeeck, 2006; Van Vuuren, 2004). Furthermore, the researcher is situated in the township and is therefore familiar with the research setting and has access to the participants.

### 1.3 The Research Problem

The role of television as a sexual educator in our culture is a disadvantage of the medium (Eggermont, 2005). On the one hand the researcher views television's accessibility, frankness, and popular appeal as an excellent instructor, offering a convenient way to learn about sex and sexual behaviours without embarrassment. While television's sexual messages are not necessarily visually explicit (which can be either non-verbal or verbal cues), they often provide information that adolescents may

not receive elsewhere (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). Through its dialogue, characterisations, storyline and themes, television programmes present adolescents with numerous verbal and visual examples of how dating, intimacy, relationships, and sex are handled. On the other hand, concern is often expressed that the messages regarding sexuality broadcast via television are limited, stereotypical, and potentially harmful (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs & Roberts, 1978; Haferkamp, 1999).

Research (Eggermont, 2005; Ward 2003; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999) that has attempted to establish links between sexual content in the media and adolescent sexuality has been conducted within America. However, we cannot assume that the above mentioned relationships are similar across cultures. For instance, South Africa is predominantly concerned with the dangers associated with sex, such as unwanted pregnancies, Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV/AIDS (Bakker et al., 2006). According to research (Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy & Jackson, 2005; Eggermont, 2005; Ward, 2003), white adolescents spend on average five to six hours a day with some form of mass media while black youth spend 7-8 hours.

The information available as regards South Africa is not as extensive as that of America, but the indications for television are that the same patterns of time usage are applicable here (Van Vuuren, 2004). For example, the South African Advertising Research Foundation (2003, 2005) studies indicate that very young toddlers (from nine months old) spend approximately 40 minutes per day in front of the television set, with the amount of viewing gradually increasing to the age of about six (to nearly two hours); then, as they go to school, there is a slight dip in the consumption of television as school activities take up some of their time. During the primary school years, a steady increase in the time spent on viewing television occurs, with a peak of about three hours per day at 10 to 12 years. During adolescence, other interests take them away from the television set again, and a dip in the time spent on viewing occurs, till after the age of twenty (Van Vuuren, 2004).

In 2003, research indicated that South African children between seven and 15 years view approximately 2 hours and 21 minutes of television per day (compared with 2 hours 43 minutes for adults) (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2003).

The 2005 data indicates that these figures have increased: During May 2005, the figure for children was 2 hours and 30 minutes and that of adults 3 hours and 18 minutes (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2003, 2005). Thus, this study aims at informing some of these gaps in past research (Aubrey, Harrison, Kramer & Yellin, 2003; Comstock et al., 1978; Eggermont, 2005; Ward 2002; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999) by examining the extent to which adolescents in Mabopane Township are influenced by television in the areas of sexual attitudes and behaviour, and establishing whether television is a socialiser through which social learning takes place.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Research**

This study is important for township communities, such as Mabopane, in understanding the influence of television on the sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescent girls. Furthermore, the information attained in this study could also help in understanding sexual decisions that are made by adolescents. As the country and the world as a whole are working towards combating the HIV and AIDS epidemic, it is imperative to try and understand the different aspects (peers, parents, television, as well as the media as a whole) that contribute to such decisions (Bakker et al., 2006), particularly since statistics have highlighted that they are more vulnerable to being infected and are at the risk of experiencing teenage pregnancy.

#### **1.5 Research Aim**

Whilst recognising international literature (Aubrey et al., 2003; Bakker et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Eggermont 2005; Huston, Wartella & Donnerstein, 1998; Peterson, Moore & Furstenberg, 1991; Roberts, 2000; Strouse, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Long, 1995; Ward, 2003; Ward & Friedman, 2006) regarding sexual messages portrayed in a wide range of media, including television, this study is primarily interested in the influence of sexually related messages to which adolescent girls from the Mabopane Township in South Africa are exposed when viewing television.

The study will further aim to identify sexual content presented in television programmes aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC 1, 2, 3) and

E-TV. DSTV was not considered in the research as it may not be accessible to most teenagers in the Mabopane Township owing to financial reasons such as the costs involved (<sup>1</sup>Z. Dhlomo, personal communication, January 26, 2008). However, the researcher did not identify specific content on television or programmes as this may have narrowed the study. The researcher allowed the participants to comment on the content or programmes that they were viewing and worked from their perspective.

For the purposes of this study, sexual content is defined as any depiction of sexual activity, sexually suggestive behaviour or talk about sex, sexual risks or responsibility, sexual health, or sexuality (Ward, 2003).

The adolescent phase runs from approximately age 13 till around age 19 (Chapin, 2000). However, this study focused on programmes that are viewed by adolescents between the ages of 15 - 17, because this is the age group that the Choose Life Community Organisation works with. The said organisation, situated in the Mabopane Township, was the access point from which the researcher would gain participants.

The study is built on previous studies that have been carried out by Aubrey et al., 2003; Bakker et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Chia, 2006; Eggermont, 2005; Huston et al., 1998; Peterson et al., 1991; Roberts, 2000; Strouse et al., 1995; Ward, 2003; Ward & Friedman, 2006 on the issue of television's influence or impact on sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescents. Furthermore, the current research has placed greater emphasis on its relevance to South African township adolescents. The study addressed the following main question:

How does television influence the attitudes and behaviour pertaining to sexuality of adolescent girls in Mabopane Township?

For other possible questions that arose during the interviews, refer to appendix D.

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Dhlomo: Managing Director of Choose Life Community Organisation.

## **1.6 Research Objective:**

To explore how television viewing influences the sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls.

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework or Paradigm**

The theoretical framework of this research was based on the Social Learning Approach. The social learning theory of Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modelling the behaviour, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) states that learning would be difficult if people had to rely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: by observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviour is performed, and on later occasions this information serves as a guide for action. Thus, social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1997).

## **1.8 Research Methodology**

The current research was qualitative in nature and data was interpreted using thematic content analysis. The study was compiled with the aid of the following:

- Literature review – to express the underlying assumptions behind the research question and to demonstrate the need for the study.
- In-depth interviews – with the aim of exploring, describing and gaining a deeper understanding of the use of television and its possible influence on the given attitudes and behaviour.

Determining the methodology was the most important phase of the research process in that it provided guidance as to the manner in which the study would be conducted. The description of the type of design, the motivation for the methodology selected, the role of the researcher, the data collection method and the sampling will be discussed.

## **1.9 Outline of the Chapters**

Chapter 1 furnishes an introduction of the study together with an outline of the research aim, rationale and objectives. Chapter 2 consists of the overview of literature relating to the study and other research regarding this area. Chapter 3 comprises the theoretical framework that underlines the study, while Chapter 4 refers to the methods and procedures followed in this undertaking, examining the utility of the qualitative approach and interviewing as well as the strategies for data collection and analysis. In chapter 5, the researcher considers the findings and interpretation of the data she collected. She further discusses the themes pertaining to the experiences of the adolescent girls. In chapter 6 the researcher presents the concluding remarks, notes the limitations and benefits of the research, as well as makes recommendations regarding further research.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

The fact that developments in the area of television are affecting our daily lives cannot be disputed, and the questions relating to these effects are numerous. Answering these questions should be very important for social researchers as this should hopefully lead to a better understanding of what underpins a person's actions and how people respond to the changes provoked by television and the media as a whole.

This study focused only on one of these issues, namely, how television influences the sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls. Although it can be expected that not all the questions related to this issue can be answered in this study, it may provide some understanding of the perceived influence of television on sexual attitudes and behaviour of girls. The study may also add to the list of unanswered questions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with literature concerning previous studies relating directly and indirectly to the influence of television on adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour. Furthermore, this chapter furnishes a detailed description of how different researchers view the underlying assumption of this study together with a consideration of the different methodologies employed to conduct the various studies which have resulted in similar conclusions.

This chapter further describes how television has influenced other aspects of adolescent life, such as body dissatisfaction (Spitzer, Henderson & Zivian, 1999; Sypeck, Gray & Ahrens, 2004) and violence / aggression (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997). Although the study focuses on the influence of television, the researcher also describes mass media in order to broaden the perspective regarding media influence among adolescents. In addition, the researcher indicates how television influences aggressive behaviour and body dissatisfaction of adolescents. These studies have been included to illustrate that if television is able to influence adolescents in this manner, it may also influence adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour.

Thus, this chapter begins by investigating the developmental aspects of adolescents, especially towards sexuality. This helps one to understand the level of development with which adolescents reason and possibly behave.

#### 2.2 Adolescents and Sexuality

Late adolescence and early adulthood can be viewed as a time of adjustment and is often characterised by turmoil resulting from issues regarding identity and sexual identity and orientation (Ruane, Kassayira & Shino, in print). A key period of sexual exploration and development occurs during adolescence (Carpenter, 1998). During this time, individuals begin to consider which sexual behaviours are enjoyable, moral,

and appropriate for their age group (Fay & Yanoff, 2000). Many adolescents become sexually active during this period; 46% of high school students in America have had sexual intercourse (Brown, Childers & Waszak, 1990; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; LeVay. & Valente, 2003; Strong & DeVault, 1994; Werner-Wilson, Fitzharris & Morrissey, 2004). Although intercourse among youths is common, most sexually active adolescents wish they had waited longer to have sex, which suggests that sex is occurring before youths are prepared for its consequences (Durham, 1998).

Sexuality is a developmental milestone of adolescence with which each generation struggles. Sexuality encompasses behavioural components with boundaries of sexual activity moving in an increasingly permissive direction. Perceptions appear to be constant through the ages while only the circumstances change (Jones & Boonstra, 2005) and yet one might argue that such reasoning is not reassuring in so far as concerns cannot simply be dismissed on the basis of “the more things change the more they stay the same” (Katz, 1997, p. 62). According to Szabo (2006), an emphasis on individual freedom and a rights-driven culture in societies may be influential in this apparent permissiveness. A number of factors which include media and the internet, urbanization, electronic communication, peer influences and the breakdown of traditional parental and community structures also play a part (Hall & Sherry, 2004; Jones & Boonstra, 2005; Szabo, 2006). Therefore, we look at these factors in more detail.

### 2.2.1 Factors influencing adolescent sexuality

There are many factors that contribute to and influence the initiation of sexual activity among adolescents (Haffner, 1997; Miller & Fox, 1987). Family structure, age, gender, parenting styles, and type of parental communication have all been researched. However, family structure has been of particular interest to most researchers as more adolescents are being exposed to family disruption and are moving away from traditional lifestyles (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Werner-Wilson, 1998). The positive or negative impact of these changes on adolescents may also influence their sexual behaviour as well as increase accepting attitudes toward sexual activities (Haffner, 1997; Werner-Wilson, 1998). The situation in South Africa will be further discussed in section 2.2.4.



Miller and Fox (1987) state that adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours are also influenced by:

- Biological and psychological factors within an individual – this refers to age, level of maturity and gender.
- Close relationships in family and peer groups – refers to the people with whom an adolescent enjoys near, close or intimate relationships.
- Socio-cultural contexts such as race, religion, school and the media – refers to the kind of environment from which the adolescents come, their belief systems, the kind of education, as well as the kind of media (television, print media, internet, radio), to which they have been exposed.

Consequently this research aims at determining the socio-cultural factors, more specifically that of television, as an influencing factor on the sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls in Mabopane Township.

## 2.2.2 Factors associated with adolescent sexuality

Werner-Wilson (1998) comments that factors associated with sexual behaviour within the person include individual factors such as psychosocial characteristics (e.g., age at first intercourse, self-esteem), gender, and attitudes towards sexuality and peer and family (e.g., number of siblings, number of parents in the home, communication with mother and father, family strengths, parental contribution to sexual education, parental discussion of sexual values, and the sexual attitudes of mother and father).

### 2.2.2.1 Individual factors

*Psychosocial influences:* Miller, McCoy, & Olson (1986) and Thornton (1990) comment that adolescents who begin to date earlier go on more dates, which is positively associated with sexual experience, number of sexual partners, and level of sexual activity during the later teens. Thus early initiation is one of the factors that predict sexual frequency. Age at first intercourse is related to expectations as regards independence.

*Self-esteem:* also influences adolescents' sexual behaviour and can be related to sexual attitudes. For example, self-esteem is positively related to sexual intercourse for adolescents who believe that intercourse is always right, but negatively related for those who believe it is wrong (Miller, Christensen, & Olson, 1987).

*Gender differences:* adolescent males are much more likely than adolescent females to report that they have engaged in sexual intercourse (Newcomer & Udry, 1985; Werner-Wilson, 1998). Furthermore, adolescent males are less likely to consider affection as a sign of sexual intimacy than adolescent females (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Miller, & Kao, 1992) and are more likely to believe that sexual coercion is justifiable (Feltey, Ainslie, & Geib, 1991), as well as being more likely to respond to peer-pressure by engaging in sexual activity (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986).

*Attitudes about sexuality:* although adolescent males and females hold different values concerning sexuality (Plotnick, 1992), personal values and attitudes contribute directly to sexual expression for both genders (Plotnick, 1992; Rotheram-Borus & Koopman, 1991). Sexual behaviour that contradicts personal values is associated with emotional distress and lower self-esteem; these values are likely to match local social norms (Miller et al., 1987).

#### 2.2.2.2 Peer and family influence

*Peer pressure* is related to age as it signifies the person's current milestone or developmental stage as well as her or his maturity. Furthermore, adolescent males and females display similar perceptions of peer pressure, but males are more likely to submit to it than females (Brown et al., 1986). Although there are strong resemblances between the sexual behaviours of peers, the similarity may not reflect peer pressure.

*Family influence:* According to Wright, Peterson and Barnes (1990), the strength of peer influence on sexuality is mediated by parent-adolescent communication. Although adolescents rate friends, school, and books as more important than parents as sources of information about sex, parents are rated as exercising greater influence on sexual attitudes (Sanders & Mullis, 1988). In addition, Miller et al. (1986) argue

that sexual permissiveness and intercourse are related to parental discipline and control, a relationship that is not straight or clear. Sibling relationships are also associated with adolescent sexual activity. Earlier sexual experience is connected with having older siblings who are sexually active (Werner-Wilson, 1998). Thus earlier sexual activity of younger siblings may occur due to role modelling (East, Felice, & Morgan, 1993), or it may result from greater parental permissiveness (Rodgers, Rowe, & Harris, 1992).

### 2.2.3 Adolescent sexuality and consequences

According to Lund and Blaedon (2003), Americans have long been concerned about premarital sexual activity in the adolescent population and the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including infection with HIV. Furthermore, researchers (Chia, 2006; Chunovic, 2000; Lund & Blaedon, 2003) state that nearly half of all high school students have had sexual intercourse, with African Americans significantly more likely to be sexually experienced (72%) than Hispanics (52%) or whites (47%). Research (Chia, 2006; Chunovic, 2000) suggests that even among adolescents who have not experienced sexual intercourse, substantial numbers engage in other intimate sexual behaviours, such as oral sex.

Among adolescent girls in America aged between 15 and 17 years, 75 per 1000 become pregnant each year, a rate two to seven times higher than rates in other industrialized nations (Chia, 2006). Those adolescents (19% of the adolescent population) who report four or more lifetime sexual partners are at greater risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection (Lund & Blaedon, 2003). According to Chunovic (2000), 25% of sexually active teenagers and 13% of all adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 become infected with sexually transmitted diseases each year, representing 3 million cases or about 25% of all new cases reported annually.

#### 2.2.4 Adolescent sexuality in South Africa

In South Africa, the situation of many young people faced with pressures from a number of sources is highlighted (Hall & Sherry, 2004). Adolescents are watching their parents and siblings die of AIDS. Parents are no longer setting boundaries. With little sense of purpose or hope, they turn to sex for recreation or a measure of intimacy without concern for their own projection of becoming infected.

There is considerable pressure on young women (adolescent girls) to have sex without condoms, stemming from a range of factors including peer pressure, economic situations, thrill and excitement, simply wanting a baby, as well as myths regarding condom use. Young people record the fastest growing infection rates; 50% of the youth in South Africa are sexually active by age 16, close to 80% by age 20 (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003) with adolescent males having earlier sexual encounters. The majority of adolescents are at risk of HIV infection through unprotected sex.

South Africa is a country where abortion is available on demand (Szabo, 2006) and which places a strong emphasis on female reproductive rights (Richter, Norris & Ginsberg 2006). Whilst this is arguably a desirable requirement in a constitutionally driven democracy, some might view this as promoting an approach to sexual behaviour that is not only morally unacceptable but also encouraging attitudes and behaviours that are not healthy (Szabo, 2006). HIV infection has reached pandemic levels and rape statistics in this country present an alarming reality. In response to the HIV crisis, the active promotion of safe sex practices, largely through condom usage, has dominated approaches to prevention of transmission (Richter et al., 2006; Szabo, 2006).

Safe sexual practices such as masturbation (self or mutual), while previously tabooed, have been more openly addressed than ever before. Other approaches such as delaying sexual encounters or abstinence have not been as prominent (Hall & Sherry, 2004). The harsh reality of life threatening sexually transmitted infection has added to the complex sexual landscape that confronts adolescents, parents and clinicians alike. In some ways the HIV issue has made things simpler (Mash, Kareithi & Mash, 2006) by effectively addressing the issue of sexuality and sexual activity with adolescents

who are not only particularly vulnerable to infection, but whose constructive involvement is critical in the fight to prevent HIV infection.

Within the legal context, issues of age of consent to engage in sexual intercourse, and the right of children and adolescents to seek medical attention for reproductive issues without parental involvement, certainly raise ethical and legal issues for health care professionals (Richter et al., 2006). There needs to be a focus on health care with a broader awareness in society and a specific awareness of oneself in objectively assessing the risk of promoting or enabling a permissive attitude towards adolescent sexual activity (Hall & Sherry, 2004). Recent South African research related to teenage pregnancy and sexual behaviour among youth has contributed an important insight into two key areas of adolescent sexuality (Mash et al., 2006).

#### 2.2.4.1 Teenage pregnancy

Regarding teenage pregnancy, the veil of secrecy as a consequence of shame has been highlighted as a failure of both family and health services to provide a secure and trusting environment that promotes open communication (Richter et al., 2006). Findings of a survey on sexual behaviour among Anglican youth in the Western Cape found that religious affiliation and involvement with church related activities did not differentiate Anglican youth from other youth (Szabo, 2006). Specifically, they were as likely to be engaged in sexual activity (31% of the sample in the 12–19 year old age group) as the broader peer group. The report cited the need for parental capacity to deal with such issues as being an important focus, specifically as this adolescent sample cited parents as an important source of information albeit that they were not perceived to be comfortable with answering questions about sex (Mash et al., 2006; Szabo, 2006).

#### 2.2.4.2 HIV prevalence

Surveys of high school students in various countries, including South Africa, consistently identify significant gaps in adolescents' knowledge of HIV, especially regarding misconceptions about causal transmission and prevention. At the same time, these young people record a high prevalence of behaviours that put them at risk of HIV infection, including early sexual onset, infrequent condom use, and multiple

sexual partners (Siegel, DiClemente, Durbin, Krasnovsky & Saliba, 1995; Stewart et al., 2001). Eaton et al., (2000) reviewed HIV/AIDS knowledge among South African youth aged 14-35 years and found that young people are very aware of the nature of AIDS but were less knowledgeable about HIV transmission and prevention. Eaton et al., (2003) reviewed unsafe sexual behaviour among South African youth and suggest that at least 50% of young people are sexually active by the age of 16; a considerable number had more than one lifetime partner and mostly used condoms irregularly. There was also uncertainty about the proper use of condoms (ibid.).

### **2.3 Sexuality on Television**

Although sexual content in the media can affect any age group, adolescents may be particularly vulnerable (Ward, 2003) since they are still in the impressionable developmental stages and are attempting to establish their own identity. Adolescents may be exposed to sexual content in the media during a developmental period when gender roles, sexual attitudes, and sexual behaviours are being shaped (Brown & Newcomer, 1991). Consequently, this group may be at risk because among other things cognitive skills may not allow them to critically analyze messages from the media, while the ability to make decisions based on possible future outcomes is not yet fully developed at this stage (Haferkamp, 1999).

Analyses of broadcast media content in America indicate that, on average, adolescent viewers see 143 (Anderson, 2004; Arnett, 1995; Ward & Friedman, 2006) incidents of sexual behaviour on network television at the most important times each week, with portrayals of three to four times as many sexual activities occurring between unmarried partners as between spouses. As much as 80% of all movies shown on television stations have sexual content (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Calfin, Carroll & Schmidt, 1993; Chunovic, 2000; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Durham, 1999, Flowers-Coulson, Kushner & Bankowski, 2000; Strong & DeVault, 1994). An analysis of music videos indicates that 60% portray sexual feelings and impulses, while a substantial minority display provocative clothing and sexually suggestive body movements. Therefore, an analysis of media content also shows that sexual messages on television are almost universally presented in a positive light, with little

discussion of the potential risks of unprotected sexual intercourse and few portrayals of adverse consequences (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001).

Survey data (Calvin et al., 1993; Chunovic, 2000; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Durham, 1999; Eggermont, 2005; Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000) indicates that adolescents' access to and use of media as sources of information are substantial. In a national study (Ward, 2003), high school students reported an average of 2.9 television sets, while 1.3 out of 10 (13%) American children reported living in homes with two or more televisions, 97% had videocassette recorders in their homes, 75% enjoyed access to television, and more than half had a television set in their own rooms. Further, more than 80% of adolescents report that their peers obtain some information, or much, about sex, drugs, and violence from television shows, movies, and other entertainment media. However, about 10% of teens acknowledge that they have learned more about AIDS from these media sources than their parents, school personnel, clergy, or friends (Eggermont, 2005; Ward, 2003).

### 2.3.1 South African data on sexuality and television

Quantitative analyses, performed by Conradie (2000), of prime time (18:00-22:00) television broadcasting, indicate that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) violence levels per hour, on average, are slightly higher than the violence level in American broadcasts. Furthermore, qualitative analyses have revealed low intensity levels of sexual behaviour in SABC programmes:

- SABC 1: 91% of prime time programmes have no sex.
- SABC 2: 89% of prime time programmes have no sex.
- SABC 3: 84% of prime time programmes have no sex.

Regarding the level of violence and sex on programmes, qualitative interviews were conducted with eight groups of viewers (parents and teenagers of four different language groups). The results revealed that there was no consensus between the groups as some indicated that there was “too little”, some said there was “too much”, while others were uncertain (Conradie, 2000).

Furthermore, research among groups of viewers (parents and teenagers) found that for almost all groups, television sex was acceptable when presented in an educational context. Sexual content on television also seemed to be unacceptable if it was broadcast during times when young children watch television (Conradie, 2000).

#### **2.4 Influence of Television on Adolescents**

Television has proven to exert a large influence on people's attitudes and behaviour (Lund & Blaedon, 2003). It has been found to reflect and possibly shape the attitudes, values, and behaviours of young people (Greeson, 1991). According to Chapin (2000), this medium has become so influential that it serves as a teacher, often providing a common source of information to young people. The role of media in adolescents' lives has raised concerns in many respects, such as violence, sexuality and body dissatisfaction. However, aggression/violence and sexuality are key research areas (Lund & Blaedon, 2003). Disquiet has been mentioned by researchers with regards to television as a teacher (Ward, 1995) of sexuality. According to Chapin (2000), even parents think that television has a large impact on adolescents' attitudes and they recognise that many adolescents spend more time watching television than they do with their parents.

According to LeVay and Valente (2003), adolescents are active consumers of messages broadcast on radio and television, printed in magazines, distributed on the Internet, and presented in video games. As technology has advanced, access to these different types of media has become common in American households (Eggermont, 2005; Fay & Yanoff, 2000; Paik, 2001; Ward, 2003; Werner-Wilson et al., 2004). Wireless resources such as radio/CD headsets, handheld televisions, portable video game players, and internet access via cellular phones add to the numerous sources of media access (Ward & Friedman, 2006). Consequently, video cassette recorder usage allowing repetitive viewing of movies and access to age-restricted movies must be taken into consideration when studying media access. With each additional source of access, popular media may replace more worthwhile activities (Carpenter, 1998). Further, adolescents appear to be using media in a private manner; thus, more adolescents seem to have media available in their private bedrooms (Larson, 1995).



As stated in chapter 1, the information for South Africa is not as extensive as that for the Americas, but the indications are, at least for television, that the same patterns of time usage are applicable here (Van Vuuren, 2004).

Fay and Yanoff (2000) state that early sexual initiation is an important health issue, and thus, raises the question of why individuals become sexually involved at young ages. What factors accelerate sexual initiation, and what factors delay its onset? There are many well-documented predictors of age of initiation into intercourse, both social and physical (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout & Brodie, 1999). However, according to several studies (Carpenter, 1998; LeVay & Valente, 2003; Paik, 2001; Ward, 2003), one factor commonly mentioned by parents and policy makers as promoting sex among adolescents is television. There is scientific reason to think that television may be a key contributor to early sexual activity (Chunovic, 2000; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Durham, 1999; Ward & Friedman, 2006). Sexual behaviour is strongly influenced by culture, and television is an important part of an adolescent's culture (Ward, 1995, 2003). The average youth watches an average of five hours of television daily (Roberts et al., 1999). There, sexual messages are commonplace, according to a scientific content analysis of a representative sample of programming from the 2001–2002 television seasons (Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Eggermont, 2005; LeVay & Valente 2003; Werner-Wilson et al., 2004). Sexual content appears in 64% of all television programmes; those programmes with sexual content average 4.4 scenes with sexually related material per hour. Talk about sex is found more frequently (61% of all programmes) than overt portrayals of any sexual behaviour (32% of programmes). Approximately one of every seven programmes (14%) includes a portrayal of sexual intercourse, depicted or strongly implied (Brown et al., 2005; Eggermont, 2005; Ward, 2003; Werner-Wilson et al., 2006).

According to the study conducted by Eggermont (2005), previous research has suggested that an adolescent's perception of how peers behave may have some bearing on his or her intentions or actual behaviours. Eggermont (2005) and Heintz-Knowles (1996), further state that this may be due to several reasons, and may be partly attributable to adolescents' television viewing. One reason could be the continuous occurrence of sexual examples on television, and according to social learning theory, as already mentioned, the more one observes behaviour, the more

likely one is to model it. Various content analyses have documented that most television programmes incorporate numerous references to dating and sex (Haferkamp, 1999; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). According to several studies (Kunkel, Cope, & Colvin, 1996), it has been reported that nearly seven in 10 television programmes contain a sexual message. Furthermore, an average of 10 references to sexual intercourse per hour occurs in soap operas (Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Heintz-Knowles, 1996), and an average of 20 instances per hour occur in programmes most preferred by young people (Ward, 1995).

Therefore, it is argued that adolescents pay special attention to such portrayals, because romantic and sexual relationships are both new and important in adolescence (Jeffres & Perloff, 1997). This argument is supported by Brown, White and Nikopoulou (1993) when they describe adolescent girls as actively interpreting sexual television contents. Several authors (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Jeffres, 1997; Ward, 1995) have assumed that adolescents may have few options other than to search for televised examples in order to shape their own conceptions regarding sex and intimacy. Regarding sexuality, television may be of functional value (Greenberg & Busselle., 1996), because direct observations of intimacy seldom occur, sexual relationships are not an easy subject to talk about, especially with parents (Gordon & Gilgun, 1987) and educational programmes tend to focus on biological features (Huston et al., 1998).

Thus, these reasons have led to the hypothesis that television may provide adolescents with the basis for social comparison regarding sexuality-related issues (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). Several studies by Aubrey et al., (2003), Buerkel-Rothfuss & Strouse (1993) and Ward (2002) have supported the concept that television's recurrent portrayal of certain sexual acts makes them seem more common or acceptable. According to Buerkel-Rothfuss, et al. (1993), it has been found that people who view soap operas regularly tend to overestimate the prevalence of sexual activity in real life, and that more frequent television exposure is related to greater expectations of peer sexual experience in a sample of 259 undergraduate students. Television appears to create the impression that everyone is doing it (Ward, 2003).

Overall, one-third to one-half of the television shows which adolescents commonly watch comprise programmes which contain verbal references to sexual issues (Ward, 1995). In 1990, relative increases in the frequency of both sexual references and explicit content on television were noted (Brown et al., 1990). More recent studies have also found an abundance of sexual references in a variety of programmes (Brown, 2002; Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Kunkel et al., 1999). In a study of college students, Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) found that more frequent viewing in terms of the nature of the show (e.g., soap operas, comedies, and dramas) indicated more frequent viewing of sexual content. A 2001 report on media content analysis revealed that sexual content on television has steadily increased and the involvement of young people in sexual activity has also increased (Kunkel et al., 2001).

Factors such as difficulties in collecting sensitive information about adolescents' sexual exposure and behaviour have included barriers to conducting research more widely. Nonetheless, some research has considered the empirical relations between media and sexuality. An early study by Brown and Newcomer (1991) revealed that adolescents who watched a heavier proportion of what were defined as sexy shows (i.e., those rated by college students as being more sexy) were more likely to have had intercourse than to have been virgins at the time. Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) examined the media consumption and sexual behaviour of 18 to 24 year old undergraduate students. The results indicated that greater exposure to and identification with television programmes that included sexual content were associated with stronger endorsement of recreational attitudes towards sex, higher expectations of the sexual activity of one's peers, and more extensive sexual experience. Brown (2000) reviewed the then existing empirical studies on this topic and found that although the studies are sparse, there is evidence that the mass media can influence how aware one is of sexual topics, one's beliefs about it, and one's actual behaviour. Furthermore, Ward's (2003) review of empirical studies revealed links between sexually orientated media and such outcomes as there being a greater acceptance of casual attitudes about sex and more advanced sexual experience.

On the other hand, others have not found evidence of a link between the quantity and content of television viewing and the initiation of sexual activity (Peterson et al., 1991). Two texts on media and sexuality (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2002;

Bryant & Thompson, 2002) indicate that much of the existing literature on television and sexuality has been descriptive, because there are many challenges, mainly ethical, to exploring these issues regarding adolescents. It is also unclear whether time spent watching sexual television is more predictive of sexual outcomes, or whether it is the explicitness of the sexual nature of the shows that is a stronger predictor of sexual outcomes. Measurement and coding of sexuality in television programming has varied, with many studies measuring sexual content descriptively or anecdotally (Jones, 2004). For example, some have used undergraduates to rate the content (Brown & Newcomer, 1991), some categorized teens' self-reported media viewing patterns (Peterson et al., 1991), and some have carried out laboratory manipulations (Kalof, 1999).

According to Brown et al. (2005), adolescents consistently refer to the mass media, including television, as the most important sources of sexual information. As mentioned, recent surveys (Brown et al., 2005) show that white adolescents spend on average five to six hours a day with some form of mass media and black youth spend even more. The sexual content in much of the media to which these adolescents refer is frequent, glamourised, and consequence free (Greenberg, Brown & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). In 2002, most of the television shows watched frequently by adolescents included sexual content, but very few of those shows included any depiction of sexual risks and/or responsibilities. Research has also indicated that television viewing can cultivate a distorted world view and influence several behavioural domains, as has been amply demonstrated; therefore it is expected that it may affect sexual learning as well (Strouse et al., 1995). Furthermore, these authors found that out of 1500 adolescents who participated in their study, 1,043 considered television to be their greatest source of pressure to become sexually active.

Brown et al. (2005) indicates that the early initiation of sexual intercourse is a risk factor for teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents. Bakker et al. (2006) states that both male and female adolescents who are younger at first intercourse are less likely to use precautionary measures, which has resulted in the increase of teenage pregnancies as well as HIV/AIDS in South Africa. According to Ward & Rivadeneyra (1999), the use of media (television,

internet and magazines), as stated in previous research, appears to exert an influence on sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescents.

Although the research with regards to the said topic has been sparse, Ward & Friedman (2006) state that several findings do associate the amount of television viewing (both in terms of programmes and time spent) with sexual attitudes and behaviour of viewers. Furthermore, they state that greater television exposure has been linked to viewers' attitudes about sex and sexual relationships. According to Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss (1987), both heavy regular consumption of and experimental exposure to sexually-oriented genres, such as soap operas and music videos, have been related to expressing more liberal sexual attitudes (Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987), to being more accepting of sexual improprieties, and to more increased negative attitudes towards remaining a virgin.

Secondly, greater television exposure has been linked to viewers' expectations about the prevalence of certain sexual outcomes frequently depicted on television (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Strouse, 1993). For example, undergraduates who frequently view soap operas offer higher estimates of the numbers of real people who divorce or have illegitimate children than less frequent viewers do.

Furthermore, there is tentative evidence that greater television exposure is linked to viewers' sexual behaviour. Although the amount of general television viewing typically has not been related to levels of sexual activity amongst viewers (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Peterson et al., 1991), links between exposure and greater sexual experience emerge when more sexually-oriented programming is examined (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987; Strouse et al., 1995). Together, these findings provide tentative evidence of a link between the amount of time spent watching sexually-oriented programming and viewers' own sexual attitudes, expectations, and behaviour.

Television's abundant yet often stereotypical sexual content has raised concern that frequent exposure to these portrayals might misguide the developing sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescents. Current evidence suggests that these concerns are warranted, indicating that both regular and laboratory exposure to television's sexual

content are associated with stronger support of non-relational sex and specific sexual stereotypes (Brown et al., 2005). However, the strength of these conclusions is tempered by methodological and conceptual limitations that underscore the need for additional evidence of causal connections, purposeful sampling of adolescent viewers and broader assessments of media use and sexual behaviour. According to Brown et al. (2005), drawing from several theoretical perspectives, these limitations are addressed by examining associations between multiple dimensions of television use and adolescents' sexual beliefs and behaviour.

The few studies of the effects of television on adolescents' sexual beliefs have found that prime-time programmes and music videos, focusing on sex outside marriage, promote more justifiable attitudes about premarital sex (Huston et al., 1998; Ward & Friedman, 2006). Two cross-sectional surveys have linked frequent exposure to sexual television content and transition to sexual intercourse. However, because time order was not clear in these studies, Ward and Friedman (2006) further state that it is credible to conclude that adolescents who were having sexual intercourse were also those most interested in sexual content in the media, rather than that exposure to sexual media was accelerating the initiation of their sexual activity. The single longitudinal study on this topic found that adolescents (12–17 years old) who watched television shows with more sexual content were more likely than those who viewed fewer shows with sexual content to have engaged in more advanced sexual behaviour, as well as sexual intercourse, up to one year later. The aforementioned study which focused on only 25 television programmes, however, combined younger and older adolescents in the same analysis and paid relatively little attention to race differences (Brown et al., 2005).

One concern is that the prevalence of sexual content on television overemphasises the role of sex in male-female relationships. Of equal concern is the impression that television provides a one-dimensional picture of sexual relationships, one in which sex is only for the young, single, beautiful and where sexual encounters are always spontaneous, romantic and risk free (Bakker et al., 2006) Thus, because of the prevalent yet limited nature of television's sexual content, researchers and educators have become interested in whether heavy viewing of these portrayals is associated

with distorted expectations, irresponsible sexual decision-making, and permissive or stereotypical sexual attitudes.

Larson (1995) is of the opinion that the exposure to portrayals of sex may affect adolescents in developing beliefs about cultural norms as well. Paik (2001) states that television may create the illusion that sex is more central to daily life than it truly is and may promote sexual initiation as a result, a process known as media cultivation. Exposure to the social models provided by television may also alter beliefs about the likely outcome of engaging in sexual activity (Chunovic, 2000). Social learning theory predicts that teens who see characters having casual sex without experiencing negative consequences will be more likely to adopt the behaviours portrayed (Greenberg, Brown & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). Although televised sexual portrayals can theoretically inhibit sexual activity when they include depictions of sexual risks (such as the possibility of contracting an STI or becoming pregnant), abstinence, or the need for sexual safety, this type of depiction occurs in only 15% of shows with sexual content (Greenberg et al., 1993; Ward, 2003). In other words, only one in every seven television shows that include sexual content includes any safe sex messages, and nearly two-thirds of these instances (63%) are minor or inconsequential in their degree of emphasis within the scene. As a result, sexual content on television is far more likely to promote sexual activity among American adolescents than discourage it (Larson, 1995; Malamuth & Impett, 2001; Remez, 2000; Singh & Darroch, 1999). Television has already been shown to influence violent and aggressive behaviour among youths (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein, Slaby & Eron, 1995; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997) and although an extension of the principles involved in the realm of sexual behaviour is not a foregone conclusion, the hypothesis that television promotes early sexual initiation logically follows from previous media effects theory and several existing studies.

Research carried out by various authors (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Calfin et al., 1993; Chunovic, 2000; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Durham, 1999, Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000) demonstrated links between the viewing of sexual content on television and attitudes toward sex, the endorsement of gender stereotypes likely to promote sexual initiation, and dissatisfaction with virginity, as well as a wide range of perceptions regarding normative sexual behaviour. In addition to these studies, articles

published in the early 1990s examined the question of whether exposure to sex on television influences the sexual behaviour of adolescents (Calvin et al., 1993; Fine, Mortimer & Roberts, 1990; Strong & DeVault, 1994). The above mentioned research found positive associations between intercourse and television viewing among adolescents, but methodological limitations rendered the results inconclusive (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Calvin et al., 1993; Chunovic, 2000; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Durham, 1999; Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000; Strong & DeVault, 1994). Higher levels of exposure to sex on television might have led to sexual initiation, but a credible alternative interpretation was that this resulted because sexual content closely reflects the identities and interests of sexually active adolescents who choose to watch more of it than their inactive peers (Ward, 2003). This possibility could not be excluded because the relative timing of these events was unknown to the researchers. These studies were also limited in their ability to attribute the sexual behaviour of youths to differences in television exposure to sex, rather than to other closely related factors (Chunovic, 2000; Paik, 2001; Ward, 2003). For example, youths who receive little supervision may be free to watch more television and to choose programmes with sexual content and may also experience more opportunities to engage in sexual activity. Finally, previous work was forced to rely on indefinite measures of content, making it difficult to be certain that exposure to sexual content per se was the source of the associations observed (Aubrey et al., 2003; Eggermont, 2005; Haferkamp, 1999; Ward, 2003).

Both children and adults have been reported to believe that the media is a central source of information on sex and sexuality for young people (Malamuth & Impett, 2001), considering that few programmes (from daily news, to reality-based programmes, talk shows and family-centred programming) appear immune to stories of a sexual nature. Content analysis has been performed on print media, television and movies, music, and computerised media in order to determine the types of messages delivered through these sources, with results showing adolescents being exposed to both implicit and explicit sexual content (Carpenter, 1998; Durham, 1998; Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000; Kehily, 1999; Strong & DeVault, 1994; Ward & Wyatt, 1994). While neither prior research nor the general public appear to dispute the sexual content of the media, the perceived influence on adolescents and their sexuality appears to warrant further examination. Few studies examine whether adolescents



themselves find the media influential in determining their sexual attitudes, values, and behaviour (Malamuth & Impett, 2001).

## **2.5 Adolescents and the Mass Media**

Regarding sexual socialisation, Brown et al. (1993) concluded that the mass media constitute important providers of sex education for American adolescents. According to Strasburger (1995), nearly 50% of adolescents say that they obtain information about birth control from the media, while Larson (1995) suggests that media use alters, often becoming more individualistic as adolescents begin to develop their sense of self. The experiences of adolescents as they develop may impact on how media is selected and how influential the messages are. Fine et al. (1990) suggest that the medium adolescents select is different during this life stage in an attempt to gain independence from parents. Depending on their rate of development, some adolescents may succumb to media influences, while others may not. Based on an extensive literature review regarding the influences of sexual content in the media, Malamuth and Impett (2001) state that individual personality factors may also be important, as research suggests that the type of media which people select and find gratifying is predictably related to their personalities and other individual differences. Sears (1991) has also examined adolescents and determined that they vary greatly regarding their development in areas such as identity formation and the development of formal problem solving and moral reasoning. Sears (1991) suggests that not only do these affect the impact of media on adolescents, but also their individual abilities, interests, social relationships, and short and long-term needs. Some adolescents may not be cognitively equipped to interpret the media images they encounter (Brown et al., 1990) leading to differences in how they process and utilise the messages. Nathanson (1991) has also suggested that media influences may be greater among adolescents who have not experienced normal personality development.

Along with developmental differences, learning styles may also contribute to the way in which media are used and interpreted by adolescents. Malamuth (1986) and Malamuth and Impett (2001) investigated various learning styles in order to determine which contributed most to the knowledge of birth control. Styles of communication and learning were assessed in terms of with whom the adolescent communicated (peers, family, professionals, multiple sources, or no one). The relationship between

the interactive communication styles (home, peer, professional, and multi-source) and non interactive (media influence without communication with others) was significant; adolescents who used interactive communication styles acquired greater birth control knowledge than those with a non-interactive learning style.

The gender of the adolescent has also been shown to be associated with media influence. For example, Baran (1976) and Brown and Newcomer (1991) examined the influence of perceptions on sexuality on television and satisfaction with sexuality. While no direct influence of television on sexuality was found, Baran (1976) did establish that males were more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with their first sexual experience and lower levels of satisfaction with their virginity. Brown and Newcomer (1991) found that males were less likely to be virgins than females, and that while females were more likely to watch television their sexual status (virgin or non-virgin) was related to the amount of sexual content viewed on television. In addition, females appear more likely to hold conservative attitudes regarding sexuality (Calvin et al., 1993). Strouse, et al (1995) revealed similar findings regarding males being more likely to engage in premarital intercourse and to hold liberal attitudes about premarital sex. Similarly, adolescent females seem to be more likely to watch soap operas and music-videos, and to spend more time listening to music (Strouse & Buerke-Rothfuss, 1987). In a qualitative, multi-method study, Steele (1999) also found that gender differences might be present in the selection of media for viewing or listening. Adolescent girls also appear to be affected differently by print media and are more likely than young males to read and display positive attitudes toward magazines. Girls use these magazines as discussion starters and to supplement sex education classes, whereas boys have reported that they consider the seeking and sharing of advice to be unmasculine behaviour (Kehily, 1999). Girls have also been reported as more likely to seek out media showing romance and are therefore more likely to be exposed to sexual content (Donnerstein & Smith, 2001). Based on content analysis research, Durham (1998) concluded that girls are likely to struggle to balance the messages sent by the media in regard to appearance, behaviour, and social power dynamics.

### 2.5.1 Television content

Consistent with previous analysis of television content (Greenberg et al., 1996; Wardle & Marsland, 1990), Ward (1999) found that sexuality was a common topic (roughly one third of the content of prime-time shows popular with adolescents). The most sexually oriented show consisted of nearly 60% sexual dialogue and suggestion. Male sexuality was featured more often than female sexuality. The three most frequent sexual themes were sexual/romantic relations as competition, men valuing and selecting women on the basis of physical appearance, and sex as the defining act of masculinity (Ward, 1999, 2003).

The media exposes adolescents to sexual scripting of behaviours they may not have observed elsewhere (Brown & Newcomer, 1991). On prime-time television, the occurrence of premarital and extramarital sex far outnumbers sex between spouses, with the rate soaring to 24:1 in soap operas (Larson, 1995). The rate is 32:1 in R-rated movies (Greenberg et al., 1996). In action-adventure series, premarital sex and prostitution are the most frequent encounters (Greenberg et al., 1993; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

Between 1980 and 1985, references to, or portrayals of, sexual activity increased by 103% (Larson, 1995); thus, the average adolescent viewer in 1985 was exposed to around 2,000 sexual references during this year (Greenberg et al., 1993). In comparison, the depiction of efforts to prevent pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease is relatively infrequent (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

### 2.5.2 Television use patterns

Technological advances have ushered in a series of new media such as internet, cell-phone chatrooms, etcetera, each of which has been criticised as a poor influence on youth, starting with concerns about children who spent too little time reading books (Larson & Kleiber, 1993). Television has drawn the most criticism, but there are similar outcries concerning the effects of rock music, music videos, and video games. With increasing age, there is a shift towards watching adult programming and watching alone (Larson, 1995).

Different mass media serve various social/psychological functions at different stages of adolescence (Fine et al., 1990). Television is often viewed together with parents and siblings. Listening to music, however, is largely undertaken alone, which is more common among older adolescents (who, again, are establishing autonomy). Thus, listening to music is seldom done in the presence of family members (Larson & Kleiber, 1993).

Increasingly earlier physical development offers a possible explanation as to why adolescents seem to do things (e.g., engage in sexual activity) at a younger age than their parents did. Cantor (2000) indicates that the average age in which young girls start to experience menstruation is currently 12-13 years in America, whereas 150 years ago it took place at age 16. Adolescent bodies mature before cognitive development and emotional maturity are much developed (Larson, 1995).

Health professionals continue to be concerned about STIs, AIDS in particular, among the adolescent population (Ward, 2003). At the end of 1999, there were over 25,000 cases of HIV infection among Americans between the ages of 20 and 24, and an additional 3,500 cases among those between 13 and 19. People under the age of 25 account for half of the HIV infections in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). Although knowledgeable about the transmission of AIDS and STIs (Chapin, 2000; Larson, 1995), adolescents in general do not take appropriate precautions (Chapin, 2000; Fine et al., 1990). Less than 10% of sexually active adolescents use condoms consistently (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 1998).

It should also be considered that 40% of the South African population is less than 15 years of age and that 15.64% of the South African youth between the ages of 15-24 is infected with HIV: one consequently recognises that HIV/AIDS represents a devastating pandemic among the youth of South Africa (Coombe, 2002; Department of Education, 2001).

A study by UNICEF (1995) was conducted through focus groups in five provinces in order to determine adolescents' knowledge and experience of sexuality. It was discovered that adolescents receive conflicting messages about sex and sexuality and that they lack the knowledge, confidence, and skills to discuss sexual issues, including

contraception and prevention of infection. Furthermore, this study found that widely believed myths reinforce negative attitudes towards safer sex and contraceptive use, and that most adolescents make decisions about sex in the absence of accurate information and access to support services. Students' feedback indicated that their need for accurate information could be satisfied through AIDS education in schools.

Further compounding the problem are the rates of syphilis and gonorrhoea being the highest for adolescents and decreasing dramatically with increasing age in America (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). Currently, an estimated 15% of adolescents have contracted an STI. Such rates are likely to be underestimated, because random urine analysis of asymptomatic adolescents has revealed that up to 12% have unknowingly contracted, and then spread, a venereal disease (Chapin, 2000).

### 2.5.3 Impact of Television

Along with the examination of media usage, several researchers have attempted to explain the relationship between adolescent sexuality and media. Correlational studies indicate that exposure to sexually suggestive materials is associated with premarital sex, although whether sexually active teens seek out sexual content or whether sexual content increases sexual activity remains uncertain (Brown et al., 1990; Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Lackey & Moberg, 1998; Malamuth & Impett, 2001; Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987). Other researchers have found sexual content in the media to exert minimal, if any, impact on the sexual activity of adolescents (Peterson et al., 1991; Stein, 1997).

Durham (1999) and Fay and Yanoff (2000) argue that explanations for the varied impact of the media include the differing characteristics of adolescents discussed earlier in this dissertation and additional factors such as the perceived reality of the content viewed, the media's portrayal of the consequences (or lack thereof) associated with sexual behaviour, and the influence of other role models. Studies of peer group interaction (Durham, 1999; Milkie, 1999) suggest that learning from the media is not only an individual process, but that messages received during peer group interactions may also contribute to how adolescents learn from and interpret media messages. According to Donnerstein and Smith (2001), research shows that parents who openly

communicate and actively co-view television may protect adolescents from potentially detrimental effects of exposure. Frequency of viewing (Malamuth & Impett, 2001) appears to be important as well.

Love songs and romance have always been popular (Durham, 1999). However, the music that is popular today is often harsh and sexually explicit, and many fear it is contributing to teen pregnancy, sexual assault, substance abuse, depression, and suicide (Durham, 1999; Klein, Brown, Childers, Oliveri, Porter, & Dykers, 1993; Ward, 2003). Furthermore, the music videos that are also shown on television nowadays tend to be sexually explicit as well, as noted previously.

#### 2.5.4 What is known about sexual content on television

What researchers (Carpenter, 1998; Durham, 1998; Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000; Kehily, 1999; Strong & DeVault, 1994; Ward & Wyatt, 1994) know about the potential effects of televised sexual content on adolescents is based largely on the content analyses of media that quantify levels of sexual material and track trends from year to year. This work includes studies of network and cable programming, rock music and music videos, and X-rated films available on videocassettes and DVDs (Eggermont, 2005; Fay & Yanoff, 2000; Paik, 2001; Ward, 2003; Werner-Wilson et al., 2004).

In addition to content analyses, correlational studies (Aubrey et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Carpenter, 1998; Ward, 2003) have linked socio-demographic factors (for example, sex, age, and ethnicity) to adolescents' viewing preferences and to their understanding and interpretation of sexual material in the media. Findings indicate that adolescent girls choose network television programmes with sexual content more often than older adolescent males, and spend more time watching it (Aubrey et al., 2003; Bakker et al., 2006; Brown et al., 2005; Eggermont, 2005; Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Huston et al., 1998; Roberts, 2000; Villani, 2001; Ward, 2003), often in the company of parents. Older adolescent boys however, are more oriented to the hardcore sexual content found in explicit music lyrics and X-rated films (Huston et al., 1998; Ward & Friedman, 2006). They are also more drawn to new media choices like handheld devices, the Internet, and computer games. Roberts (2000) and Villani (2001) state that adolescents of both sexes who watch and listen to much media are

more likely to accept stereotypes of sex roles on television as realistic than those who are less frequent viewers .

Other researches (Eggermont, 2005; Ward 2003; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999) indicate that ethnicity plays an important role in media viewing choices. Compared with their white peers, African Americans spend more time watching television, are more likely to choose fictional programming with African American characters (Brown, 2002), and are more likely to perceive those characters as realistic. Similarly, African American adolescents report watching more R-rated movies (Brown et al., 2005; Eggermont, 2005; Ward, 2003) than white peers, with less parental involvement or mediation. African American and white youths also find different features of video portrayals salient and disagree on story elements. Higher rates of viewing by adolescent African American adolescents, especially of soap operas, make them more likely to be exposed to sexual content (Carpenter, 1998; LeVay & Valente, 2003; Ward, 2003).

Age or the stage of development also influences comprehension and interpretation of sexual content. In studies (Chapin, 2000; Villani, 2001) of sexual innuendo on television, 12-year-old youths were less likely to understand suggestive material than 14 and 16-year-olds. Similarly, in a qualitative study of adolescent girls aged 11 to 15 (Chapin, 2000), those who were at an earlier stage of physiological development were less interested in sex portrayed in the media, whereas more mature young women were intrigued and more actively sought out sexual content in the media as a means of learning the rules, rituals, and skills of romance and relationships. They reported that the media provided models for achieving the right look (Villani, 2001) to become popular and attract boys, portrayed adolescent characters with problems similar to their own, showed how they solved those problems, and gave examples of how to behave in sexual situations (Chapin, 2000; Villani, 2001).

Studies (Aubrey et al., 2003; Brown et al. 2005; Strouse et al., 1995; Ward, 2003) have assessed the associations between the degree and nature of adolescents' exposure to sexual content and their sexual attitudes and behaviour. A study by Bakker et al. (2006) of African American girls aged 14 to 18 years found that teens with either multiple sexual partners or a history of sexually transmitted infections reported a higher rate of viewing television shows which depicted women as sexual

objects or prizes. Experimental studies (Eggermont, 2005; Fay & Yanoff, 2000; Paik, 2001; Ward, 2003; Werner-Wilson et al., 2004) have shown that viewing sexual content can exert moderate effects on sexual knowledge or attitudes, but it is unclear whether these effects are sustained over time or result in changes in sexual intentions or behaviour. Brown and Newcomer (1991) found that television viewing patterns differed according to the sexual status of the adolescent (virgin versus sexually active), with sexually active teens viewing more television with a high level of sexual content.

## **2.6 Influence of Television on Aggressive/Violent Behaviour of Adolescents**

Although this study focuses on the influence of television on sexual attitudes of adolescents, other studies that must be considered or are worth mentioning are the influence of television on aggressive or violent behaviour of adolescents and the influence of television on body dissatisfaction among adolescents. These studies serve as a motivation regarding the way in which television can influence more than one portion of adolescent life through its role in social modelling behaviour. Furthermore, these two areas have been intensely researched, thus serving as evidence that television is able to influence the attitudes and behaviour of adolescents. Much research (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein et al., 1995; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997) has been carried out in this area which will aid in substantiating this current study.

Children learn violent behaviour from their family and peers, while also observing it in their area and the community at large. These behaviours are reinforced by what youth see on television, the Internet, in video games, movies, music videos, and what they hear in their music (Brown et al., 2005; Chapin, 2000; Eggermont, 2005; Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Huit, 2004; Huston et al., 1998; Roberts, 2000). The research is large and very clear regarding the relationship between media violence and real-life aggression: a cause-and-effect relationship may exist (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Donnerstein et al., 1995; Robinson, Wilde, Navracruz, Haydel & Varady, 2001; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997; Villani, 2001). After 10 more years of research, the consensus arrived at between most of the research community is that violence on television does lead to aggressive behaviour



by children and teenagers who watch the programmes (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Chapin, 2000; Robinson et al., 2001; Villani, 2001). This conclusion is based on both laboratory experiments and on field studies. Not all children become aggressive, of course, but the correlations between violence and aggression are positive (Kronenberger et al., 2004). Television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behaviour as any other behavioural variable that has been measured (Anderson, 2004). According to Robinson et al. (2001), the research question has changed from asking whether or not there is an effect, to seeking explanations for the effect.

The research data (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Donnerstein et al., 1995; Kronenberger et al., 2004; Robinson, et al., 2001; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997) illustrated that high levels of television viewing are causally related to aggressive behaviour and the acceptance of aggressive attitudes. In addition, the research demonstrates that the more often adolescents are exposed to violence or are victims of violence in their homes or communities, the more likely they are to use violence or carry weapons themselves (Kronenberger et al., 2004). Thus, the witnessing, and consequently the social modelling, of violence is an important determinant of violent behaviour, and media violence represents the witnessing of violence explicitly, on the television or movie screen.

Therefore, if a cause-and-effect relationship exists between violence in the media and aggression and violence among adolescents (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein et al., 1995; Kronenberger et al., 2004; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997; Villani, 2001), the hypothesis could be that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between sexual content on television and the sexual attitudes, as well as sexual behaviour, of adolescent girls. However, this study does not focus on proving a causal relationship between television and sexual attitudes and behaviour but, rather, sets out to describe the influence of television on the sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls.

### 2.6.1 Media violence and adolescent behaviour in South Africa

The phenomenon of media portrayals of violence and the potentially negative impact on adolescent behaviour has been mostly documented internationally over the past few decades (Villani, 2001; Szabo, 2006). As stated previously, the concept of media does not only refer to electronic media such as music videos, advertising, computers and the internet. In addition, print media in the form of books, magazines and newspapers as well as radio should be included. However, the dominant concerns seem to be movies, television and other forms of electronic media (Donnerstein et al., 1995) because they seem to exert a greater influence on the behaviour of people.

Media exposure is known to influence knowledge, behaviour and value systems among children, with the perception of media messages being strongly associated with behaviour (Szabo, 2006). As mentioned previously, children in America spend an average of 3-5 hours per day with a variety of forms of media (Paik, 2001; Werner-Wilson et al., 2004; Ward, 2003; Fay & Yanoff, 2000; Eggermont, 2005), thus, creating consensus that the viewing of media violence may be associated with behavioural problems (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein et al., 1995; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997).

Furthermore, aggression and violence appear to be behaviours that are prevalent in South Africa (Stein, Seedat & Emsley, 2002). The crime situation in the country attests to this and has been a cause of concern for the country. Research into such behaviour among South African adolescents has shown that, in a community based sample, 9.6% to 13.8% had been victims of such behaviour in various settings and 11% had been involved as perpetrators (Cantor, 2000; Stein et al., 2002; Szabo, 2006). A number of possible contributory factors that were suggested are:

- Political transformation, relating to South Africa being a country in transition;
- Media violence related to television and movies.; and
- Influence of the attention on alcohol advertising.

## **2.7 Influence of Television on Body Dissatisfaction of Adolescents**

As an intensively studied area, the researcher also saw fit to include this section in order to validate her study. The mass media, which includes television, movies, and the Internet, exerts an influence on the daily lives of people, especially adolescents. One of the effects of such media saturation is the transmission of societal beauty ideals (Tiggemann, 2006). Formal content analysis of women's magazines and television demonstrates the predominance of young, tall, and extremely thin women (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Malkin, Wornian & Chrisler, 1999). Thus, these embodiments of beauty underscore the desirability of thinness at a level that is unrealistic for most women to achieve by healthy means (Spitzer et al., 1999; Sypeck et al., 2004).

According to Tiggemann (2006), there is empirical evidence that a link exists between the mass media and body concerns or disturbed eating. Milkie (1999) and Tiggemann, Gardiner and Slater (2000) indicate that women hold the media partially responsible for their negative feelings toward their bodies. Furthermore, a number of experimental studies have identified immediate effects after brief exposure to idealised media images (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). However, these negative effects have been shown to persist only for short periods (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2002; Hausenblas, Janelle & Gardner, 2004).

Correlational research has indicated that fashion magazines or television utilisation have been found to correlate with body dissatisfaction (Jones, Vigfusdottir & Lee, 2004; Tiggemann, 2003), perception of being overweight (McCreary & Sadava, 1999), and eating disorder symptoms (Harrison, 2000; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw & Stein, 1994). Certain studies (Hofschire & Greenburg, 2002; Tiggemann, 2006, Van den Bulck, 2000a) have found that the relationship with television viewing is limited to specific genres that present ideals of thinness, such as soap operas and music videos. Tiggemann (2006) states that experimental studies demonstrate immediate effects of acute exposure to idealised thin images of people.

Longitudinal studies exploring various aspects of media influence (Field, Camargo, Taylor, Berkley & Colditz, 1999; Field, Camargo, Taylor, Berkey, Roberts & Colditz,

2001) have indicated that girls who reported making considerable effort to look like the women in the media were more likely to develop weight concerns and begin to purge over a one year period. Thus, perceived media pressure to be thin has been identified as a risk factor for body concerns and eating pathology (Stice, 2002). However, media involvement and perceived pressure to conform assesses people's beliefs about the extent of media influence and thus reflects characteristics of individuals rather than reports of their exposure to media (Tiggemann, 2006).

### 2.7.1 Gender differences in the influence of media on body dissatisfaction

Empirical evidence has been gathered that indicates that girls show greater body dissatisfaction than boys (Barker & Galambos, 2003; Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer & Paxton, 2006; Muth & Cash, 1997). In the study conducted by Muth and Cash (1997), which focused on gender differences in body image, 40% of females were not satisfied with their bodies while only 22% of males were not satisfied with their bodies. Whilst body dissatisfaction in girls is mostly related to a desire to be thinner (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Wardle & Marsland, 1990), body dissatisfaction amongst boys is related to a desire to lose or gain weight or to be more muscular (Cohane & Pope, 2001; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Smokal & Stein, 2006).

One explanation for the gender differences in body dissatisfaction is that, for girls, great socio-cultural emphasis is placed on physical attractiveness (McKinley, 1999). Media images create a beauty standard for girls in which a perfect, thin body is essential. It has further been suggested by research (Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) that differences between actual and ideal body images can result in body dissatisfaction.

In recent years, boys too have been presented with images of the ideal male body by the media (Rohlinger, 2002). They are presented with a lean, muscular ideal body and this ideal is becoming more muscular as time progresses (Arbour & Ginis, 2006; Durrheim, 1999; Labre, 2002). Thus, as mentioned above, whilst girls have reported their wish to lose weight and be thinner, boys have indicated that they wish to lose or gain weight and develop muscularity (Cohane & Pope, 2001).

Although different body ideals for males and females are presented in the media and it has been suggested that both girls and boys are influenced by these ideals (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001; Smokal et al., 2001), research suggests that boys and girls do not respond to the media presentations with the same intensity (Presnell, Bearman & Stice, 2004). Adolescent girls indicate an increase in body dissatisfaction after exposure to idealised female images (Tiggemann, 2006), whilst boys show no increase in body dissatisfaction after exposure to idealised images of young men (Arbour & Ginis, 2006; Tiggemann, 2006).

Indicators of the influence of media such as the internalisation of the body ideal and perceived pressure from media have been shown to be directly related to body dissatisfaction (Thompson et al., 1999). Internalisation of media ideals refers to the adoption of socially defined ideals which are presented by the media as a personal standard (Jones et al., 2004). The internalisation of externally presented images and the acceptance as well as adoption of these societal body ideals can affect attitudes and behaviour (Tiggemann, 2003, 2006). According to Levine and Smolak (2002), body image is a central part of the self-concept, especially in adolescents. Therefore, it can be assumed that the successful integration of changing the body into a self-concept is an essential task for personality development during adolescence (Thompson et al., 1999). Reasons why boys and girls respond differently to exposure to media images may relate to differences in the extent to which girls and boys internalise media ideals and the extent to which they feel pressure to conform to these ideals (Tiggemann, 2006).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, previous studies relating to this research topic have been described. Furthermore, the researcher has included other research studies that are indirectly related to the research topic: the influence of violence/aggression on adolescents, as well as the influence of television on body dissatisfaction of adolescents. These studies were included so that the researcher could construct a strong foundation for the current research problem.

Therefore, this chapter serves as a lens through which it becomes apparent that there is not only one aspect that influences attitudes and behaviours; other aspects such as parental role, peer relations, other media, as well as the social environments also play an important role in the development and shaping of attitudes and behaviour. The next chapter deals with the theoretical framework of this study and will explain this in detail.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the theoretical framework underlining this study and as such, is a review of the development of Social Learning Theory with an emphasis being placed on the two major developers of the theory, namely Rotter and Bandura.

Firstly, the researcher wishes to elaborate on “why I opted for social learning theory” as a theoretical framework for this study. When an individual views television, the primary phenomenon is vision; what they see, to what extent they absorb what they observe, and how their observations might influence their attitude and/or behaviour. Thus, social learning theory appears to be a useful framework for the study as it emphasises the importance of observing and modelling behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

#### 3.2 Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory of Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. As mentioned previously, Bandura (1997) states that learning would be difficult if people had to rely on the effects of their own actions to inform them in terms of what to do. However, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: by observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action.

##### 3.2.1 Definition

Social learning theory, also called observational learning, takes place when an observer's behaviour changes after viewing the behaviour of a model (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). An observer's behaviour can be affected by the positive or negative consequences termed the vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment of a model's behaviour. Social learning, thus, refers to all learning experiences in which social and cognitive factors play a role (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). It suggests

that learning occurs through four main stages of imitation, namely, close contact, imitation of superiors, understanding of concepts and role model behaviour.

Social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1997). The component processes underlying observational learning are:

- Attention: various factors increase or decrease the amount of attention paid, including modelled events (distinctiveness, affective valence, complexity, prevalence, functional value) and observer characteristics (sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual set, past reinforcement).
- Retention: remembering what one paid attention to, including symbolic coding, cognitive organisation, symbolic rehearsal, motor rehearsal.
- Motor reproduction: reproducing the image, including physical capabilities, self-observation of reproduction, and accuracy of feedback.
- Motivation: having a good reason to imitate, including external, vicarious and self reinforcement.

These will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage.

In light of the aforesaid, the most common examples of social learning situations are television commercials, movies and music videos. Sexual content displayed in these programmes may suggest that certain sexual behaviour renders girls more attractive and admirable (Brown et al., 1993). Depending on the component processes involved (such as attention or motivation), one may model the behaviour shown in the commercial and buy the product being advertised.

Social learning theory suggests specific mechanisms through which the observation of media (television) examples may shape attitudes and beliefs (Huit, 2004). Firstly, observational learning is believed to be stronger when the behavioural model occurs frequently. Viewers who regularly observe similar examples of sexual request situations may begin to perceive the strategies used as the proper and normal approach. In this respect, content analysis has suggested that the rate of occurrence of sexual request situations on television is high. Television exhibits the tendency to imply sexual intercourse through frequently repeated, formulaic representations of behaviours that typically precede sexual intercourse. Research has shown that the



most common type of sexual imagery on television is verbal insinuation that aims to communicate sexual desire. When television characters talk about sex, 59 to 74% of the conversations are about prospective appeal and attraction (Kunkel, Cope, & Colvin, 1996). When television actually displays sexual behaviour it most often does so in terms of physical acts such as flirting, hugging, kissing, and erotic touching, which are precursory to sexual intercourse (Kunkel et al., 1996; Ward, 2003).

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the social learning approach is used as a lens through which to interpret the data. The approach aims at emphasising the importance of modelling the behaviour, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1997). According to Escoban-Chaves, Tortolero, Markham, Low, Eitel & Thickstun (2005), television is regarded as an increasingly influential instrument of socialisation that produces its effects through the tendencies of children to learn by imitation. This study, from a social learning perspective as mentioned, attempts to understand the perception of adolescent use of television as a guide. Qualitative information about the sexual content of television programmes affects the emotions, attitudes and behaviour of adolescents, and the kinds of sex or sexuality related stories they are likely to encounter, as well as the messages conveyed by those stories.

### **3.3 Social Learning Theory of J B Rotter**

According to Rotter's Social Learning Theory (Rotter, 1989), we cannot focus on behaviour as being an automatic response to an objective set of environmental stimuli. Rather, in order to understand behaviour, one must take both the individual (i.e., his or her life history of learning and experiences) and the environment (i.e., those stimuli that the person is aware of and responds to) into account. Thus, Rotter's social learning theory aims at predicting behaviour by means of four main components, being behaviour potential, expectancy, reinforcement value, and the psychological situation (Rotter, Lah, & Rafferty, 1992).

### **3.4 Social Learning Theory of A. Bandura**

Bandura (1986) expanded on Rotter's idea by incorporating aspects of behavioural and cognitive learning. Behavioural learning assumes that the environment

(surroundings) of people causes them to behave in certain ways. Cognitive learning presumes that psychological factors are important influences on how one behaves. Social learning suggests a combination of environmental (social) and psychological factors that influence behaviour. Social learning theory outlines four requirements for people to learn and model behaviour, as mentioned above, which will be discussed at a later stage.

### 3.4.1 Modelling

The social learning theory of Bandura emphasises the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. As it has been mentioned before, Bandura (1997) said that learning would be difficult and risky, if people had to rely on only the effects of their own actions to inform them in terms of what to do. He is supported by Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss (1993) when they elaborate the concept that humans learn by watching others and will engage in behaviour they see rewarded. Most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. With regards to the current study, a fitting question could be: “Which behaviour is more likely to be engaged in by an adolescent girl’s observation of characters on television?”

Huit (2004) provides a number of definitions to clarify the factual and theoretical issues. Modelling refers to the observed behaviour of others, whether presented through direct demonstrations or through films, television or stories which are heard or read. When modelling cues are presented by direct exposure to other people, the phenomenon is referred to as live modelling, while the behaviour of others as observed in movies, television, and other representative media is usually considered in the general category of symbolic modelling. Therefore, the modelling process is discussed in detail below.

#### 3.4.1.1 The modelling process

The component processes underlying observational learning are:

(1) ***Attention***: People cannot learn much by observation unless they attend to, and perceive, the significant features of the modelled behaviour. Attentive processes determine what is selectively observed in the profusion of modelling influences to which one is exposed to and that which is extracted from such exposure. Mischel (1993) states that various factors increase or decrease the amount of attention paid, including modelled events (distinctiveness, affective valence, complexity, prevalence, functional value) and observer characteristics (sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual set, past reinforcement). The people with whom one regularly associates, either by preference or obligation, restrict the types of behaviour that will be repeatedly observed and hence learned thoroughly. For example, opportunities for learning aggressive conduct differ distinctly for members of violent gangs and those of groups exemplifying a pacific lifestyle (Bower & Hilgard, 1981). Bandura (1997, 2001) further comments that attention to models is also channelled by interpersonal attraction. Models that possess engaging qualities are sought out, while those lacking pleasing characteristics are ignored or rejected (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). Some forms of modelling are intrinsically rewarding in that they hold the attention of people of all ages for extended periods, for example, people who follow “soopies” on a daily basis. According to Bandura (1986), Hjelle & Ziegler (1981) and Mischel (1993), models in televised form are so effective in capturing attention that viewers learn much of what they see without requiring any special incentive to do so. The rate and level of observational learning, according to Bandura, (2001) is also determined by the nature of the modelled behaviours themselves, that is, their salience and complexity. The capacities of observers to process information influence the degree to which they will benefit from the observed behaviour (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2001).

(2) ***Retention***: refers to, according to Hergenhahn (1994) remembering what one paid attention to, including symbolic coding, cognitive organisation, symbolic rehearsal, motor rehearsal. People cannot be influenced by observation of modelled behaviour if they do not remember it. In order for observers to profit from the behaviour of models when they are no longer present to provide direction, the response patterns must be represented in memory in symbolic form (Mischel, 1993). It is the advanced capacity

for symbolisation that enables humans to learn much of their behaviour by observation. Observational learning relies on two representational systems: imaginary and verbal (Liebert & Spiegler, 1990).

*Imaginary* - some behaviour is retained in imagery. Sensory stimulation activates sensations that give rise to perceptions of the external events. As a result of repeated exposure, modelling stimuli produce enduring, retrievable images of modelled performances (Bandura, 1986). Thus, later, images of events that are physically absent can be summed up. Therefore, reference to an activity that has been repeatedly observed usually arouses its imaginary counterpart (Liebert & Spiegler, 1990; Mischel, 1993). Visual imagery plays an important role in observational learning during early periods of development when verbal skills are lacking.

*Verbal* - most of the cognitive processes that regulate behaviour are verbal rather than visual. Details of an observed behaviour are acquired, retained and later produced by converting the visual information into a verbal code (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Observational learning and retention are facilitated by symbolic codes because they carry a great deal of information in an easily stored form. After modelled activities have been transformed into images and readily utilised verbal symbols, these memory codes serve as guides for performance (Liebert & Spiegler, 1990; Mischel, 1993). Adding to symbolic coding, rehearsal serves as an important memory aid. When people mentally rehearse or actually perform modelled response patterns, they are less likely to forget them than if they neither think about them nor practise what they have seen. Yet most behaviour that is learned observationally cannot be easily established by overt enactment because of either social prohibitions or lack of opportunity (Bandura, 1997). It is therefore of interest that mental rehearsal, in which individuals visualise themselves performing behaviour, increases proficiency and retention.

(3) *Motor Reproduction*: this involves converting symbolic representations into appropriate actions, thus reproducing the image, including physical capabilities, self-observation of reproduction, and accuracy of feedback. Behavioural reproduction is achieved by organising one's responses spatially and temporally in accordance with the modelled patterns (Hall, Lindzey, Loehlin & Manosevitz, 1985). Behavioural enactment can be separated into cognitive organisation of responses, their initiation,

monitoring, and refinement on the basis of informative feedback. The initial phase of behavioural enactment begins with responses being selected and organised at the cognitive level (Bandura, 1986). The amount of observational learning that will be exhibited behaviourally depends on the availability of component skills. Learners who possess the constituent elements can easily integrate them to produce new patterns, but if some of these response components are lacking, behavioural reproduction will be faulty.

(4) *Motivation:* people are more likely to adopt modelled behaviour if it results in outcomes they value than if it leads to unrewarding or punishing effects. Thus, people need to have a good reason to imitate, including external, vicarious and self reinforcement motives (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Observed consequences influence modelled conduct as well. According to Mischel (1993), the behaviour that seems to be effective for others is favoured over behaviour that is seen to engender negative consequences. The evaluative reactions that people generate toward their own behaviour also regulate which observationally learned response will be performed. They express what they find self-satisfying and reject what they personally disapprove of.

#### Effects of modelling on behaviour

According to Bandura (1986, 1997), modelling affects behaviour as follows:

- Modelling teaches new behaviours.
- It influences the frequency of previously learned behaviours.
- It may encourage previously forbidden behaviours.
- It increases the frequency of similar behaviours.

As the modelling process has been explained in detail, it is also important to understand the process of observational learning. Hence, it is discussed below.

#### 3.4.2 Observational learning

Observational learning refers to any and all of the demonstrated consequences of exposure to modelling (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). Observational learning can take

different forms and may be measured in different ways, depending upon the interests of a particular researcher or the nature of a particular issue. Thus, factors that influence observational learning are discussed in detail.

#### 3.4.2.1 Factors influencing observational learning

##### (1) The nature of the modelled behaviour

The nature of the behaviour we observe influences all four aspects of observational learning (attention, retention, reproduction and motivation), depending on the observer's motivation and the situation in which modelling occurs. For example, new, unknown, active or striking behaviour usually attracts the attention of observers, and such behaviour is accordingly more easily acquired than familiar, less striking behaviour. Consequently, this could be an explanation of why aggressive behaviour is more often imitated than most other behaviour (Meyer et al., 2003). Therefore the interaction between the nature of the observed behaviour and the individual's moral values is an interesting phenomenon, especially regarding the difference between retention and reproduction (Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1993).

##### (2) The characteristics of the model

The characteristics of the model, such as age, sex, status and personality, in interaction with other factors, play a role in observational learning (Hall et al., 1985). A model with high status or characteristics similar to those of the observer is usually more likely to be imitated in preference to a lower status model or one that is dissimilar. Thus, it is more likely that adolescents, as observers, would copy symbolic models such as characters in television programmes, movies, music videos, the internet or books.

##### (3) The characteristics of the observer

Characteristics of the observer, such as motivation, interests, values, self-confidence, opinions, intelligence and perceptions are also important in all three aspects of observational learning (Meyer et al., 2003). The observer's personality is important in determining which models she/he will choose, which behaviour will hold the attention

and which behaviour will be attained and reproduced. When observers expect to be rewarded for imitating modelled behaviour, they are more likely to reproduce the behaviour than when they foresee no reward or expect to be punished. Therefore, expectation is influenced by the observed results of the model's behaviour (Hergenhahn, 1994; Meyer et al, 2003; Mischel, 1993).

#### (4) The results of the model's behaviour

Vicarious or explicit reward usually leads to imitation of the modelled behaviour, whereas vicarious punishment leads to counter-imitation (Bandura, 1986; Liebert & Spiegler, 1990; Mischel, 1993). The influence of vicarious outcomes resulting from the behaviour of the observers is mediated by their cognition. Thus, the vicarious results they observe provide them with information which they interpret and use in light of the total situation and their previous experience (Bandura, 2001). Therefore, vicarious consequences have the following distinct influences on the observer:

- They provide observers with information about factors they have to consider in planning their own behaviour, such as the results they can expect if they produce the same behaviour.
- They influence observers' motivation in that observed reinforcement encourages them to produce the same behaviour, while observed punishment discourages them from doing so.
- The way models react to the consequences of their behaviour may influence observers' emotional reactions and values.
- They may influence the observers' perceptions of the model and the reinforcing agent.

#### (5) Self-efficacy

Observational learning is also influenced by the individual's self-efficacy perception; their confidence in their ability to reproduce the behaviour (Bandura, 1997).

### 3.4.3 Acquisition versus acceptance

Acquisition versus acceptance, according to Bandura (1986, 1997), refers to the ability to reproduce previously unfamiliar acts as a function of observational learning and the subsequent acceptance and spontaneous performance of behaviours that are the same as, or similar to, those which have been observed. For example, a child may observe and remember a particular adult's manner of speech, the particular expressions that he uses, or the novel forms of helping (or hurting) others which the exemplar displays without necessarily adopting any of these characteristics. Nonetheless, if the observer can produce or describe the behaviour she or he has witnessed, then the basic form of observational learning, the acquisition of new behaviour, has occurred.

The possibility that behaviour can be acquired observationally and retained, without necessarily being performed immediately, carries important implications for our understanding of the effects of both television and other observational learning opportunities. According to Huit (2004) and Ward (2003), if an individual has learned some new behaviour, then they have the potential to produce it if or when they find themselves in a situation in which such a performance appears to be desirable, useful, or likely to serve their own purpose. Thus, although learning does not necessarily lead to action, it does make possible the performance of otherwise unavailable forms of social responses.

It should also be considered that acceptance of another individual's behaviour as a guide for one's own behaviour does not necessarily imply an increase in similarity between the behaviour of the model and that of the observer (Bandura, 1986). For instance, a child who sees a peer burnt by a hot stove will become less likely to touch the dangerous appliance than before; he accepts the exemplar's actions and consequences as a guide for what he should not do.

### **3.5 Learning through Self-regulation**

Self-regulation refers to one's ability to control one's own behaviour (Bandura, 1997). Self-regulation, according to Bandura (1997, 2001), also refers to the individual



holding his or her own ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour and choosing actions accordingly. As mentioned previously, observational learning refers to an individual's ability to regulate his/her own behaviour, specifically the learning processes (Meyer et al., 2003). According to Bandura (1986), this includes self-reinforcement (reinforcing one's own behaviour by rewarding oneself when one meets one's standards), and self-punishment (eliminating certain behaviour by punishing oneself in some way when this occurs). Thus, individuals continually regulate their behaviour by choosing situations which will expose them to certain environmental influences, and by assessing their behaviour. Bandura (1997) differentiates two types of self-regulation: internal and external. Both can operate positively (self-reinforcement) and negatively (self-punishment).

- “Internal self-regulation refers to people's subjective evaluation of their own behaviour, as when they say ‘well done’ to themselves or when they feel proud or ashamed of their own behaviour” (Bandura, 1991, p. 248).
- “External self-regulation involves arranging the situation and the outcome of behaviour so that individuals reward or punish themselves in a concrete way” (Bandura, 1991, p. 248).

However, certain questions could be posed: Do adolescent girls have the ability to self-regulate? Can they differentiate between what is appropriate and what is inappropriate? Thus, do they have the ability to differentiate for themselves what is appropriate on television and what is not? One should refer to the developmental stages of Erikson (Meyer et al., 2003) regarding the milestone that adolescents experience at this stage. During the fifth psychosocial crisis (adolescence, from about 13 or 14 to about 20) the child, now an adolescent, learns how to answer satisfactorily and happily the question of “Who am I?” But even the most adjusted of adolescents, according to Carver & Scheier (2000), experience some role of identity diffusion: most boys and probably most girls experiment with minor delinquency, rebellion flourishes, self-doubts flood the adolescent, and so on. Adolescents attempt to develop identity and ideas about strengths, weaknesses, goals, occupations, sexual identity, and gender roles (Hergenhahn, 1994). Therefore the question still remains whether adolescents possess the ability to self-regulate; and for this study, to what extent does television influence their sexual attitudes and behaviour?

In conclusion, this approach aims at emphasising the importance of modelling behaviour, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1986). According to Escoban-Chaves et al. (2005), television is regarded as an increasingly influential instrument of socialisation that produces its effects through children's tendencies to learn by imitation. Thus, this study, from a social learning perspective, attempts to understand the perception of adolescent use of television as a guide.

### **3.6 Social Learning Theory on the Influence of Television**

Social learning theory is a general theory of human behaviour. However, Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997, and 2001) and other researchers (Check & Malamuth, 1986; Lelkowitz, Eron, Walker & Huesmann, 1977) concerned with mass communication have used it to try and explain media effects. Bandura cautioned that children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised modelling. Bandura (1986, 1997) also cautioned that television might create a violent reality that was worth fearing.

#### 3.6.1 Social learning theory on the influence of television on sexuality

According to social learning theory, behaviour is modelled by others, observed, and then reproduced (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). This initial imitation is linked to drives (Sears, 1991) and reinforcement (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) and Mischel (1993) have argued that reward is not necessary for imitation; it is sufficient for children to perceive the model as being reinforced, causing vicarious reinforcement. In this way, modelling, both in the home and through the media, conveys sex role information (Bandura, 1986).

Furthermore, Bandura (1977) argues that evidence from cross-species and cross-cultural studies indicates that human sexuality is governed mainly by social conditioning, rather than endocrinal stimulation. Sexual modelling teaches affectionate techniques, reduces sexual inhibition, alters sexual attitudes, and shapes sexual practices by conveying norms: for instance, which behaviours are socially acceptable and which are not.

Thus, social learning theory has the potential to explain how the media promotes sex roles and sexual behaviour (Bandura, 2001). Depictions of adolescents in the media, their successes, failures, rewards, and punishments, provide models from which beliefs, behaviour and attitudes are learned and actions are imitated. Therefore, it is important to note that adolescents are aware of these sexual images, especially negative portrayals of women, such as prostitution and sexual promiscuity (Miller, Clarke & Wendell, 1997; Lavin & Cash, 2001). Using primarily social learning theories as theoretical frameworks, certain researchers have studied sexual outcome correlations of sexually oriented television (Greeson & Williams, 1987; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). According to Bandura (1977), most human behaviour is learned through observation/modelling and imitation. However, Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism would also suggest a multidirectional nature between the constructs, and in 1994, he wrote specifically about the influences of mass media and a bidirectional relationship. Adolescents who are sexually active (or at least prone to be so) are also more likely to seek out sexually loaded television programming. Similarly, as children and adolescents construct expectations for male and female sexual roles, as proposed in a symbolic interactional perspective on sexual development (Levine & Smolak, 2002) the media are likely to be involved in this development and sexual socialisation. Several other prominent researchers who have also supported the notion of a bidirectional relationship (Brown, 2000; Steele, 1999) added that the specific study of media relations with adolescent sexuality remains comparatively limited, and thus the relationship with sexual outcomes is to a large degree left to speculation.

### 3.6.2 Social learning theory on television's influence on violence/aggression

Social cognitive theory was formulated on the basis of a social learning theory, which is interested in observational learning and imitation because they apply to social behaviour, and has already focused on aggressive behaviour. Bandura (1977) stated that a theory of human aggression should explain (1) how aggressive patterns are formed, (2) what provokes people to behave aggressively, and (3) what sustains aggressive behaviour. He further noted that there is an interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants in acquiring aggressive tendencies.

Social learning theory was based on several assumptions (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Firstly, as a phenomenon, aggression must be learned. Secondly, learning aggressive actions happens vicariously through observing a model (Bandura, 1977). Thirdly, the electronic media play an important role in the social diffusion of aggressive ideas and behaviour, making symbolic modelling a key component in the social diffusion of ideas, values, and behaviour (Boeree, 2001).

Bandura (2001) outlined several cognitive capacities thought to be crucial for learning, including symbolising, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-reflection, and forethought. For example, if we foresee negative outcomes to our actions, we will be less likely to pursue them. In addition, the ability to participate vicariously in another's experiences, at times to the point of identity loss, is an important cognitive function with implications for a character's influence on viewers. Related to this is the ability to engage in abstract modelling (Bandura, 1997, 2001). That is, observers not only learn how to act but to extract rules governing a specific judgment or action exhibited by others. Thus, Wilson and Cantor (1987) say that they can then use these rules to generate new instances of aggressive attitudes and behaviour that go beyond what they have viewed or heard.

Social learning theory takes into account many factors that moderate or mediate the relationship between viewing aggression and acquiring and imitating aggressive cues (Boeree, 2001). Personal characteristics of both the viewer and the model are crucial to the process. Thus, factors such as perceptions of characters are important because they affect the relationship between viewing and acquiring or performing aggression. These factors help to determine whether one is more likely to learn aggression from and imitate television characters. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the conditions and processes that facilitate such learning and imitation.

Many factors, including attractiveness and gender, are important to the relationships which viewers form with television characters (Bandura, 1994). Here, he focused on the viewer's inclination to be aggressive and the character's aggression, because they influence perception of that character. Social cognitive theory should take relational factors, such as similarity, identification, and empathy with characters, into account. Some have suggested that identification as a cognitive factor plays a crucial role in

linking people's perceptions of others and the outcomes of these perceptions. Bjorkqvist (1997), for example, found that an adolescent's identification with a parental role model was important in bringing about imitation.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on discussing the theoretical framework that underlines this study. A review of social learning theory is provided with the main emphasis placed on Bandura's theory. The importance of observing and modelling behaviour, attitudes and emotional reactions of others is addressed, as is the fundamental assumption of social learning theory.

The modelling process, factors influencing observational learning, effects of modelling of behaviour, social learning theory, regarding the influence of television on sexuality, as well as its influence on violence/aggression, are discussed in detail in the chapter. The next chapter will deal with how this theoretical framework can be incorporated into the research methodology. Thus, a social learning approach is used as a lens when interpreting the data. As mentioned throughout the chapter, the approach aims at emphasising the importance of modelling behaviour, attitudes, and the emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1997).

In the next chapter, the researcher will be discussing the research process and research methodology employed.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a background to the research process of the study: it aims to orientate the reader as to how the research will be conducted. The focus of this chapter falls on the research procedure that will be followed in conducting this study.

The methodology is the most important phase of the research process in that it provides guidance as to how the study will be conducted. The description of the type of design, motivation for its choice, the researcher's role, data collection method and sampling will be discussed.

The research is qualitative in nature and data was interpreted using thematic content analysis. The study was compiled with the aid of the following:

- A literature review – to express the underlying assumptions behind the research question and to demonstrate the need for the study.
- In-depth interviews – with the aim of exploring, describing and gaining a deeper understanding on the use of television and its possible influence on sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls.

According to Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994, p. 3) qualitative research refers to “an attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do, an exploration, elaboration and systematisation of the significance of an identified phenomenon, as well as the illuminative representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem”.

Furthermore, Banister et al. (1994) state that qualitative research in psychology takes, as its starting point, awareness of the gap between an object of study, the way we represent it and the way interpretation comes to fill the gap. The process of interpretation provides a bridge between the world and us, as well as between objects and our representations of them. Thus, this study adopted an explorative, qualitative

research design. The reason for this choice is that an explorative design is suitable for exploring how television influences adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999, p 39) further elaborate that "exploratory studies are used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research. They employ an open, flexible and an inductive approach to research as they attempt to look for new insights into phenomena".

## **4.2 Research Design**

Durrheim (1999) defines a research design as the link between the research questions formulated by the researcher and the actual execution of the research. If the design of a research project provides the architectural guidelines for the implementation of the research, it is logical that it should precede and therefore determine the method of the research. The importance of the design lies in ensuring congruency between the research questions, data collection and analysis (Durrheim, 1999). Before turning to the method of this study, it is necessary to comment on its research design.

As indicated in the introduction, this is an exploratory study of a particular phenomenon, that is, influence of television on adolescents girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour. Exploratory studies are deemed appropriate when the research is conducted in a relatively unknown field (Durrheim, 1999). The literature review indicated that there is a scarcity of information on this phenomenon in the South African context, more specifically within South African township communities. An exploratory research design does not aim to provide detailed and replicable data, but is a preliminary investigation of the topic on hand (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Exploratory studies result in the understanding of, and insight into, the research topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Research design furnishes a framework in which a research project is located. This study was rooted in a qualitative approach towards the issue of television's influence on adolescent girls. The focus thus fell on the understanding (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) of adolescents' perceptions and attitudes towards television and how these may influence their sexual attitudes and behaviour. The study aimed to look through the eyes of the adolescents to gain an understanding of their experiences as television

viewers. Qualitative research does not attempt to establish causal relationships, but aims to uncover the meanings of people's actions and behaviours (Gaskell, 2000; Silverman, 1993), as was hoped in the present case.

The disadvantage of an exploratory study within a qualitative framework, however, is that this kind of research may result in raising more questions instead of providing definite and clear-cut answers (Babbie & Mouton, 1999). This was indeed found to be a reality in this study. The net results constituted tentative clues to possible answers regarding adolescent girls and television and some hints at methods that may provide more definite and satisfying answers. (This is discussed in the chapter containing the recommendations.) Therefore it can be said that these two elements of the design of this study dictated the methodology that was used to conduct the research.

#### 4.2.1 Motivation for choice of design

The goal of the researcher was to explore the influence of television on adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour; therefore a qualitative design was appropriate for the study. In line with the requirements of this study and the fact that qualitative research is often used to explore topics wherein variables and theory are unknown, the following basic characteristics (Creswell 1994, 2002) have served as the motivation for the said choice.

- Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with the process, rather than with the outcome.
- Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning, i.e. how people make sense of their lives, experiences and structures of the world.
- The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
- Qualitative research involves fieldwork, which means that the researcher physically goes to the people, setting or citing to observe or record in the natural setting.
- Qualitative research is descriptive since the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words and pictures.
- The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds concepts, theories and hypotheses from details.



In view of the above, it can be concluded that the researcher was interested in the way people make sense of their lives, that is, in understanding and interpreting the meanings and the intentions that underlie everyday human action. Therefore, a process of interaction between the researcher and the respondents was aimed at (Creswell, 2002).

#### 4.2.2 The researcher's role according to social learning theory

Creswell (1994) is of the opinion that the bias, values and judgement of the researcher must be explicitly stated in the research since qualitative research is interpretative. Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman (1995) are of the opinion that the researcher in qualitative studies is the instrument in that through her presence, whether it is sustained, intensive or personal as during in-depth interview studies or not, she enters into the lives of the participants.

In this study, which involves personal interaction, co-operation between the researcher and interviewees (Fox, 2006) was essential since interviewees might have been unwilling or uncomfortable in sharing all that the interviewer hoped to explore. Openness and a positive attitude were regarded as helpful at all times. Marshall and Rossman (1995) point out that rapport must be actively sought and worked out.

Negotiation regarding participants' entry for this study was performed by requesting permission to conduct the research in the Choose Life Community Organisation and explaining the purpose of the study (Appendix E). The organisation received information about the study: its objectives, goals and methodology. The main purpose for this was to clear any concerns and to provide clarification as to what the research entailed. Marshall and Rossman (1995) highlight the need to gain access and receive formal approval. Creswell (1994) also adds that it is important to gain access to research or archival sites by seeking the approval of gatekeepers.

Before respondents agreed to participate, consent from legal guardians was sought (Appendix B). The aims and objectives of the research were made clear to them so that they could obtain a clear picture of why they were going to participate in the research. The researcher refrained from value judgements regarding the points of view

and actions of the subjects, even if they conflicted directly with those of the researcher. The researcher also respected the cultural customs of the Mabopane community in all her actions in order to obtain good co-operation from the community (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2002). Thus, she first had to speak to the parents and legal guardians of potential participants and explain the research verbally to them as well as to assure them that such participants would not be exploited during the interviews.

The researcher also needed the ability to develop and establish rapport with the interviewers. This was important as the topic of the study was sensitive in nature. Thus, it was very important for participants to feel accepted and not judged by the researcher (De Vos et al., 2002), which in turn ensured that the participants felt free to give information and be as truthful as possible.

According to Fox (1998), in addition to being able to ask relevant questions, the interviewer / researcher must be aware of what the respondent is doing throughout the interview. It should also be mentioned that the researcher was also the interviewer and both these terms will be used interchangeably (Seidel, 1998; Terreblanche & Durrheim, 1999). She had to listen carefully to cues in order to avoid interrupting before the respondent had completely answered a question. As a researcher, one must be sure that the respondent feels that he or she is an integral part of the research and that any answer she or he offers is accepted. Thus, the most important aspect of the interviewer or researcher's approach concerns conveying an attitude of acceptance, that the participant's information was valuable and useful (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Fox, 1998).

#### **4.3 Data Collection Method**

The researcher used face-to-face in-depth interviews as a method of data collection. Qualitative in-depth interviews are more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories.

#### 4.3.1 Data collection procedures

Data collection procedures in qualitative research design, according to Creswell (1994) involve:

- Setting boundaries for the study; and
- Collecting information through observation, interview and documents.

#### 4.3.2 Geographical boundaries

The study was conducted in Mabopane (Block X-Extension) because the Choose Life Community Organisation facilities are based there. The population of adolescents residing in Mabopane Township may be estimated at 20 000. Mabopane Township can be described as a black township community in which the vast majority of residents possess a low socio-economic status. The township could be characterised as suffering from poverty and records a large unemployment rate. However, the township also houses members of the up and coming middle class among young black people. In families where both parents are working, the adolescents and children tend to be left to their own devices (personal communication, Mr Dhlomo). The adolescents and children therefore seek stimulation and activities outside of their homes and thus attend day care centres or organisations, such as the Choose Life Organisation, in order to pass the time within a safe and secure environment.

Participants were recruited from Block X-extension. The researcher displayed posters in the building of the Choose Life Community Organisation to invite participants (Appendix C) subsequent to acquiring written informed consent from the Choose Life Community Organisation to do so (Appendix E). The Choose Life Community Organisation is involved with adolescents of 15 to 17 years; therefore, this study focused on adolescents of this age group. All participants received verbal and written information, were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and confidential and that they could withdraw at any time (Appendix A & B). The researcher explored the data that was provided by participants until she acquired a satisfactory sense of the situation (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Hence, a saturation point was reached (Creswell, 2002; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

#### 4.3.3 Sample

A sample can be defined as a set of respondents selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 2002). Furthermore sampling refers to the act, process (Creswell, 1994), or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1998), the purpose of sampling is to draw conclusions about populations from samples.

The sample selected for this study consisted of adolescent girls who reside in Mabopane and are part of the Choose Life Community Organisation. Before they could participate in the study, the possible participants needed to hand in a signed assent form (Appendix A) as well as a consent form (Appendix B) signed by their parents or legal guardians, which served as a confirmation of their involvement in the study and of the fact that they understood what the study was about. The sample size was determined by the recurrence of themes. In this method of sampling the researcher continued sampling until she found a recurrence in what participants were saying (Creswell, 2002; Maykut & Morehouse, 1993; Patton, 1990). According to Maykut and Morehouse (1993, p. 63):

We cannot decide a priori on how many people or settings we must include in our study in order to fully understand the phenomenon of interest. Ideally, we continue to jointly collect data and analyse it in an ongoing process until we uncover that there is no information that is new. We continue to gather information until we reach the saturation point, when newly collected data is the same as previously collected data.

#### 4.3.4 Sampling technique

A sample is a special subset of the population, observed for the purpose of making inferences about the nature of the total population itself. Rubin and Babbie (1993) are of the opinion that a sample should be representative of the population from which it is selected and that the aggregate characteristics of the sample should closely approximate the same aggregate characteristics in the population. There are two basic types of sampling, that is, probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Rubin

& Babbie, 1993). In probability sampling (Silverman, 1993), elements for the study are selected from the population on the basis of random selection with non-zero probabilities.

On the other hand, social researchers mostly use non-probability sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). There are four types of non-probability samplings: purposive, quota, reliance on available subjects and snowball. Purposive sampling was used for this study, with an attempt to purposefully select participants in a random manner. This method (purposive random sampling) was based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995).

#### 4.3.5 Purposive random sampling

Bearing in mind that Mabopane is a large township, purposive random sampling was used as a method of sampling because it allowed the researcher to randomly select a small sample and yet still be able to obtain one that was information rich (Creswell, 2002). According to Struwig and Stead (2001), purposive sampling aims at adding credibility when the purposeful sample is larger than one can handle. Although the researcher had purposefully identified the sample, she had no control over who was going to participate as the sample was dependent on the response the researcher received from the adolescent girls involved in the organisation. Purposive random sampling also aims at reducing judgement and criticism that the researcher might have been biased in selecting the sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Struwig & Stead, 2001). However, the researcher acknowledges that this method of sampling is not suitable for generalisation to the broader population (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

#### 4.3.6 The interviews

The interview is an important data collection technique that involves verbal communication between the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2002; Fox, 2006). Interviews are mostly used in survey designs and in exploratory and descriptive studies. Interview design consists of three main types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Fox (2006) further states that the quality of the data

collected in an interview will depend on both the interview design and on the skill of the interviewer. This study adopted an unstructured method of interviewing.

Most adolescents responded after hearing about the research from their peers and made appointments to see the researcher, who met the participants on three occasions, firstly to explain what the study was about to those interested, and to make follow-up appointments. The possible participants then took the consent forms home to request their parents' permission; the following week the participants returned signed copies of consent as well as assent forms. An interview schedule was then created by the interviewer to run over two days, with two interviews a day.

#### 4.3.7 Unstructured or in-depth interviews

The researcher used this method to conduct her interviews with the intention of gaining a rich picture of what was happening in a particular setting. Thus, the aim of the researcher was to glean as much information as possible from the participants who were interviewed in order to gain the fullest understanding of how television influences adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour in Mabopane Township (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to Fox (2006), the researcher attempts to understand the interviewees' worldview in an unstructured manner. Therefore, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is very important. A characteristic of in-depth interviewing is that the researcher has a general objective and may use an interview guide (appendix D), but the respondent accords most of the structure to the interview. Other characteristics of an in-depth interview are (Gibbs, 2002; Hiles & Cerma, 2008; Rubin, & Babbie, 1993) that it:

- Enables extended data collection from participants;
- Enables researchers to probe aspects of what a participant says in order to gain a fuller view of an experience;
- Can explore the experiences of different participants; and
- Allows people to speak for themselves and thus increasing the validity of the data.

#### 4.3.8 Individual interviews

The researcher selected individual interviews as they seem to be of value to provide detailed information about the meaning of an event, situation or social context to each participant in a setting (Fox, 2006). They were also appropriate for this study as the topic discussed was sensitive and the respondents may not have been willing to speak about some aspects of their experiences in front of others.

Thus, individual interviews with open-ended questions were posed so as to achieve a deeper insight into thoughts and views about television and sexuality. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each and took place in a quiet room. After informed consent was obtained, the interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. The interview guide contained open-ended questions covering the following themes: *reflections about television, common sources of sexual messages on television, possible influence on sexual behaviour and attitudes, feelings about sexuality, television viewing habits*. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher so that the transcripts became as accurate and understandable as possible to the reader (Constas, 1992).

However, the researcher also acknowledges the weaknesses of this technique: it proved to be costly in time, while some participants were unfocused as they struggled in restricting themselves to the area in which the researcher was interested; furthermore it could not be generalised and it could be subject to bias. These weaknesses will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

#### 4.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis comprises a variety of processes and procedures where one moves from the qualitative data that has been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations one is studying (Gibbs, 2002; Seidel, 1998). The intention behind qualitative data analysis is to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data. For example, in this study, by analysing interview data the researcher attempted to identify any or all of:

- Someone's interpretation of the world; how the adolescent girls interpret the world of television;
- Why they hold that point of view;
- How they came to that view;
- What they have been doing;
- How they conveyed their view of their situation; and
- How they identify or classify themselves and others in what they say.

Consequently, data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organising the data for analysis, then reducing it into themes through the process of categorising and condensing codes and finally representing data in figures, tables or discussion (Hiles & Cerma, 2008).

Further, the process of qualitative data analysis involves two aspects, the writing and identification of themes. Looking for themes involves categorising (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2002; Hiles & Cerma, 2008). This is the identification of passages of text and of applying labels to indicate that they are examples of a thematic idea. Gibbs (2002) states that this labelling or categorising process enables researchers to quickly retrieve and collect all the text and other data that they have associated with some thematic idea so that they can be examined together and different cases can be compared in that respect.

Therefore, after the data was collected and formulated, there was a need to analyse it in order to arrive at the findings and conclusions. As a result, content thematic analysis (Gibbs, 2002; Neuman, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted to analyse the data. which the researcher first transcribed onto paper. Interviews were conducted in English and Se-Tswana (the indigenous language of the participants). Data collected in Se-Tswana was translated into English and subsequently analysed by means of content thematic analysis. This was made possible by the fact that the researcher is also Se-Tswana speaking; thus, it was easier for her to translate the information given by the participants into English. Possible limitations will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.



#### 4.4.1 Content thematic analysis

Content thematic analysis is an approach dealing with data that involves the creation and application of ‘categories’ to data. Thus, it involves summarising the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features (Hancock, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data being analysed might take any number of forms: an interview transcript, field notes and documentation. Thematic analysis concerns discovering themes and concepts embedded throughout the interviews (Neuman, 2006). This relates to the social learning approach which states that humans learn from observing others and through modelling. By picking up themes in other people, human beings start to model them (Brown et al., 1993). Thus, this research aimed at uncovering themes that adolescents learn from watching television and at exploring how these patterns of themes influence their behaviour and attitudes (especially sexually).

Furthermore, content can be analysed on two levels (Hancock, 1998). The basic level of analysis is a descriptive account of the data (Hancock, 1998; Silverman, 1993), that is, what was actually said with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it. This is also referred to as the manifest level or type of analysis. The higher level of analysis is termed interpretative (Bryman & Burgess, 1993; Hancock, 1998), which is concerned with what was meant by the response, or what was implied. It is also referred to as the latent level of analysis.

##### 4.4.1.1 The process of thematic content analysis

A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data. Consequently, the process of conducting a thematic analysis, according to (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is as follows:

- *The pre-analysis stage:* Firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data, transcribing recorded data into written text, reading and re-reading the data (immersing herself in the data and thoroughly reading through the notes over and over again, including the transcriptions).

Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999, p. 141) suggest that this should be done up to the point where the researcher knows the data “well enough to know more or less what kinds of things can be found where, as well as what sort of interpretations are likely to be supported by the data and what not”.

The units of analysis were phrases and passages in the text, and not only the repeated occurrence of certain words. These passages were marked as possible themes. Since the data consisted of the texts of four individuals, the texts were examined for similarities and contradictions within each individual, as well as between the four individuals.

- *Inducing themes*: Secondly, the researcher made a list of the different types of information she found. She then categorised interesting features of the data in a systematic manner across the entire data set, collecting data relevant to each category. The researcher created many categories and decided to reduce them later (Hancock, 1998).

- Thirdly, the researcher began to link some of the categories that she felt could be connected. The researcher then listed minor and major categories. Hence, themes were developed. The researcher began to search for potential themes, gathering all data for each potential theme. Common themes were then grouped together under relevant topics.

- Fourthly, the researcher continued to follow these steps until all her interview transcripts had been completed. After all the relevant transcript data was sorted into minor and major categories, the researcher again reviewed the data within the system of categorisation.

- Fifthly, once the researcher had sorted all the categories and was sure that all the items of data had been correctly categorised, she established the major themes of the study.

According to Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999), this process should move beyond a summary of the texts, and the identifying and labelling of themes must be related to

the research focus (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The marked passages were therefore revisited several times and refined into main themes with sub-themes under each theme.

● *Interpretation and checking*: The final step was to interpret the results, using the thematic categories as sub-headings. Data was interpreted according to how the adolescents described their experiences and how the researcher, understood their lives.

Although these themes were based on what was presented in the interviews with the participants, at this stage the researcher became the interpreter of the perceptions and experiences of the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In very simple terms, she aimed to answer the “how and to what extent” question with which the researcher is confronted at the end of the analysis process. The product of this phase is presented in the next chapter where the results are discussed. It is a written account of what was found by the researcher’s investigation into the influence of television on sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls and their perceptions on the possible influence that television exerts on the other aspects of their lives.

#### 4.4.1.2 Validity and credibility

The final element of the analysis was to check the credibility of the interpretation. This, according to Babbie and Mouton (2001), implies that the researcher must ensure that there is a congruency between the constructed reality of the participants and the realities that are attributed to them by the researcher. Durrheim (1999) rephrases this as the degree to which the research findings are believable observations for the researcher, participants and the readers of the study. Because it was not possible to regain access to the participants in the schools, the researcher did not refer the analysis back to the participants. This constitutes a limitation to the credibility of the analysis.

The researcher constructed a valid argument for choosing the themes, which was accomplished by reading the related literature. By referring back to the literature, the researcher gained information that allowed her to uncover themes from the interview

(Constas, 1992). Once the themes were collected and the literature had been studied, the researcher formulated theme statements to develop a story line. When the literature was interwoven with the findings, the story that the interviewer constructed was one which contained value. A developed story line helps the reader to comprehend the process, understanding, and motivation of the interviewer (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

To ensure the validity of the research, the researcher tried to make certain that the participants' viewpoints, thoughts, intentions and experiences were accurately understood and reported (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Emphasis was placed on the perspective and language of the participants rather than on the interpretations and terminology of the researcher. The researcher was transparent and explicit (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) and she further elicited comment from participants on the findings in maximising the interpretative validity of the findings.

#### **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

For the purpose of the study, the researcher adhered to the principles and responsibilities set forth by the University of Pretoria's code of ethics for research ([www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)). The researcher gave two forms to the potential participants (Appendix A & B), an assent form for themselves and a consent form for the legal guardian. Both forms contain information regarding the topic of the research, risks and discomforts, benefits, participant's rights and confidentiality.

Furthermore, the sensitivity of the context of the study was acknowledged; as a result, participants needed to be reassured of the confidentiality of the information they provide. The participants were also informed that the recordings of the interviews would be stored for the next 15 years by the researcher and the university with which she is conducting the study; thereafter, they will be erased. *Parents* or guardians as well as participants received an information sheet that explained the nature and purpose of the study.

Only upon the return of the signed consent form and assent form were they considered as participants. Though consent of parents or guardians is needed, potential

participants as well as parents or legal guardians were assured that the latter would not have access to information provided by the participants.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on how the researcher intended using qualitative research methodology in her study, as she was more interested in the quality of the information she would gather. The first step in her research was to determine which individuals or groups or other social systems would be involved in the study, namely adolescent girls who view television which may influence their sexual attitudes and behaviours.

Once a sample of participants is selected, the researcher must determine what information is required. Different ways of obtaining this information have been described and made relevant to this study. The next chapter will deal with the presentation and analysis of the data obtained.



## CHAPTER 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The researcher collected data from adolescent girls between age 15 and 17 by means of individual in-depth interviews. The recorded data was transcribed to provide textual data for purposes of analysis. In this chapter, the researcher summarised the stories of adolescent girls, highlighting important details and the main themes that emerged from their experiences. Thus, consideration was given to the researcher's preconceived ideas that were formulated prior to the analysis. This was deemed necessary because these ideas could have influenced the reading of the texts; her being eager to find evidence in the data that proves the researcher's assumptions may have led to her overlooking responses that were not in line with or related to these preconceived themes. These prejudices were influenced by the literature reviewed, as well as the researcher's own experiences (Bauer, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). However, evidence was found for some of these themes, while some were found to be inaccurate, whereas in other instances the researcher's prejudice was only partly accurate.

In the second part of the chapter, the researcher furnishes her interpretation of the major themes that emerged from the experiences of all the adolescent girls who participated in this study. Furthermore, the results of the study are the responses of the participants to the issues that were discussed in the individual interviews (Appendix F for transcripts). This chapter presents the researcher's interpretation and understanding of how adolescents perceive the influence of television on their sexual attitudes and behaviour. Given the nature of the data, it was decided to present the results, and discussion thereof, as a single text.

### 5.2 Background Information

Biographical data was recorded during the interview sessions and a brief biographical description for each adolescent girl is presented below in order to contextualise the textual material for the analysis. The researcher used numbers to refer to the girls in order to ensure anonymity as well as confidentiality.

### 5.2.1 *Participant 1:*

She is a 17 year old girl, currently in grade 12 at Mokoma High School. She watches television mostly after school and during weekends. When not watching television, she likes chatting on <sup>1</sup>Mxit with her friends or “hanging out” with them. She also enjoys commercial subjects at school and is looking forward to owning a business in the future.

### *Participant 2:*

She is a 16 year old girl, who is currently studying grade 11 at Hillside High School. She prefers to study a lot, but watches television whenever she can although she tries not to watch too much. If not watching television she also enjoys decorating and helping her older sister with her catering business.

### *Participant 3:*

She is a 17 year old girl, currently in grade 12 at Mabopane High School. She watches television mostly after school and during weekends. When not watching television she also enjoys chatting on Mxit with her friends or “hanging out” with them. She enjoys “soapies”: and movies on television, especially E-TV.

### *Participant 4:*

She is a 16 year old girl who is currently studying grade 11 at Laudium High School. She watches television mostly after school and during weekends. When not watching television she also enjoys chatting on Mxit. She has many friends and enjoys relaxing and chatting to them in the streets.

## **5.3 Content thematic analysis**

As mentioned previously, qualitative data analysis deals with uncovering themes. The themes that the researcher has identified stemmed from the literature review, the phenomena being studied, as well as the researcher’s theoretical orientation (Bulmer, in Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Mxit: a cellphone based chatroom that connects people to the world using instant messaging as a social network.

The themes were clustered together as meaningful components for gaining insight on how television influences adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour. To help the researcher to identify themes from the data she collected, she considered the literature review (previous studies conducted that were directly and indirectly related to this study) as well as the theoretical paradigm underlying this study. The literature review helped her to express the underlying assumptions behind the research question and to demonstrate the need for the study. In depth open ended questions were also employed with the aim of exploring, describing and gaining a deeper understanding of the use of television and its possible influence on the given attitudes and behaviours. The process described in the previous chapter was then followed so as to uncover the themes. As a result, six major themes were identified from the data:

1. Adolescents' view of programmes (positive and negative) that they like watching and the frequency of doing so.
2. Adolescents' perceptions of sex on television.
3. Television characters as role models.
4. Influence of television on sexual beliefs.
5. Adolescents' view of the role of their peers and parents.
6. Other aspects that television influences.

These themes and interpretations were discussed jointly, integrating the literature and giving plausible accounts of the challenges and influences posed by television among these adolescent girls when they watch it.

### 5.3.1 Adolescents' views of programmes that they like watching and their frequency of doing so

According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), sexual contents displayed in the programmes shown on television may suggest that certain sexual behaviours make girls more attractive and admirable (Brown et al., 1993). Depending on the component processes involved (such as attention or motivation), one may model the behaviour shown in the commercial and buy the product being advertised. Thus, in describing the kind of programmes that they like to watch on television and the frequency thereof, most of the girls indicated that they mainly enjoy soap operas



movies and dramas. According to Kunkel et al. (2001), it has been reported that nearly seven in 10 television programmes contain a sexual message.

*Participant 3: Ummh! I'm referring to those, ummh...U know! Late night movies that appear on TV, I'm also referring to those other soapies that are shown on television such as..... not necessarily everything on Generations but there are things on Generations that when you watch them and actually think about them they are actually not a positive aspect in a person's life.*

*Participant 1: Ooh! It will depend on the kind of person, how they are. I usually watch eeh... soapies, yaah...comedies, yaah...that kinda programmes.*

*Participant 4: The Bold, Days of our Lives, The Young and the Restless, and Generations.*

Based on these responses, it can be said that the girls are most likely to watch soapies, dramas and movies, which, when one considers the frequency, occupy most of the time. However, while television's sexual messages are not necessarily visually explicit, they often provide information adolescents may not find elsewhere (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999). Through their dialogue, characterisations, storylines, and themes, television programmes present adolescents with numerous verbal and visual examples of how dating, intimacy, relationships, and sex are handled. On the other hand, concern is often expressed that the messages broadcast via television about sexuality are limited, stereotypical, and potentially harmful (Comstock et al., 1978; Haferkamp, 1999). Furthermore, the social learning theory of Bandura (2001) states that depictions of adolescents in the media – their successes, failures, rewards, and punishments – provide models from which beliefs, behaviour and attitudes are learned and actions are imitated. However, it is important to note that adolescents are aware of these sexual images, especially negative portrayals of women, such as prostitution and sexual promiscuity (Miller et al., 2001).

Regarding programmes that they watch, participants said:

Participant 3: *programmes that have two sides, there are positive programmes that one can enjoy and have something later as an influential aspect and there are negative ones that actually at the end of the day can destroy one's life.*

She further explored the difference between positive and negative programmes as such, describing the negative ones thus:

Participant 3: *Ummh! I'm referring to those, ummh...U know! Late night movies that appear on TV, I'm also referring to those other soapies that are shown on television such as..... not necessarily everything on Generations but there are things on Generations that when you watch them and actually think about them they are actually not a positive aspect in a person's life.*

The positive broadcasts she discussed as follows:

*Positive ones, Ummmh! I refer to programmes like..... Take5, there's Zola7 you can watch as an influential aspect and there is also Shift on SABC 1, Yaah! Other programmes you can watch that you can become something in life.*

Moreover, the frequency with which adolescent girls watched programmes also tended to vary according to individual preference.

Participant 1: *Yaah! I think so because it's...on our eyes everyday, it's something that we see. I'm not saying it contributes to us doing wrong things but it also you know...it's an everyday thing for us, you know, so I think, you know, it really does contribute to our bad attitude.*

Participant 4: *Eeh! Everyday I can say.*

Strouse et al. (1995) argue that both heavy regular consumption of and experimental exposure to sexually-oriented genres, such as soap operas and music videos, have been related to expressing more liberal sexual attitudes, to being more accepting of

sexual improprieties, and to more increased negative attitudes toward remaining a virgin. Furthermore, an average of 10 references to sexual intercourse per hour occurs in soap operas (Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Heintz-Knowles, 1996), while an average of 20 instances per hour occurs in programmes most preferred by young people (Ward, 1995).

Furthermore, according to social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), observational learning is stronger when the behavioural model occurs frequently. Viewers who regularly observe similar examples of sexual request situations may begin to perceive the strategies used as the proper and normal approach. As mentioned, when television characters talk about sex, 59 to 74% of the conversations are about prospective appeal and attraction (Kunkel, Cope, & Colvin, 1996).

Most participants indicated that they enjoy watching soap opera and drama, which, according to earlier studies, tend to portray sexual scenes (Brown & Newcomer, 1991; Calfin et al., 1993; Chunovic, 2000; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Durham, 1999; Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000; Strong & DeVault, 1994).

Participant 2 stated: *There's a lot of explicit sex on TV, which.... Each and every day you watch TV, you watch soapies, and you watch dramas there is always a sex scene, where as a young person you kinda go like I wanna see what that feels like, you know! I wanna experience that for myself. If Karabo on Generations can do that so can I, because as a young somebody you look at Karabo as an idol as a role model, you know. Everything about Karabo, if Karabo is your role model you see it as perfection, so now at the end of the day you wanna be like Karabo. So I think that is the one thing that can actually lead you astray.*

Participant 1 further said: *I think I would say more because everyday when I watch television, there's always, umh... you know...eeh...there's always intimacy between two certain people. Everyday when I watch television somebody has to kiss someone, somebody has to do something intimate with someone and I think...I think on everyday television, on a soapie, on a drama, or comedy, there has to be sexuality, you know contact between the two, you*

*know...it's something that happens everyday, I think on everyday television soapie or comedy.*

However, they also indicated that there are programmes that are positively presented, which teach them to make correct decisions and are interactive.

*Participant 2 said: Ummmh! I refer to programmes like..... Take5, there's Zola7 you can watch as an influential aspect and there is also Shift on SABC 1, Yaah! Other programmes you can watch that you can become something in life.*

Thus, the participants seem to consider television as exercising both a negative and a positive influence in their lives.

*Participant 2: programmes have two sides, there are positive programmes that one can enjoy and have something later as an influential aspect and there are negative ones that actually at the end of the day can destroy one's life.*

### 5.3.2 Adolescents' perceptions of sex on television

According to Brown et al. (2005), adolescents consistently refer to the mass media, including television, as the most important sources of sexual information. The sexual content in much of the television these adolescents attend to is frequent, glamorised, and consequence free (Greenberg & Busselle, 1996).

*Participant 1: I think it contributes a lot in terms of maybe they show a celebrity giving such a thing and everyday as young people we would like to look up to those people and they do things that they do and even if those things are wrong but we still wanna do it just because maybe somebody did that so I think it really plays a...a... very big role in a teenagers life especially girls because they like doing things that tend to be wrong you know, but just because it's an "In thing", so we continue doing that.*

*Participant 2: I think TV gives messages to the youth e sharpo (its okay), but then in most soapies, heeh...ga ke dumelane le tsona... (I don't agree with them).*

Participant 3: *There's a lot of explicit sex on TV, which..... Each and every day you watch TV, you watch soapies, and you watch dramas there is always a sex scene, where as a young person you kinda go like I wanna see what that feels like, you know! I wanna experience that for myself. If Karabo on Generations can do that so can I, because as a young somebody you look at Karabo as an idol as a role model, you know. Everything about Karabo if Karabo is your role model you see it as perfection, so now at the end of the you wanna be like Karabo. So i think that is the one thing that can actually lead you astray.*

Participant 4: *Well geke di beya ka rating nkare (when I rate them) about 8 out of 10, because ge re lebella ba di ntsha gantsi (when we look they show them a lot). O tlo kreya di etsagala ko di TV programmes tso tsoitlhe, so gentse di etsagala byana o tlo kreya di richa standard sa gore hae! Its okay re kanne ra e labella, its nothing, e iragela fela mo TV but then ga e iragele fela mo TV, e etsagala thata, and then....yaah... (you'll find they appear in all programmes, so when they happen like this, you'll find they reach a standard of: its okay we can watch it, its nothing, it only happens on TV but then it doesn't only happen on TV, it happens a lot).*

Participant 1: *I think I would say more because everyday when I watch television, there's always, umh... you know...eeh...there's always intimacy between two certain people. Everyday when I watch television somebody has to kiss someone, somebody has to do something intimate with someone and I think...I think on everyday television, in a soapie, in a drama, or comedy, there has to be sexual scenes, you know contact between the two, you know...it's something that happens everyday, I think on everyday television whether it's a soapie or comedy.*

Therefore, the study supports research by Jeffres (1997) which argued that adolescents pay special attention to such portrayals, because romantic and sexual relationships are both new and important in adolescents. This is also supported by the social learning theory when it contends that sexual modelling teaches affectionate techniques, reduces sexual inhibition, alters sexual attitudes, and shapes sexual practices by conveying norms (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

This argument is further supported by Brown et al. (1993), when they describe adolescent girls as actively interpreting sexual media contents. Several authors (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Greenberg et al., 1996; Jeffres, 1997; Ward, 1995) have proposed that adolescents may have fewer options other than to search for televised examples, in order to shape their own conceptions regarding sex and intimacy. Regarding sexuality, television may possess a high 'functional value' (Greenberg et al., 1996), because direct observations of intimacy seldom occur, sexual relationships are not an easy subject to talk about, especially with parents (Gordon & Gilgun, 1987) and educational programmes tend to focus on biological features (Huston et al., 1998).

According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1997; Mischel, 1993), an observer's behaviour can be affected by the positive or negative consequences named vicarious reinforcement or vicarious punishment of a model's behaviour.

Participants also indicated that they view television as not portraying the unpleasant consequences that could occur when engaging in sex, which is supported by previous studies. They have indicated that an analysis of media content shows that sexual messages on television are almost universally presented in a positive and negative light, with little discussion of the potential risks of unprotected sexual intercourse and few portrayals of the adverse consequences (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein & Smith, 2001), thus influencing adolescents to engage in sexual matters because they think there are no adverse consequences. This "no-consequences" issue is further discussed in the next major theme as a sub-theme because they are interconnected.

### 5.3.3 Television characters as role models

As noted, social learning theory emphasises the importance of observing and modelling the behaviour, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977; 1997). Furthermore, Greenberg et al. (1993) state that the most common examples of social learning situations are television commercials, movies and music videos. Sexual contents that are displayed in these programmes may suggest that certain kinds of sexual behaviour render girls more attractive and admirable.

Thus, the participants commented that they look to the characters on television as their role models and it seems easier for them to emulate these characters

because it seems acceptable and looks enjoyable. Participant 3's views on Karabo have already been reproduced.

She added that : *The problem is that we don't know..... we don't really know the real Karabo, the only Karabo we see is on Generations, so if.. if I like the way Karabo dresses and if I like the way Karabo does her things, actually I am gonna be like my role model is Karabo, my role model is so and so. And I will be like whatever so and so does, I wanna do that myself because I think for that purpose of living at the end of the day it doesn't harm her as an individual, so I think if it doesn't hurt why not!*

Participant 1: *I think that we tend to do things that...that particular person was doing, we won't be thinking of ourselves because if we did we would be focusing on good things. I think that we do things that are shown on television to belong somewhere as I have said, so I think that as young people we tend to do things that we see from certain people who we call our role models being it the models, the actresses, the actors, you know that kinda people.*

Participant 1 further said: *I think that because Karabo or Brooke are in the limelight so you think that...you think that particular person is there you know, you would also be wanting that coolness from your fellow peers you know, like you'd be on their good side because you did something that you know everyone should try out and you know it's something that they saw on television so they wouldn't judge you for that, some would, you know some, you know we have some irresponsible kids out there, so I think that others would consider that as good because they have seen that on television, so...*

As mentioned above, television also influences emotional reactions, which could in turn influence how an individual reacts and behaves.

Participant 4 stated: *Yaah! Because Akere ge ba thoma ba.....e re kere ge motho a swa on the story or on the scene, e tlo causa something like , o tlo feela emotionale, like in a way ge ba nyala o tla bo o thabile. And then sometimes ge o lebeletse TV o tla kreya someone a no lla fela bara o llelang,*

*are waitse scene ela e nthachitse (isn't it when they start...isn't it when someone dies on the story or on the scene, it will cause something like...you'll feel emotional...like in the way when they get married you become happy. And then sometimes when you're watching TV you'll find someone crying, when asked why you are crying, they say you know that scene touched me).*

#### 5.3.3.1 Consequences portrayed by television

According to Prochaska & Norcross (2007), observational learning refers to all of the demonstrated consequences of exposure to modelling. Observational learning can take different forms and may be measured in different ways, depending upon the interests of a particular researcher or the nature of a particular issue.

However, participants stated that most programmes on television did not display consequences when they showed sexual scenes. This was supported by studies that have been conducted in this field. According to previous studies, in 2002, most of the television shows watched frequently by adolescents included sexual content, but very few of those shows included any depiction of sexual risks and/or responsibilities (Aubrey et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Ward, 2003). Research has also indicated that television viewing can cultivate a distorted world view and influence several behavioural domains, as has been amply demonstrated; therefore it is expected that it may affect sexual learning as well (Strouse, Buerkel-Rothfuss & Long, 1995; Brown et al., 2005; Ward, 2003; Aubrey et al., 2003). Strouse et al. (1995) discovered that out of 1500 adolescents who participated in their study, 1,043 considered television to be their greatest source of behavioural modelling as regards becoming sexually active. In this study, one of the participants stated the following:

*Participant 3: The problem is...is...is the way they present them on TV. They present them in such a way that they don't have consequences, you know... They just do it and it's over and done with and there is nothing that comes back and bites you in the ass at the end of the day. So I think the way they present them is not really beneficial.*



She further said: *I'd say it's....it's not that ...That explicit but the message is interpreted wrongly by a lot of people. When you watch Generations they don't necessarily show you the steps taken when whosoever and soever sleep together with whosoever, but then the stages...the afterwards...The fact "ya gore" (that) you go out and sleep with somebody...There are consequences, they don't display the consequences. Some...Karabo sleeps with whoever and then at the end of the day, you know it's okay for her to do that, it's...it's okay, it's...it's painless, and it's...it's consequences less, and then why not if even why...somebody like Karabo. Karabo actually doesn't have to deal with the consequences of being pregnant, of maybe some day being diagnosed with an STD or being HIV positive. I mean if...if... Karabo can't get HIV positive, sure as hell I'm not gonna get AIDS, so why not.*

The participants indicated that they view television characters as their role models, thus being influenced by the latter and being susceptible to do what they are doing, especially if there seem to be no consequences (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, Huit (2004) and Ward (2003) argue that if an individual has learned some new behaviour, then they have the potential to produce it, if or when they find themselves in a situation in which such a performance appears to be desirable, useful, or likely to serve their own purpose. Social learning theory states that vicarious or explicit reward usually leads to imitation of the modelled behaviour, whereas vicarious punishment leads to counter-imitation (Bandura, 1986; Liebert & Spiegler, 1990; Mischel, 1993). The influence of vicarious outcomes on observers' behaviour is mediated by their cognition. Hence, the vicarious results they observe provide them with information which they interpret and use in the light of the total situation and their previous experience (Bandura, 2001).

Therefore, even though adolescents may view these characters on television as their role models, learning from them does not necessarily mean that they would behave in that manner (Huitt, 2004). As Participant 1 said:

*I think it will depend on the...on an individual. Sometimes you can take a kiss or something like...maybe a message that was said, you can take it like, you know, just a kiss and you move on but sometimes you can take that as something maybe you should do to get something that...something in*

*particular that you want from someone. Maybe you wan to attract a guy, maybe you gonna use that kinda kiss, maybe from a certain soapie, you know, to use that thing to get someone, yaah.*

#### 5.3.4 Influence of television on sexual beliefs

According to Bandura (1977; 1997), sexual modelling teaches affectionate techniques, reduces sexual inhibition, alters sexual attitudes and shapes sexual practices by conveying the norms: for instance, which behaviours are socially acceptable and which are not. Thus, sexual content may contribute to the re-shaping of sexual beliefs among adolescents as they watch programmes containing sexual messages on television. The participants further commented on this by saying:

*Participant 3: Yah! I think they do, because as...as a young somebody you are brought up in a family which says this is what goes with God, this is what goes with our family, this is what goes with our religion and stuff and stuff, and then when you see whatever, maybe Isidingo and you see an unmarried couple doing whatever, and you think, I mean if they can do it once and then there's no punishment for that, or...or to do that, I mean...you know...they don't have to reap anything from that, you know..They don't have...you know...they don't have the come backs of it.....let me just do it just once, I'll explain myself when the time comes and maybe I'll have an excuse when the time comes...but they don't get caught..And I won't get caught if I do exactly the same what they did...I'm not gonna get caught. And I also think they...they clash with beliefs because we were taught "gore" (that) sex before marriage is a sin and when you watch Generations, you watch Isidingo, there are people who sleep together and they are not even married and you think, I mean, really now....this is the real world...you know..Things like those..You know, are not necessarily true...they might be true in heaven...but then...hey! We are living in the world...on earth where...will deal with these kind of things when we get there...when the time comes for us to get there but for now lets just live for now.*

Participant 1: *I think that depends also on an individual because...maybe... and also peer pressure. Maybe you come from such a family that you were raised good, you know, have respect and that kinda stuff but when you go out there you want to see...you want to belong somewhere and be part of a certain group with certain friends. I think many... many young girls will tend to do things not wanting to, but to impress others. And I think... I think you can change what you believe by just looking at a certain movie or something. Yaah... yaah...I think it contributes.*

### 5.3.5 Adolescents' view of the role of their peers and parents in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviour

According to Wright et al. (1990), the strength of peer influence on sexuality is mediated by how parents and adolescents communicate. Even though adolescents rate friends, school, and books as more important than parents in terms of sources of information about sex, parents are rated as exercising greater influence on sexual attitudes (Sanders & Mullis, 1988). Consequently, regarding the role of peers and parents, the participants said:

Participant 1: *I think that eeh...as friends we tend to...sometimes we tend to you know, mmh...tell each other things that are not really important, we tend to get jealous at times of maybe a certain person being a virgin, you know, we didn't have that you know, it's not a nice thing being a virgin, you know, you'd be maybe...people will start you know, like keeping a distance from you because of your title as a virgin, you know as a bad person. I think that as young people, teenagers we tend to do things not because we like them but because of peer pressure as I've said before. Yaah! I think that we should maybe be involved with friends that love, yaah and accept us for who we are.*

Participant 2: *They've got a big role to play in our lives. I think even a much bigger role than our parents because they are the people we go to, we talk to a lot and then we ask for advice most of the time because you don't....we don't wanna talk to our parents. So I think our friends have got a lot of influence because if you ask them how am I gonna do this?, you know....how am I gonna*

*say this, how am I gonna do this and then and then, they are the ones to tell you do this....do that and don't do that, but then most of the time it's all about influence, it's...it's all about how your friends are. There are those friends, you know, that are there, you know, just to take something away from you and there are those friends who are there to be there for you when you need them. so it's also about which friends do you have, which do you choose to have in your life and then how you choose your friends, you know, because it's not everybody that comes in your life for just being in your life and being your friend. There are those who come as predators in your life so you gotta be careful who you choose as a friend in your life.*

*Participant 3: Well... Thata thata ba bolela ka gore they won't do it just because ke nyako weitsa, ba no ietsa kagone chomi ya ka o e editse, kaonne chomi ya ka o e editse lenna ko e etsa. Chomi a re ye go monate tsa mo trya, ke mo go tsenang peer pressure because you've been pressured by a friend a go botsa gore o ile go etsa dilo just because go monate? (they say they won't do it just because they want to do it, they do it because their friend has done it: my friend lets go it's nice, go and try, that's where peer pressure enters, because you've been pressured by a friend telling you to do things just because it's nice).*

*She further said: Well thata thata nkare peers and television because most parents are not home, so as long as ba se gae they think gore howa!akere kere gona le babang ba ba saeng skolong, ba nna ba tsentsha programme, ba labella dilo, gab a fetsa fela tle be ba le under influence ya gore howa!kaonne diparents gab a teng, a re tseyeng advantage eo, re berekise nako eo gore re kgone go etsa dilo tse ba nyakang go di etsang (let me say peer pressure and television because most of the parents are not home, so as long as they are not home they think that No! I said there are those who don't go to school, they view programmes, watch things, when they finish they'll be under the influence of saying No! Because my parents are not here, let's take advantage; use this time to do whatever we want to).*

Regarding the role of parents, participants said:

Participant 2: *I think parents should be more open with their kids and talk about these things. And then also not to be harsh when the kid wants to talk about this, not to push them away...tell them “gore” (that) this is what’s happening....this is what’s happening...this is what’s happening...and at the end of the day it’s about you, you know. You got a choice to do this or you gotta.....you know....it’s all about you and you’re the one to make all the choices. So if you wanna make a positive choice, this is the way to go, these are the pro’s and these are the con’s and then “wena” (you) as an individual you stand here and then if you....you know....this is what.....this is what’s happening and then at the end of the day it’s your choice to make and if you feel like what we are giving you is not enough for you, go out there, look for more information and then come back and then talk to us....But then I think the parents still have a lot of roles to play in their children’s life because older people believe they ain’t gonna talk to kids about this thing, neeh!!! They’ll learn these things at school if needs be...but then what if they don’t learn these things at school and they get exposed to things and they don’t know how to deal with situations. I thought...I think they should start these things at home, when they go to school, when they talk about these things.....go to school knowing that this is how my mother said it is. And when things happen, you know this is how what is and I’m not gonna be led astray because I know this is how it is.*

Participant 3: *I think that...ehh...parents nowadays are opening to us, because I can share anything with my mother, my sisters, my friends, yaah so I think parents are open nowadays, if you have an older person at home and you can’t talk to them you always have another person to talk to, so I think that as young people we do things, you know out of, you know...out of...maybe having this negative attitude. I think that parents are very open and we can tell them anything, so we cannot blame parents in this kinda situations or television, you know being sexually active in our eyes and not controlling ourselves. I think that parents are there to talk to us and you know teachers are there, the sisters are there, the brothers are there, so if maybe you have a certain*

*problem maybe you should try to talk to one of them I don't think they will refuse to help you in any situation you have.*

In the discussions or interviews that the researchers conducted with the participants, it was apparent that there are other aspects that influence the shaping of one's sexual attitudes and behaviour. The participants strongly indicated that parents and peers also play an important role in shaping their sexual attitudes and behaviour. Miller and Fox (1987) stated that adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour are also influenced by close relationships in family and peer groups: referring to people with whom an adolescent is near, close or intimate. Leigh, Morrison, Trocki, and Temple (1994) and Werner-Wilson (1998) further stated that family structure has become of particular interest to most researchers, as more adolescents are being exposed to family disruption and are moving away from traditional lifestyles. These changes influence adolescent sexual behaviour and increase accepting attitudes toward sexual activities (Haffner, 1997; Werner-Wilson, 1998). Furthermore, social learning theory (Bandura, 1997; Bower & Hilgard, 1981) states that people, with whom one regularly associates, either by preference or obligation, restrict the types of behaviour that will be repeatedly observed and hence learned thoroughly.

According to Wright et al. (1990), the strength of peer influence on sexuality is mediated by parent-adolescent communication. Although adolescents rate friends, school, and books as more important than parents as sources of information about sex, parents are rated as having more influence on sexual attitudes (Sanders & Mullis, 1988). Thus, the interview with participant 1 elicited:

*I think that...eeh...parents nowadays they're opening to us because I can share anything with my mother, my sisters, my friends, yaah so I think parents are open nowadays if you have an older person at home and you can't talk to them you always have another person to talk to, so I think that as young people we do things, you know out of, you know...out of...maybe having this negative attitude. I think that parents are very open and we can tell them anything, so we cannot blame parents in this kinda situations or television, you know being sexual active in our eyes and not controlling ourselves. I think that parents are there to talk to us and you know teachers are there, the sisters are there, the brothers are there, so if maybe you have*

*a certain problem maybe you should try to talk to one of them I don't think they will refuse to help you in any situation you have.*

In addition, Miller et al. (1986) argues that sexual permissiveness and intercourse are related to parental discipline and control, a relationship that is not straight or clear. Parental influence on sexuality is indirect as well. In this respect, participant 4 indicated:

*Well thata thata nkare peers and television because most of the parents are not home, so as long as ba se gae they think gore howa! akere kere gona le babang ba ba saeng skolong, ba nna ba tsentsha programme, ba labella dilo, gab a fetsa fela tle be ba le under influence ya gore howa! kaonne diparents gab a teng, a re tseyeng advantage eo, re berekise nako eo gore re kgone go etsa dilo tse ba nyakang go di etsang (let me say peer pressure and television because most of the parents are not home, so as long as they are not home they think that NO! I said there are those who don't go to school, they put on programmes, watch things, when they finish they'll be under influence of saying NO! Because my parents are not here, let's take the advantage; use this time to do whatever we want to do.*

However, Eggermont (2005) stated that an adolescent's perception of how her or his peers behave may have some bearing on his or her intentions or actual behaviour. According to Eggermont (2005) and Heintz-Knowles (1996) this may be due to several reasons, some of which could be attributed to adolescent television viewing. Firstly, the question that arises is whether there is a continuous occurrence of sexual examples on television, since, as mentioned, according to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; 1997), the more one observes behaviour, the more likely one will model it.

Therefore, this theme indicates that the sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescents are influenced by different aspects of their life. Parents, peers, and television as well as the media as a whole seem to be the major contributors to the shaping of adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour in Mabopane Township.

### 5.3.6 Other aspects that television influences

As was mentioned in the previous theme discussed, adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviour are influenced by various aspects of their life. As a result, the researcher also saw fit to acknowledge other aspects of life that are influenced by television and which the participants also mentioned in the interviews, consequently becoming one of the major themes.

Even though this study focuses on the influence of television on sexual attitudes of adolescents, as noted other studies regarding the influence of television on aggression or violent behaviour and body dissatisfaction among adolescents serve as an indication of how television can influence more than one aspect of an adolescent's life. Much research (Anderson, 2004; Donnerstein et al., 1995; Smith & Donnerstein, 1998; Strasburger, 1997) has been carried out in this area which will aid in substantiating this current study.

Young people learn behaviour from their family and peers, as well as observing it in their area and in the community at large. This behaviour is reinforced by what adolescents see on television, the Internet, in video games, movies, music videos, and what they hear in their music (Brown et al., 2005; Chapin, 2000; Eggermont, 2005; Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Huit, 2004; Huston et al., 1998; Roberts, 2000). In this regard, participants said:

Participant 4: *“Yaah! E influenza violence because o tla krey a bana ba trya...ba tla ka dilo but then ba di tshwere diparents gab a di bona, maybe ba di tshwere ge ba tsena ko skolong ba be bare: “hey chomi bona ke tshwereng, a bare e le gore why we tshwere, a ba re n eke nyako bona gore diman wa ko TV weditse byang, so yo thoma gona mo violence and then e leada to things like bigger things like di crime, and then ka mokgwa e thomile, e thomile e le ntho e nnyane and a sa itse gore o etsang but then later tla be e le ntho e kgolo maybe a ka ya tronkong or something (it influences violence because you'll find children trying...they come up with things and parents don't see, maybe they have them at school and they say: my friend see what I have, then they say why do you have that? then they say I wanna see how that guy on TV did*



*it, so violence starts there and leads to bigger things like crime, and in that way it has started, it started small not knowing what they were doing and then later it becomes bigger and maybe they go to prison or something.*

Participant 1: *Yaah! I think so because young people tend to do...to say vulgar words around older people, you know, disrespect, you know and I think violence also contributes because looking at our generation from eeh...from the school that I come from, teenagers bring things, knives, they bring weapons into school and our teachers don't have that power anymore to...you know, to call in order, you know, to control the school because they bring certain things like guns and knives, they rape in the toilets. So I think they should do that...if they wanna show eeh...play a show that's got violence, maybe at a certain time whereby we can't really watch it because we will be asleep, so, yaah.*

Furthermore, characteristics of the model, such as age, sex, status and personality, in interaction with other factors, play a role in observational learning (Hall et al., 1985). A model with a high status or characteristics similar to those of the observer usually tends to be imitated rather than a low status model or one that is dissimilar. Thus, it is more likely that adolescents, as observers, would copy symbolic models such as characters on television programmes, movies, music videos, internet or books.

One of the effects of such media saturation is the transmission of societal ideals of beauty (Tiggemann, 2006). Formal content analysis of women's magazines and television points to a predominance of young, tall, and extremely thin women (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000; Malkin, Wornian & Chrisler, 1999; Spitzer, Henderson & Zivian, 1999; Sypeck, Gray & Ahrens, 2004). Participant 1 said:

*Yaah! That one...I think television also portrays something that you know...like in terms of modelling you know that kind of stuff. I think that it tends to destroy young people because as a young person I also think...I'm a size 32 but I think I'm fat because I see a certain model wear a size 22 and everyone says she's beautiful, she's nice, she's got money you know so I wanna look like that person and...and to make myself feel better, so I think that in terms of body wise, I think that television contributes a lot in terms of*

*young girls getting sick and forgetting that you know size doesn't really matter, I'm not saying that you should be obese just because of...you know...I think that they should try to send a good message about eeh...an individual loving their own body and accepting that. If they are fat they are fat, if they are skinny they should accept that.*

Participant 2: *Mmmmh...maybe alcohol and drugs...*

Participant 3: *There's al.....they also influence.....I think.....I think they also...the way our minds think. Because you watch Generations and you see Kenneth Mashaba being a multi-millionaire somebody without any degrees, without anything, and what they display is...is...you can get rich without going to school, I'm not saying it's wrong but what I'm saying is that you can get rich without going to school and then as an individual I think: Naah, Man!!! School can come later, if Kenneth can make it, so can I, you, you know, if....if Kenneth can get so much money without going to school, I mean, really now.....I can also do it.*

Social learning theory indicates that the nature of the behaviour we observe influences all four aspects of observational learning, depending on the observer's motivation and the situation in which modelling occurs (Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1993). For example, new, unknown, active or striking behaviour usually attracts the attention of observers, and such behaviour is accordingly, more easily acquired than familiar, less striking behaviour. Hence this could present an explanation of why aggressive behaviour is more imitated than most other behaviour (Meyer et al., 2003). Therefore the interaction between the nature of the observed behaviour and the individual's moral values is an interesting phenomenon, especially regarding the difference between retention and reproduction (Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1993). In this regard, participant 3 remarked:

*And then they also display a lot of violence, you know, there's a lot of violence going around, a lot of guns spreading and running around and we've got little kids in our houses and we've got teenagers saying: Ooh my God! I love 2pac.....the way he walks, the way that he sings, you know, the way that he swears, the way that he dresses, the way that he takes the gun and sways it*

*around his finger. And you see your father's gun lying around there, you like let me try that style that I saw 2Pac doing and you like.....and then you shoot your mother by accident. You know they display a lot of things, but I think as well there are also a lot of positive things. They show you a street kid coming from the street, making their way up, and earning a living, an honest day's life living and then at the end of the day the kid is living in a mansion, owning a mansion. There are certain things that are displayed and then are positive; it's only a matter of choice.*

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

In describing how television influences their sexual attitudes and behaviour, the adolescent girls that participated in this study indicated that they regard television as one of the major influences in their lives, and not only towards sexuality but in other aspects as well, such as aggression/violence, as well as experiencing contentment with their bodies. The participants acknowledged that television influences them not only positively (programmes that teach them about life, e.g. Take5, Theta-Junction) but also negatively (programmes that contain sexual messages, e.g. soap opera, movies, dramas).

They also indicated that other aspects of their lives, such as parental guidance and peer pressure, influence their sexual attitudes and behaviour. However, they still perceive television characters or personalities as their role models, thereby confirming the findings of Hall et al. (1985) that it is evident that adolescents would be more likely to model someone they view as having a high status or certain characteristics than imitate a low status model.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

The final chapter concludes the dissertation by providing a brief account of the limitations the study encountered as well as offering suggestions for future investigation. There is a growing emphasis on how media, especially visual, are influencing individuals daily. However, having conducted this study, the researcher recognises that further research in this field in South Africa and Africa as a whole, especially now that that we are fighting the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, is necessary. Nonetheless it is the researcher's hope that future studies could be guided by the limitations of this study.

#### 6.2 Limitations and Recommendations

##### 6.2.1 Limitations

The following limitations that will be addressed relate to the scope of this study and issues that emerged from the analysis of the data.

##### 6.2.1.1 Scope of the study

The most apparent limitation of this study was that the scope of the research was too general. Although adolescent girls' experiences and perceptions of how television influences them were addressed, this study would have benefited from a narrowed focus on specific programme genres (e.g. soap opera, drama, movies) and specific channels (e.g. SABC-1, SABC-2, SABC-3, E-TV).

Furthermore:

- It was also limited to a township community (only one township was considered). Furthermore, it focused only on the township and did not incorporate urban places. Hence, it did not investigate the distinction between adolescent girls in townships and those in urban settings.

- The sample used was also small; a larger sample of girls could be considered in the future.
- The study focused on adolescent girls only and not both genders. Therefore, further research into a sample of boys is recommended.
- The study also focused on one specific race (black adolescents) and excluded white, coloured and Asian adolescent girls. Consequently, further research with a sample inclusive of all the adolescent population (white, black, asian and coloured) ought to be considered.

Foney (2002) argues that all individuals develop within a range of environmental contexts, which in turn, influence how they respond to various stimuli. Therefore, the next limitation focuses on the lack of appropriate information regarding the extent to which adolescent girls watch sex on television in South Africa, as well as the accessibility of various forms of television equipment (e.g. DVDs, or videotapes). Identifying which contexts exercise the most influence on their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour is crucial in understanding their experience and interpretation of sex on television. Furthermore, the adolescents' relationship with parents, siblings, and peers is also important in order to contextualise it, as this may offer insight into their vulnerability or resilience to television influence.

#### 6.2.1.2. Sampling issues

The researcher elected to use purposive random sampling as a sampling technique. Since the sample was small the results therefore may not be generalised. The criticism may also be advanced that because the researcher is part of the community, her research could be subject to bias.

#### 6.2.1.3. Self-report data

The findings from this study are a step towards understanding adolescent girls' perceptions of sex on television and its influence on their sexual attitudes and behaviour. However, there are limitations to the current study that should be considered with regard to the interpretation of the findings. The present findings were

based on a study employing self-report data. Although subjective responses are useful in uncovering reaction and perception patterns, objective data would also be useful.

Although the method of in-depth interviewing allowed the researcher to clarify confusing questions, the participants may have been uncomfortable answering sensitive questions orally (Atkin, 1995; Malamuth, 1986). Atkin (1995) further indicates that participants may feel uncomfortable during interviews, which could result in responses lacking completeness or honesty. Therefore, one of the major concerns when using self report data is truthfulness (Kaizer Family Foundation, 1996). According to certain researchers (Atkin, 1995; Kaizer Family Foundation, 1996; Malamuth, 1986), little is known about the validity of reports by adolescent individuals or reports about socially taboo behaviour.

Therefore, while the methodological approach of in-depth interviewing for the appropriateness in capturing individualised outcomes was utilised, the fact that data was self reported constituted both a strength and a limitation of the study.

#### 6.2.1.4. Developmental issues

In addition, participants spoke about their level of maturity, reporting that their younger counterparts are more vulnerable to the influence of sex on television. The question could be posed: are adolescents at the developmental stage where they can be regarded as mature/adults? According to Ward (2003), the importance of age as regards a viewer's capability for processing, understanding and evaluating sexual content has been supported by reports that 12-year-olds experienced more difficulty in understanding the sexual implications of television programmes than 15-year-olds (Silverman-Watkins & Sprafkin, 1983). Another study by Brown et al. (1993) indicated that preadolescent girls reacted uninterestedly or with disgust to sexual television content, whereas older girls are often intrigued. This offers an indication that the participants who were involved in this study (between ages 15-17), exhibit a certain level of maturity or understanding regarding sexual content on television.

When we refer to the developmental stages proposed by Erikson (Meyer et al., 2003) regarding the milestone that adolescents experience at this stage, they seem to be at a

level where they have learned how to answer satisfactorily and happily the question of who they are. Furthermore, this stage brings about bodily growth and anatomical changes (Hook, Watts & Cockcroft, 2002). Thus, this stage results in physical and psychological changes to which adolescents have to adjust. But even the most well adjusted of adolescents, as Carver and Scheier (2000) have mentioned, experience some role identity diffusion. Adolescents attempt to develop identity and ideas about strengths, weaknesses, goals, occupations, sexual identity, and gender roles (Hergenhahn, 1994). Therefore the question still remains whether adolescents are at a level where they can say they are mature. Another question, as mentioned, could be: to what extent does television influence their development sexually and their sexual decisions?

Moreover, in the cognitive-developmental tradition, one study has explored the relationship between maturity and effects of sex on television (Bandura, 2001). However, future researchers ought to consider children from different age groups, which will clarify the distinction between adolescents' perceptions of their younger counterparts' vulnerability and perceptions of their own vulnerability.

It would be insightful to find out how television influences or impacts the stage of adolescents' lives. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the developmental stage needs to be deployed when conducting a study involving adolescents.

#### 6.2.1.5. The role of the researcher

The researcher employed in-depth interviews to collect data; consequently, this study involved personal interaction and co-operation between the researcher and interviewees (Fox, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1995) point out that rapport must be actively sought and worked out. However, as a young woman, the researcher might have influenced or impacted the participants' responses to questions: they might either respond openly because they think the researcher understands or they might have closed up owing to the fear of being judged as the researcher is a member of their community.

The researcher chose to utilise an exploratory study. As mentioned in chapter 4, one of the disadvantages of an exploratory study within a qualitative framework is that this kind of research may result in raising more questions instead of providing definite and clear-cut answers (Babbie & Mouton, 1999). This was indeed found to be the case in this study. The net results constituted tentative clues to possible answers concerning adolescent girls and television while some hints at methods that may provide more definite and satisfying answers were identified.

While individual unstructured interviews were adopted for this study, the researcher also acknowledges the weaknesses of this technique, which proved to be costly in time as the researcher had to take enough time to ensure that participants were comfortable. Some participants struggled to restrict themselves to the area in which the researcher was interested and would stray into other topics not directly related to the study. Therefore, the researcher found herself having to redirect the participants, which could have influenced their responses as they may have realised that the researcher was redirecting them.

#### 6.2.1.6. Theoretical issues

According to social learning theory, as a child grows older, her or his behaviour and the circumstances which are seen as appropriate or useful become more abstract, and beliefs and attitudes are developed from inferences made with regards to observed social behaviour. Furthermore, theoretically, people can be expected to learn from whomever they observe: parents, siblings, peers or media characters. Thus, television alone seems not to be solely responsible for the formation of sexual attitudes and behaviour of adolescent girls. The participants also mentioned parents and friends or peers as playing an important role in their formation of sexual attitudes and behaviour.

#### 6.2.2 Recommendations

Since the researcher has recognised that this study displays certain limitations, the following recommendations are made for future studies:



- As it was noted earlier, future studies should try to be more specific regarding television programmes (soap opera, drama, and movies) as well as television channels (SABC 1, 2, 3, E-TV or DSTV).
- What kind of sexual content do different groups of adolescents watch on television and why do they watch this content? What function does viewing sexual content serve for different groups of adolescents? Which adolescents intentionally select sexual content and which adolescents intentionally avoid sexual content? What are the reasons for such viewing behaviour?
- The studies should attempt not to focus on one township, but should include others so that the results stem from a broader perspective.
- A larger sample of participants could be used so that the results become more valid and can be generalised.
- As mentioned in the limitations, the study focused on adolescent girls only, so that further studies could also include adolescent boys.
- Future studies may also consider addressing the developmental stages of adolescents and the effects of television in more detail.
- Future researchers should be aware of their role and impact when conducting studies of a sensitive nature (talking about sex). Feelings of acceptance and non-judgement should be displayed to participants as this may affect how they respond to the question, thus influencing their openness and honesty.
- As the participants mentioned that television is not the only factor that influences their attitude and behaviour towards sex, studies need to be conducted that address the influence of peers and parents on the sexual attitudes and behaviour of the adolescent.
- How do different groups, such as parents and children, peers, and doctors talk about sexual topics on television and in the media generally? What healthy sexual practices are discussed? What public health concerns are discussed? Do television or other media provide public health guides for audiences?
- Studies regarding urban versus rural or township settlements ought to be considered by researchers when studying sexual behaviours of adolescents and the influence of television or media as a whole.
- To what extent do adolescents from different ethnic groups seek out programming designed for and featuring characters from their own ethnic group?

- Furthermore, the participants mentioned that television exerts an influence on other aspects of their lives; therefore, studies could be conducted as to how television influences these other aspects such as violence, body dissatisfaction, etc.
- What media other than television, including magazines, movies, video games, and the Internet, do adolescents use to seek sexual content? How does such media use vary for different groups of adolescents? Do different media serve different functions for their users? For instance, it was suggested that adolescent girls rely on magazines for information about sex and romance and that adolescent boys are more likely to use the Internet for such information. Is this the case?
- There have been many analyses of sexual content on television. Although they have provided a great deal of information about the frequency and explicitness of sexual behaviour, more theoretically guided and contextually situated content analyses are needed. Theory about sexuality and sexual development as well as television and/or media influences could be employed. Moreover, it would be useful to include a wider range of television programming (e.g. DSTV, advertising, news and talk shows: Take-5, Theta-Junction) and to study other media (e.g. the Internet and video and computer games). New studies might address the following issues:
  - Do different media portray healthy interpersonal sexuality, that is, sexuality that is consensual, honest, mutually pleasurable, protected and non-exploitative? How do different genres of television and other media portray sexuality?
  - What interpersonal contexts for sexual behaviour are portrayed in the media? What sorts of relationships characterise the participants in sexual activity? How can we characterise sexual situations? What events lead up to sexual activity? How do participants report feeling about sexual activity? What motivates such behaviour and what are the consequences (psychological and otherwise) of sexual behaviour?
  - How do individuals communicate or negotiate about sexual interactions? Do participants discuss issues of "safe sex", or feelings, or the meaning of sex in

relationship development? What sorts of messages about sexual power and vulnerability are provided in portrayals of sexual negotiation?

- To what extent do sexual interactions on television take place in coercive or abusive relationships? What are the messages about such relationships? How are depictions of sexual interactions related to violence?

### **6.3 Researcher's remarks**

The researcher conducted the study being aware of her own assumptions about television and its influence on adolescent girls. These assumptions were supported by previous studies that have been conducted relating directly or indirectly to this research topic, as well as the data collected from the research participants. For example, how adolescent girls view television characters as their role models and how they are more inclined to model their behaviour. However, the researcher kept an open mind when conducting interviews with the participants in order to ensure that the participants spoke as openly and freely as possible. The researcher summarised the stories of adolescent girls, highlighting important details and the main themes that emerged from her experiences. Furthermore, the researcher considered her own experiences as well as preconceived ideas prior to formulating the analysis of the data she collected. As mentioned above, this was necessary because the ideas could have influenced the reading of the texts (Bauer, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

### **6.4 Conclusion**

Social learning theory as the theoretical framework underlying this study provides solid theoretical reasons to consider that television and other media can play an important role in educating children and adolescents about sexuality. Television portrayals surrounding adolescents indicate that they are intensely interested in sexuality, romance, and relationships. The few available experimental studies show that television has the potential to change viewers' attitudes and knowledge. However, while some studies provide weak evidence that television viewing is linked to sexual behaviour and beliefs, the measures of viewing are crude at best. There is also some

evidence that personal factors such as interest in sexual content, level of understanding, perceived reality, and parental mediation modify the influence of sexual messages. However, much more work of an empirical nature is needed to substantiate the theory that naturally occurring sexual content on television, and in the media generally, does cause changes in attitudes and behaviour. What those changes are needs to be examined as a function of what individuals are watching, the messages they are receiving, how they are interpreting them, and other factors that influence an adolescent's sexual persona.

However, to conclude this study, the current research broadens the findings of previous studies by giving a voice to adolescent girls, enabling them to share their understanding of how sex on television influences them and providing a foundation for future investigations that are needed in South Africa. In the face of widespread poverty, abuse and neglect, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and a high prevalence of child headed households, research in the area of adolescents and television in South Africa has traditionally not been prioritised. With these technologies thoroughly entrenched in society and impacting on our culture and value systems, social relationships and traditional social systems, it is becoming increasingly important to understand how the media, especially television, are impacting on the younger generation (Haffner, 1997; Leigh et al., 1994; Miller & Fox, 1987). The present researcher hopes to contribute to the broader adolescent research agenda in South Africa by explicating how television could possibly be influencing the wellbeing, especially sexual attitudes and behaviour, of South Africa's adolescent girls in general.

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## Appendix A



University of Pretoria

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<http://www.up.ac.za>

1090 Block X

Mabopane

0190

Researcher: Tebogo Moswang

Contact Number: 073 634 3006

### **Re: Assent for participation in a research project.**

**1.1 Title of the study:** The Influence of Television on Adolescent Girls' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours in the Mabopane Township

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the influence of television on adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviours. The research will involve asking you questions focusing on television and its influence on behaviours and sexual attitudes, if there are any. An audio-tape will be used to record the interview. The interview will take between 50 minutes to an hour.

#### **Risks and discomforts:**

There are no risks from participating in the study other than perhaps you may experience discomfort when talking about certain sexual aspects. If this happens, you may choose to stop the interview.

**Benefits:**

You may not get any benefits from participating in the study but the information you provide may help us understand how television influences adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviours.

**Participant's rights:**

You may withdraw and stop participating in the study at any time you wish. You will not be penalised in any way if you withdraw and stop participating in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

All information that you provide to us will be kept strictly confidential. At no time will we give any information to anyone who is not involved in the research. The recordings of the interview will be erased when the research is finished. The results on this study may be presented at professional meetings or published in a professional journal, but your name and any other identifying information will not be revealed.

**Consent for participation.**

I \_\_\_\_\_, voluntarily agree, without being coerced or pressured, to participate in the study and feel comfortable to share my experiences with the interviewer. I understand that the information that I will provide for this study will be disseminated and shared with other researchers and that my identity will not, under any circumstances, be disclosed during publication without my consent.

Name and surname of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions about this study or if you have a problem, you can call to talk to me about this research study at 073 634 3006-Cell or (012) 420 2333 (work). You may also contact the Supervisor on 083 3761995 (Ms Ilse Ruane).

## Appendix B



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Republic of South Africa  
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1090 Block X

Mabopane

0190

Researcher: Tebogo Moswang

### **Re: Consent for a legal guardian**

**1.1 Title of the study:** The Influence of Television on Adolescent Girls' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours in the Mabopane Township

The participant is invited to participate in a research study investigating the influence of television on adolescent girls' sexual attitudes and behaviours. The research will involve questions focusing on television and its influence on behaviours and sexual attitudes, if there are any. An audio-tape will be used to record the interview. The interview will take between 50 minutes to an hour.

#### **Risks and discomforts:**

There are no risks from participating in the study other than perhaps the participant may experience discomfort when talking about certain sexual aspects. If this happens, the participant may choose to stop the interview.

#### **Benefits:**

The participant will not get any benefits from participating in the study but the information provided may help us understand how television influences adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviours.

**Participant's rights:**

The participant may withdraw and stop participating in the study at any time you wish. The participant will not be penalised in any way if they withdraw and stop participating in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

All information that will be provided to us will be kept strictly confidential. At no time will we give any information to anyone who is not involved in the research. The recordings of the interview will be erased when the research is finished. The results on this study may be presented at professional meetings or published in a professional journal, but your name and any other identifying information will not be revealed.

**Consent for legal guardian**

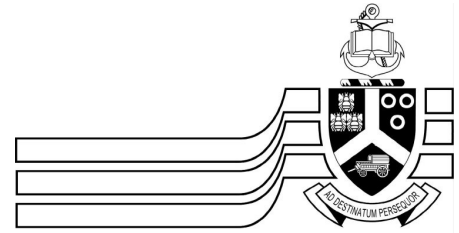
I \_\_\_\_\_, voluntarily agree, without being coerced or pressured, to give consent for \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the study. I understand and agree that I will not have access to information that will be disclosed to the researcher by the participant. I also understand that the information that will be provided for this study will be disseminated and shared with other researchers and that my identity will not, under any circumstances, be disclosed during publication without my consent.

Name and surname of legal guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of legal guardian \_\_\_\_\_

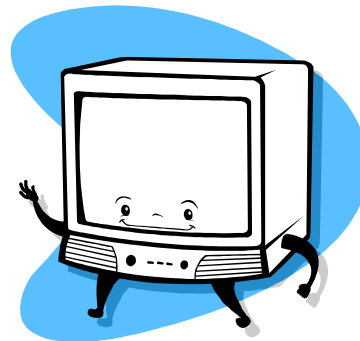
Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any further questions about this study or if you have a problem, you can call to talk to me about this research study at 073 634 3006-Cell or (012) 420 2333 (work). You may also contact the Supervisor on 083 3761995 (Ms Ilse Ruane).



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Republic of South Africa  
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## INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT.

You are invited to participate in a research project that is about to start at 1090 Block X. This study aims to explore the **Influence of television on Adolescent Girls' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours**. If interested in the study, please contact TEBOGO at 073 634 3006 or come 1090 Block X to talk to me about the study. **All information gathered is strictly confidential!!**

## Appendix D

### Possible Questions:

1. What television programmes are regularly watched?
2. What extent are sexual messages presented in television programmes- frequency of sexual dialogue and sexual behaviours?
3. What sexual content do adolescents pay attention to, and how do they interpret what they see and hear?
4. How explicit are these sexual messages, and how are they communicated?
5. Does sexual television content affect adolescents' sexual beliefs and behaviour?
6. What kind of emphasis is placed on the possible risks or responsibilities of sex in the stories that deal with sexual topics?
7. What kind of positive sexual health messages are presented, and how are these portrayed?
8. Can the television be used to promote responsible sexual behaviour among adolescent girls?