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A PSYCHOLOGICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE PROCESSES THAT CULMINATE IN POSITIVE VIEWING EXPERIENCES AND SUBSEQUENT AUDIENCE LOYALTY TO A SOAP OPERA

By

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Capstone[1]

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the following parties without whom this study would not have been possible:

SOLI DEO GLORIA

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[1] Written last - Zachariah 4: 6-9.

Dedicated to the girl who got grounded for a semester in 1964.

ABSTRACT

The research was based on a secondary analysis of a qualitative market research study conducted for the SABC on the soap opera Isidingo. The data used in the study includes 10 focus groups, five diaries of loyal soap opera viewers who were asked not to watch Isidingo for a week and keep a record of their experience, a focus group conducted with these viewers after the completion of the deprivation exercise, the market researcher's field notes, the market research report and the academic researcher's own reflective diary. The analysis was conducted within a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework. A model for the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera is presented. The model illustrates how viewers use soap world knowledge and real world knowledge to interpret the characters and storylines of soap operas and that the degree of enjoyment the viewer experiences from viewing, is dependant on the quality of the mental models formed of these respective components. The role that transportation, realism, social influences and timeslot play in the engagement process is also defined. The study illustrates a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway for qualitative research and demonstrates how market research can be explicated for academic gain.

Key terms: soap opera, media psychology, lived reality, hermeneutic phenomenology, qualitative research, secondary analysis, market research.

Chapter 3 - Interpretive framework

Chapter 5: The first hermeneutic

Chapter 6: The second hermeneutic

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

To production companies, broadcasters, and channel and network owners, media psychology is only of value if it can increase the likelihood that viewers will continue to watch their programmes. If media psychology can illustrate a clear pathway to repeated viewership, it can act as an indicator of consumption and potential profit. Psychology has an important contribution to make in this instance. The understanding of soap opera viewership as a psychological process could enlighten us on why viewers continue to watch certain programmes. This study plots the psychological processes which contribute to pleasant viewing experiences and loyal viewership to a soap opera in the South African context.

As figure 1.1 illustrates, this chapter introduces the study by discussing the lived reality under study, the research topic and its significance, the research question, the research aim and research questions, the theoretical approach, the methodology, and the structure of the content.

Figure 1.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 1.

In the sections that follow each component of Figure 1 will be discussed.

2. The lived reality under study

An introduction to this study necessitates a discussion of primarily two dimensions, namely a discussion of soap opera viewership in general, and a preamble to the soap opera pertinent to this study, i.e. Isidingo. Together these two dimensions represent the lived reality under study.

2.1. Soap opera viewership

Figure 1.2 is a graphic representation of the lived reality that the study will aim to understand. A soap opera is communicated through structural elements within a social, physical and individual environment. Viewers experience this environment and through interpretation, which is embedded in past experiences, arrive at a contextual meaning that influences their behaviour. The process through which this meaning develops, is the primary unit of analysis within the study.

Figure 1.2. The lived reality the research will investigate.

In 2006 a market research company, *Qualitative Intelligence*, conducted a market research study on Isidingo. The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from this study. The study will re-visit the interpretations made by participants about a soap opera, as well as the interpretations of participants' interpretations by the original researcher. Through a hermeneutic circle of interpretation, this study will attempt to understand the psychological processes inherent to positive viewing experiences and repeated viewership.

The justification for selecting the soap opera as opposed to another genre for the lived reality under study lies in the genre's ability to sustain loyal viewership for long periods of time. Since its inception, the genre's ability to sustain loyal viewership has baffled critics (Pitout, 1998). South African soap

opera productions are proof of the longevity of the genre's viewership, with the soap operas Egoli, Generations and 7de Laan boasting respectively seventeen, sixteen and nine years on air at the time of writing this document.

Logic suggests that if you discover the secret of the soap opera, you will have unlocked a much larger wealth of knowledge applicable to movies, series, books and stories. All texts that aim to entertain can learn from the soap opera, seeing that soap operas manage to sustain loyal viewership over longer periods of time than any other genre.

2.2. Isidingo as the selected soap opera

Isidingo is a soap opera on South African television, broadcast on SABC3 at 18H30 every week night. It is set in and around Johannesburg in contemporary time. When first introduced to South African audiences, the soap's main setting was Horizon Deep, a mining community just outside of Johannesburg. The mining business has since been replaced with the television station ON!TV as the main setting, but many characters still have ties to *The Deep*, as it is affectionately referred to. True to the genre, Isidingo has a proliferation of characters; however selected characters are more prominent. These include:

- The immoral tycoon, Barker Haines and his moral daughter, Lee Haines, who has been able to follow in her father's footsteps as a successful business woman.
- Barker's archrival, Cherel de Villiers.
- The Matabane family with stubborn father Zeb, mother Agnes, sister Letti and her boyfriend Joe, brother Parsons and his HIV-positive wife, Nandipha.
- The lovable gangster Georgie Zamdela, also known as Papa G.
- The town gossip Maggie and her friend Stella.
- Employees of ON!TV, including Frank, Rajesh, Lolly, Harriet, Erin and Siyanda, and
- other characters tied to the above characters, including Len, Vernon, Angelique, Mad Dog, Du Plessis, Tanya, Pule and Refiloe.

The reason for using Isidingo as lived reality to study was initially a choice of opportunity. As an employee of a market research company that regularly conducts research for the SABC, the researcher was in the position to obtain permission to use one of these studies for the purpose of this thesis.

The research process that unfolds in the following chapters revealed, however, that Isidingo is unique amongst its peers in portraying contemporary South African society realistically. The high degree of external realism (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004) in a soap opera is an important contributor to its appeal to viewers, which seems to be the case for Isidingo. This seemingly high external realism also differentiates the soap opera from international soap operas available to viewers on local television (including Bold and the Beautiful and Days of our Lives amongst others) to which viewers in this study report to have a very low external realism.

3. The research topic and its significance

In the previous section the reader was introduced to the lived reality under study. This section introduces the study itself, with a discussion on the research topic and the researcher's motivation for choosing it. The research topic is concerned with the process by which soap operas establish a continued interaction with its viewers. The justification for this research topic is primarily the inability of existing research on soap operas to address the issue. Table 1.1 is a summary of the research conducted on soap operas in date order.

Table 1.1 *Journal articles on soap operas used in this study*

Author	Date	Main finding	Main contribution
Livingstone	1989	Meaning is negotiated between the active viewer and the structure of the soap opera text.	The interpretation of soap operas.
Livingstone	1990	The interpretation viewers make of the soap opera text is influenced by the character they identify with, liked or felt sympathy for.	The interpretation of soap opera characters.
Chamove and Mullins	1992	Examined soap operas and found a pronounced prevalence of negative relational content.	The structural elements of a soap opera.
Larson	1996	Significant negative effect on gender role socialisation of adolescents.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Tager	1997	The viewing experiences of urban black viewers of The Bold and the Beautiful.	The interpretation of soap operas.
O'Guinn and Shrum	1997	Viewers have high memory retrieval of information exposed to in soap operas which they use in the construction of reality.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Liebes and Livingstone	1998	European soap operas represent three distinct sub-genres to the soap opera genre.	Definition of the soap opera genre.
Pitout	1998	Structural elements of a South African soap opera facilitate viewer involvement and loyalty.	Structural elements of the soap opera. Definition of the soap opera genre. Understanding viewer involvement and loyalty.
Haferkamp	1999	Found a correlation between TV and soap opera viewing and dysfunctional relationship beliefs.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Creswell	2001	Soap operas useful in therapy to aid	The therapeutic use

		recognition of emotion, prediction of behaviour and understanding social rules.	of soap operas.
Segrin and Nabi	2002	Found a correlation between viewing romantic genre programming and idealistic expectations on marriage.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Frisby	2002	Found that male viewers also watch soap operas.	Audience reach
Ex, Janssens and Korzilius	2002	Ritualised exposure to one soap opera (as opposed to quantity exposure to many) soap operas have an impact on viewer's image of own images of motherhood.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
De Jager	2004	South African children also watch soap operas.	Audience reach
Lockyear	2004	Found that 3 local soap operas do not portray South African society as multicultural, but rather portray an economically viable stereotypical view of society that is consistent with advertisements shown in the same timeslot.	The portrayal of society in local soap operas.
Wyer and Adaval	2004	Information television viewers are exposed to influence new decisions.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Marx	2008	Found that 4 South African soap operas form a unique female genre and that the soap operas have the potential of challenging hegemonic ideas about gender identities.	The portrayal of gender in local soap operas. The effects of soap opera viewing.

During the initial literature study the researcher was tempted to believe that much of what has been written on the genre has been descriptive of its effects on viewers. However, it was found that literature, dealing with the interpretive soap opera viewer (Livingstone, 1989; 1990; 1998), the diversification of the soap opera genre (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998) and viewer representation of soap opera characters (Livingstone, 1989) does exist.

Many studies (Busselle & Bilandsic, 2008; Cohen 2001; Green et al., 2004; Hoorn & Konijn 2003, 2005) have also attempted to describe the process of engagement with and appeal of other television genres. These theories on viewership proved helpful in guiding the researcher's understanding of how viewers perceive, understand and engage with television characters (Busselle & Bilandsic, 2008; Cohen, 2001; Hoorn & Konijn, 2003, 2005), and how the process of transportation into the narrative contributes to enjoyment (Busselle & Bilandsic, 2008; Cohen, 2001; Green et al., 2004).

Apart from Pitout (1998) few of these studies addressed the question of loyalty or a viewer's tendency to return to the programme episode after episode, and also few have made any explicit attempt at exploring the psychological processes by which programmes are able to sustain a relationship with its viewers. Since the reason behind the soap opera's ability to create unprecedented loyalty remains largely undiscovered in academic literature, this study makes a worthwhile contribution to the body of knowledge on soap operas and media theory in general.

4. Aim of the study

The original aim of the study was to find the psychological link between positive viewing experiences and loyalty to soap operas. Two additional aims emerged as the study progressed: (a) understanding how to use market research for academic purposes and (b) identifying a unique sub-genre of soap opera unique to South African television. Each of these will now be discussed.

4.1. Finding the link to loyalty

As discussed previously, the wealth of literature on soap operas and television in general fails to demonstrate a clear link between positive viewing experiences and continued viewership. The aim of this study is to identify the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and subsequent loyalty.

In order to achieve this primary research aim, the study will address several secondary objectives. Soap operas are communicated on screen through the portrayal of characters and storylines (Livingstone, 1998). It is therefore necessary to understand the process through which viewers interpret soap opera characters, and the process through which they interpret storylines. The researcher anticipated that positive viewing experiences would lead to loyalty in soap operas. A secondary objective salient from this is to understand what contributes to enjoyment of soap opera viewership. The final model should therefore indicate how the interpretation of characters, the interpretation of storylines, enjoyment and loyalty interact.

4.2. Understanding how to use market research for academic purposes

While working on the thesis the researcher often experienced difficulty in making the transition from market research to academic research. She was often reminded by her supervisor to use academic language and think of the study within an academic framework. Through this process one of the research aims became to illustrate how market research can be explicated for academic gain, and to identify the convergence and divergence between these two approaches.

To fully address this aim, one of the objectives was to reflect on the divergence and convergence of the two approaches on the following aspects: the nature of the research objectives, interpretation, research output, positioning of the research participant, timeframe, language used and the role of researcher bias. The end result is a study in which the commercial and academic is juxtaposed in a

workable methodology. This will be discussed in section 7 of this chapter and expanded on in the final chapter.

4.3. Identifying a unique sub-genre

Another aim that emerged through the course of the study was the identification of a unique South African sub-genre of soap opera. Liebes and Livingstone (1998) identified three sub-types to the genre in their analysis of European soap operas (this will be discussed in Chapter 2). Analysing the relationship ties between characters in Isidingo according to Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) methodology revealed how Isidingo represents a unique sub-type to the genre.

5. Research questions

The following research questions will be answered to address the research aims as described above:

- Research question 1: Can psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to soap operas be identified?
- Research question 2: Can market research be explicated for academic purposes?
- Research question 3: Can a unique sub-genre of soap opera be identified for South Africa?

6. Interpretive framework

The study is conducted from a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework. The interpretive framework, hermeneutic phenomenology, was chosen for its ontological emphasis on lived realities, but this (emphasis on lived realities) is only one aspect of the interpretive framework. The following is a brief introduction to additional concepts that are central to hermeneutic phenomenology and the methodology applied in this study:

- Dasein: The interpreting individual (the viewer) is seen as being-in-the-world and not as external and objective to the world.
- Facticity: Understanding is co-constituted and synergised in our interaction with others.
- The hermeneutic circle: Interpretation is always context bound and meaning is negotiated between the parts and the whole.
- Historicity: Any interpretation is necessarily influenced by its temporal location.
- Heideggerian prejudice: All interpretation is influenced by existing knowledge on the subject and the person interpreting the lived reality can not distance him or herself from this knowledge.

These and other concepts in the theoretical approach will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

7. Methodology

The methodology used in the study is set out in detail in Chapter 4, but this section will provide a short summary as introduction. The study is a secondary analysis of a market research study conducted on behalf of the SABC. The market research and academic studies will now be introduced briefly. Thereafter the methodology will be justified and the order of the research phases will be specified.

7.1. The market research study

This market research study, of which the current study will be a secondary analysis, was a comprehensive evaluation of the soap opera Isidingo with the purpose of making strategic recommendations that would have the most desired effect on the retention and growth of an audience for the soap opera.

The data for the market research study was collected mainly through focus groups. It also included a deprivation exercise in which viewers were asked not to watch Isidingo for a period of time and diarise what they missed most, as well as a focus group with the participants who took part in this exercise. The market research company that conducted the study analysed this data and presented the findings to the SABC in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. The verbatim transcripts of the focus groups, the diaries of the participants in the deprivation exercise, and the market research presentation constitute the data set for the academic study.

7.2. The academic study

The academic study was therefore a secondary analysis of two sets of interpretations – those of the soap opera viewer (or the research participants) and that of the market researcher. The market researcher read the transcripts representing the interpretation of the soap opera viewer and using other background knowledge (including her own understanding of the lived reality of soap opera viewership, experience in other audience research, and an understanding of the objective of the SABC) interpreted their interpretations.

As explained above, the study is conducted from within a hermeneutic phenomenological tradition. Using key principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, such as the hermeneutic spiral and foregrounding of knowledge, the academic researcher re-analysed the market research study to arrive at an understanding of the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and loyalty to a soap opera.

7.3. Justification for using this methodology

Because of the nature of this research process, the interpretation of the market researcher in the initial study was built on that of the viewer. The interpretations presented in this thesis are therefore a third interpretation of the lived reality, which is soap opera viewership.

Hunter, Schmidt and Jackson (1982) noted that the need in many areas of psychology is for an effort to interpret the vast amounts of existing information, rather than new empirical data. This study, with its comprehensive literature study and central emphasis on secondary analysis of existing data, wishes to address the above concern in the field of media psychology.

7.4. Defining the order of the research phases

To ensure that the study is carried out within the tradition of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, a set of 19 hermeneutic phenomenological research principles, that guided all interpretive actions, were defined. The hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003) includes the historicity of meaning. According to Heidegger's historicity of meaning, all meaning is shaped by its temporal location. The immediate moment of interpretation is necessarily a product of what preceded it. It is therefore important to stipulate the order in which certain elements were introduced to the research process. Just as all interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenology is bound to context and history, all research phases necessarily influenced the phases that followed it.

The order in which the research process unfolded was as follows:

- Comprehensive market research study on the soap opera Isidingo (primary analysis).
- Preliminary literature review for academic purposes and writing of the thesis proposal.
- Departmental review process: small internal committee (Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria (UP)).
- Departmental review and approval process: research committee (Department of Psychology, UP).
- Faculty review process and approval of ethical application (Research proposal and ethics committee, Faculty of Humanities, UP).
- Faculty approval of the thesis title.
- Preliminary writing of Chapter 1.
- Writing of Chapter 3.
- Writing of Chapter 4.
- Secondary analysis of interpretations made by research participants (i.e. secondary analysis of transcripts).
- Writing of Chapter 5.
- Secondary analysis of interpretations made by first researcher (i.e. secondary analysis of market research reports).
- Writing of Chapter 6.
- Literature review.
- Writing of Chapter 2.
- Integrated interpretation.
- Writing of Chapter 7.
- Writing of Chapter 8.
- Revisions to Chapters 2 to 8 in the order set out the above.
- Revisions to Chapter 1.

8. Structure of content

The thesis consists of 7 chapters of which the introduction (Chapter 1) has been set out above. Chapter 2 is the literature review. The literature review attempts to address all aspects of the lived

reality of soap opera viewership. It begins with an introduction to the soap opera and its genre conventions, as well as an introduction to media theory. An argument for the resourceful viewer introduces the sections on the interpretation of the narrative and the interpretation of characters. This is followed by a discussion of how viewers become engaged in a soap opera. The chapter concludes with a summation of the psychological processes that culminate in loyalty.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the interpretive framework of the study. The chapter commences with a discussion of the history of phenomenology. The differences between Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology are then set out to support an argument for the appropriateness of the former for an understanding of the lived reality. The key components of hermeneutic phenomenology are then discussed with emphasis on their meaning within a qualitative research study. The chapter concludes with the discussion of a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway within which the research is conducted.

Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter. It commences with an introduction to the research context, which includes a discussion of the data sources, the data structure and the academic and market researchers' interpretive influences. A detailed description of the analysis and interpretation process is then provided. This includes the conceptualisation of the analysis process, and an overview of the implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the ethics and the quality of the research.

Chapter 5 is the first data chapter. It contains the interpretations made by the soap opera viewers and therefore represents the first hermeneutic. Following the process of interpretation and analysis introduced in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 begins with a description of the sample and a summary of the interpretations made by viewers (referred to as footprints). In the next section, footprints are grouped together with other footprints that relate to the same aspect of the lived reality and result in ten unique themes. The discussion of these ten themes represents the largest part of the chapter. Before concluding the chapter, the researcher comments on one contradiction or hermeneutic turn that she noticed in the chapter with regards to viewers' tendency to watch both international and local soap operas.

Chapter 6 is the second data chapter, which contains the second hermeneutic or the interpretation of the market researcher. To demonstrate how the second hermeneutic builds on the first, Chapter 6 is structured around the ten themes identified in Chapter 5. Where relevant it elaborates on the themes identified in the first hermeneutic and one additional theme is added.

Chapter 7 is the discussion chapter and represents the interpretation of third hermeneutic. Chapter 7 commences with a discussion of the academic researcher's understanding of the first and second hermeneutics, which is summarised in three conceptual models. After this introduction, the most substantial part of the chapter follows, which is the process through which the academic researcher

interprets the first and second hermeneutic within the framework provided by the literature study. The chapter concludes with a summary of two important processes that underlie the new model of the psychological processes that culminate in loyalty to a soap opera.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter and represents the last stages of the third hermeneutic. A new model of the psychological processes that culminate in loyalty to a soap opera is presented and discussed. The thesis concludes with a reflection on the research process, including a discussion of the similarities and differences between the academic and market research process, the contributions and limitations of the academic study, suggestions for future research and a reflection on the research questions.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter the research question and research aims were presented and a motivation for the significance of the study was provided. The lived reality under study was described and the methodology and interpretive framework within which the study was conducted were introduced.

The rest of thesis can be read in one of two ways. The reader can follow the numerical order of the chapters as they are bound in this volume and read it front to back or the reader may choose to follow the historicity of the thesis by reading the chapters in the order that they were written. Whichever route is chosen, it is the researcher's hope that the reader will be transported into the narrative and experience true enjoyment as he/she embarks on the interpretive journey that spirals through the seven chapters that preceded this one.

Chapter 2: Literature

1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will review the literature and theoretical dispositions to media studies, with a specific emphasis on soap operas. The researcher will illustrate that social psychology and most importantly social cognition offers a useful framework in which to understand the interpretive processes that are involved in loyal viewership of a soap opera, and that clear parallels can be drawn between this approach and the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. As the following quotation reiterates, the literature review – as presented in this chapter – makes an integral contribution to the overall value that can be gleaned from the study.

> The quality of the research findings is contingent upon the scope of the background knowledge that the researcher brings to bear and his or her ability to forge insightful linkages between this background knowledge and the texts at hand. The cultivation of a socio-historical perspective on the research domain coupled with a sensitivity to textual nuances are probably the most critical aspects of hermeneutic interpretation (Thompson, 1997, p. 6).

Figure 2.1 is a graphical schema of the chapter. The literature review is presented in seven parts. The first section is an introduction to the genre of soap operas. It includes a discussion on the characteristics and sub-types of the genre as well as the use of tension in the genre, the peculiarities of the timeslot in which it usually airs, the significance of the fact that viewers talk about soap operas with fellow viewers, the reach of the genre in South Africa, and the effects of soap operas as justification for the importance of understanding the genre. The second section introduces the social cognitive approach to media theory and discusses the relevance of the approach within the context of the interpretive framework. The viewer plays a central role in this approach and for this reason section two is followed by a short discussion on the resources of the viewer. The interpretation of narrative is discussed in section four, where three semiotic concerns which influence the interpretation the viewer makes are identified. These include choice points (narrative moments in which the story can take two or more distinct directions), the impact of genre, and the different levels of meaning that events hold.

Figure 2.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 2.

The fifth section is the most comprehensive and deals with the interpretation of characters. Three views on the interpretation of characters are discussed: the social cognitive theory of Livingstone (1998), Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures, and Hoorn and Konijn's (2003) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters. The section concludes with a discussion on how viewers relate to different character types.

The last two sections of the chapter aim to provide a comprehensive view of the lived reality of loyal soap opera viewership. In section six (Engagement with the narrative) the transportation and enjoyment theory of Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004), and Buselle and Bilndzic's (2008) model of narrative comprehension and engagement are discussed. Lastly the tripartite model of enjoyment of Nabi and Krcmar (2004) is discussed to address positive viewing experiences. In conclusion the chapter gives a discussion of the psychological processes involved in soap opera viewership to illustrate how literature suggests these processes culminate in the motivation to watch soap operas.

It should be noted at this point why the academic researcher uses two terms that are from outside of the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. The first term is social cognitive theory. The researcher discusses social cognitive theory because it is so central to the work of Livingstone (1989, 1990, 1991, 1998, 1999, 2004, 2006) who is one of the most seminal scholars on soap operas. The second term which is used extensively in the current study, although it is from outside of the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology, is narrative. In this particular instance, narrative is used to refer to the plots and characters that make up the story of the soap opera.

2. The soap opera

Over a period of more than 70 years, since as early as the 1930s, soap operas have been the most pervasive genre in media (Borchers, 1994). It originated in the USA with companies such as Palmolive and Proctor and Gamble creating a captive audience for product placements (Lavin, 1995, Pitout, 1998). A genre that started out as the underdog of television has in recent years been repositioned more positively, as thinking about television in general developed (Pitout, 1998; Warth, 1994).

2.1. Characteristics of the genre

The conventions of genre in television research shapes how the reader orients him/herself to the genre, the kinds of hypotheses the reader makes about the genre and the nature and degree to which the reader becomes involved in the genre (Allen, 1992; Livingstone, 2004). The soap opera has unique genre conventions. Firstly, it is a continuous serial drama that is transmitted daily[2]. Secondly, it has no hero or heroine and does not invite identification with one distinct figure, but rather a participatory involvement with a community of characters. Thirdly, it consists of a largely fragmented narrative, which combines multiple stories that are never completely resolved. In this way it contrasts with more masculine action-adventure genres, where the focus is on the beginning and end of the narrative. Soap operas could be described as a continuous middle with no promise of a definite end or resolution (Livingstone, 1998; Pitout, 1998; Warth, 1994). Fourthly, soap operas have several abrupt segmentations between storylines in one episode. The moment viewers become involved in the characters and situations of one storyline, the soap would move to another storyline. This segmentation happens several times during an episode (Pitout). Fifth, an attempt is made to mimic calendar time in the soap opera to calendar time in real life. Dates such as Christmas, Valentines Day or public holidays would be referenced in the soap opera as they occur in real life (Pitout).

As a sixth convention, the soap opera deals with socially significant themes and becomes a forum for the portrayal of cultural and ideological issues, including kinship, relations, reproduction, gender, the role of the community and so forth (Hobson, 1994; Pitout, 1998). Seventh, characters act as representatives of the contrasting poles in these issues and the narrative plays out as these contrasting positions are negotiated, manipulated and transformed. The topic of soap opera is everyday life, portrayed through the lives of characters and it is because of this trait that the viewer is always in a superior position to that of the producer (Hobson; Pitout). Eighth, the soap opera has storyline themes that reoccur, such as romance, divorce, the single mother, and sacrifice. Ninth, the

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[2] Pitout (1998) argues that a distinction has to be made between daytime and primetime soaps on this genre convention. Daytime soap operas are typically broadcast daily, while primetime soaps, such as Dallas were broadcast only once a week. Dallas is included in the genre by various authors (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998; Livingstone, 1998; Riegel, 1996) and Pitout argues that this is due to the nature of Dallas' characters, narrative and dramatic concern, combined with the fact that the American press referred to Dallas as a soap opera. For the purpose of this study, Dallas is included in the definition of a soap opera (Pitout, 1998) and no distinction is made between daytime and primetime soap operas.

genre also has character types that reoccur, such as the young, romantic heroin, the romantic hero, the mother, and the patriarch (Pitout).

Much of the dialogue in soap operas can be compared to gossip (Riegel, 1996) and this brings us to the last convention, soap operas are a dialogue heavy genre. The narrative gains paradigmatic depth (Riegel, 1996) through the dialogues of the characters.

2.2. Sub-types of the genre

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) identified sub-types within the soap genre. They analysed the social relationships of Coronation Street (UK), The Young and the Restless (USA), Dallas (USA), The Brightness (Greece), Redereit (Sweden), Lindenstrasse (Germany) and Onderweg Naar Morgen (Netherlands). They identified three sub-types that relate mostly to the nature of social relationships in different soaps: Dynastic soaps (e.g. Dallas), Community soaps (e.g. Coronation Street) and Dyadic soaps (e.g. The Bold and the Beautiful). Table 2.1 summarises the three genre sub-types. Liebes and Livingstone (1998) discuss the sub-genres in terms of the power structure; social loci (the settings in which stories are played out) and gender relations.

Table 2.1 *Genre sub-types (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998)*

Genre sub-type	Definition	Femininity	Example
Dynastic soap	One powerful family with outsiders connected to them through romantic and business interests.	Concerned with romance; motherhood and career are subordinate.	American prime time soaps, such as Dallas.
Dyadic soap	A destabilised network of uni-generational, interchanging couples.	Concerned with romance; motherhood and career are subordinate.	American day time soaps, such as The Young and the Restless.
Community soap	A number of equal, multi-generational, working or middle class families living together in one neighbourhood.	Concerned with motherhood.	British soaps such as Coronation Street.

Dynastic soaps, such as Dallas focus on one powerful family with characters that are connected to the family through romance, marriage or rivalry. The power structure in dynastic soaps take class distinction for granted. The lifestyle of the affluent is portrayed to prove that the rich and powerful are unhappy. In some dynastic soaps this is contrasted with a working class periphery. The social loci in dynastic soaps are structured around a clear division of labour, where men have both careers and

home lives, and women, despite having careers in some instances, are mostly seen in the home, concerned with motherhood and romance. Where women are portrayed in professional contexts, they are mainly subordinates. Gender relations in dynastic soaps are clearly asymmetric. Men are prioritised over women in having access to power and careers, while the women's only access to real power is their ability to deliver beauty or children to their husbands (Liebes & Livingstone).

Community soaps, such as EastEnders and Coronation Street, consist of a number of equal, separate families that are multi-generational, working or middle class and that are all living in the same neighbourhood and therefore belong to one community. Community soaps also include single parent families and single characters. The power structure in community soaps attempt to overcome the hardships of lack of upward mobility by offering an idealised, nostalgic view of life in a small community. Its main message is that old fashioned values and hard work no longer exist in modern society. The social loci are places where ordinary life takes place. Characters struggle through career and family problems and meet in public spaces, such as coffee shops, banks, grocery stores and Laundromats. Gender relations in community soaps position women as being strong (Liebes & Livingstone).

Dyadic soaps, such as The Bold and the Beautiful and The Young and the Restless, are made up of a number of densely interconnected, mostly uni-generational, interchanging couples with past, present and future romantic ties. Dyadic soaps are destabilised in three ways: characters constantly change places in relationships, experimenting with new intimate partners; the structure of the relationships change as characters experiment with different types of intimacy (across genders and races), and lastly, characters are not part of a stable family and the tension is related to characters trying to find a substitute for family in friendships. Metaphorically characters in dyadic soaps are orphaned. They are usually uni-generational and the power structure benefits the young characters. Any middle age characters that are present have lost their power, although they may participate in the romantic game from time to time. The main objective is personal gratification rather than the continuation of a dynasty (Liebes & Livingstone).

2.3. Talking about soap operas with fellow viewers

Soap operas make their way into the lives of viewers in a way that transcends the 30 minutes of viewing time every day. Soap operas depict everyday life and events, and because it is so familiar and relevant they are discussed among friends as if talking about mutual acquaintances (Giles, 2002; Hobson, 1994; Pitout, 1998, Riegel, 1996).

In her study of black South African women's identification with, and interpretation of The Bold and the Beautiful, Tager (1997) also found that viewers interpreted the soap opera during but also after the episode was broadcast through the discussion of the soap with other viewers. Much of the pleasure of watching the soap was identified as being able to discuss the soap with other people.

The process of talking about soap operas involves telling stories, commenting on the stories, assessing the events that take place in the soap (Hobson, 1994) and predicting what will happen next (Livingstone, 1998). While many soaps reference real life, the discussion also changes to a discussion of the real-life events introduced by the soaps. It is because of this characteristic that soap operas could be regarded as a source of soft news (Kitzinge & Henderson, 2001).

The notion that soap opera viewers talk about soap operas with fellow viewers has positive implications. It allows viewers to further explore the histories of the characters, while giving viewers the opportunity to test viewpoints on social norms, which are difficult to discuss on an abstract level for real-life situations (Riegel, 1996).

It was found that the meaning viewers derive from soap operas are what Tager (1997) calls "collaborative readings" (p.11). Participants in her research watched the soap with family members or friends and relied on fellow viewers to compensate for any knowledge gaps that resulted from missing an episode. Kreutzner and Warth (1994) also illustrate how people are introduced to soap operas through other viewers in the aptly titled chapter: "I was thirteen and my best friend got me hooked: An interview with Karen and Jane" (p.164). Watching soap operas is in no way a passive process and through discussions, such as those described above, the soap opera extends into areas of every day life (Hobson, 1994; Riegel, 1996).

2.4. Tension in the soap opera

Talking about soap operas closely resembles gossip (Riegel, 1996; Tager, 1997; Tulloch, 2000), because the topic of discussion is mainly people (characters) and their lives. Tulloch (2000) argues that the pleasure of engaging in gossip about a soap opera lies in sharing information that only a few people have access to. Soap opera viewers know more about the narrative than the characters. At the end of an episode, after tension has been building for a while, information is often revealed rather than withheld and viewers are left to speculate not about what will happen in the story, but rather what will happen when other characters find out what they already know (Tulloch, 2000).

2.5. Soap time

Due to the regular broadcast of soap operas viewership becomes a ritual for loyal viewers which they prefer not to be interrupted by visitors, the telephone or family members (Pitout, 1998). In her chapter *And that's my time: Soap operas and the temporal organisation of women's everyday lives* (p.216), Warth (1994) shows how soap operas intersect with viewers' day to day lives. Most of the viewers she interviewed had a two hour period of more or less fixed viewership, but they differed in the extent of undivided attention they could afford. Some planned the household routine to allow them to watch undisturbed. Others could not structure their chores according to soap time and constantly struggled between their need for leisure and conflicting obligations. These viewers worked through soap time, either completing tasks during commercial breaks or doing their chores with the soap opera on in the background. For this last group, viewership was limited to the most dramatic incidents in the soaps.

For most, undivided attentive soap viewing was a luxury that had to be planned for, and for some - paid for later with harder work (Warth, 1994). Tager (1997) found that the taxi industry in Johannesburg is scheduled around the afternoon soap operas. It is therefore deemed important that a theory of audience interpretation of soap operas should include reference to the temporal location of the soap opera within viewers' daily routine.

2.6. Reach of the genre in South Africa

Soap operas are traditionally categorised as a female genre but the reach and subsequent impact of the genre should not be limited to the female audience (Frisby, 2002). Frisby explored the role of soap operas for male viewers and found that their viewership was motivated by the fact that it makes them feel good, provides an escape, and aids conversations with the opposite sex.

In a survey conducted by the South African Advertising Research Foundation, De Jager (2004) reports on the preference of children for soap operas. This, combined with an existing adult male audience (Frisby, 2002) is proof of the extended reach of the genre.

2.7. The effects of soap operas as justification for the importance of understanding the genre

Apart from a study done by Hoekstra (2000), soap operas have been found to have a significant effect on viewers' relational schemes and certain aspects of adult identity formation. The effects of visual stimuli, whether encountered in the movie theatre, soap opera or elsewhere on television, have a tremendous impact on us. This impact is not always apparent to the user of the media, but it has nonetheless been identified and has also been the topic of numerous studies. Most of the studies available on soap operas point to the impact soap operas have on viewers' lives (Ex, Janssens & Korzilius, 2002; Larson, 1996; O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Wyer & Adaval, 2004). Clearly soap operas have proximity with everyday life and the social cognition used in everyday life could be relevant to how we interpret soap operas.

For example, Wyer and Adaval (2004) write that concepts and knowledge that become easily accessible in memory as a result of exposure to movies and television, can affect the interpretation of new information and the implications that are drawn from it. Similarly O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) found that loyal soap opera viewers have significantly higher ease of retrieval of concepts in memory from soap operas and subsequently use these by means of heuristics (mental shortcuts) in their construction of reality.

Information that viewers are exposed to during soap opera viewing can influence judgements and decisions viewers make in real life that are similar in content to what was portrayed in the soap opera (Shrum, 1996). Shrum found that extensive soap opera viewing had a significant correlation with the cultivation effect, as well as the availability heuristic. When asked to estimate the real-life occurance of crime and certain occupations, extensive soap opera viewers made higher estimates (cultivation

effect) and needed less time to make these estimates (availability heuristic) than non-soap opera viewers.

As a 'dialogue-intensive' genre, soap operas have even been recognised as a valuable resource in therapy, as they provide rich content from which to recognise emotions, understand the rules of interpersonal relationships and predict characters' actions (Creswell, 2001). This again shows the potential psychological impact of identification with soap operas.

Ex et al. (2002) explored young females' self image and ideal image of motherhood, as well as the extent to which television viewing was related to these images. They found that continuous viewing of specific soap operas (as opposed to overall quantity of viewing) to have a significant effect on young women's images of future motherhood. The study shows that sitcoms and soaps' depiction of motherhood as traditional are related to young females' anticipation of a traditional image of motherhood.

Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981) examined the relationship between exposure to soap operas and perceptions about people and events in real life. They found that exposure to soap operas related to college students' perception of the numbers of professionals (lawyers, doctors, and business people) and problems (divorce, illegitimacy, abortions and crimes) in real life. Another study by Larson (1996) showed that soap opera viewership had an impact on how adolescents view the role and lifestyle of the single mother. Soap opera viewers had an unrealistic and overly positive view of single motherhood.

Segrin and Nabi (2002) found a relationship between viewing of romantic genre programming (e.g. romantic comedy movies and soap operas) and idealistic expectations about marriage. Another study highlighting the negative impact of soap operas, is that of Haferkamp (1999) in which she examined and found a relationship between television and soap opera viewing, and viewer approval of unhealthy relationship beliefs.

This finding can perhaps be explained by a study by Chamove and Mullins (1992): In a preliminary examination of 27 programming hours of 13 soap operas shown on Scottish television, just over 50% of the total number of interactions demonstrated poor communication skills, and these skills were more prevalent on the most popular shows. The unhealthy forms of hostility, power and fear occurred twice as frequently as healthy, assertive patterns of communication.

With a well-documented history of effect on its viewers, the soap opera is a unique and interesting genre that holds significance beyond the 30 minutes of viewing time. The question of effects has largely focused on minimising harm but is gradually beginning to explore the broader issues of meaning and practice (Livingstone, 2004).

3. Media theory

In mass communication theory, audience, together with production and text have been represented over the years in one of three broad theoretical paradigms: encoding and decoding (classic literature approach), uses and gratifications, and models of media effects (Livingstone, 2006). These paradigms represent contrasting views on how the television audience should be conceptualised from the populist view on the one hand, that regards the audience as heterogeneous and discriminating (active), to the elitist views that see the audience as a homogenous, mindless mass on the other hand (Biocca, 1988; Livingstone, 1991, 1998).

While all these writers generally agree that television plays an integral part in our daily lives, they will disagree on all the major dimensions of audience analysis: the audience (as passive or active), the programme (as open to various interpretations or as a set message for all), the process through which television affects the audience (through the viewer's selectivity or an imposition), the nature of the effects (on behaviour or beliefs), the level of effects (individual, social or political), and the methods through which to study audiences and the texts they interact with (ethnography, experiment, text analysis) (Allen, 1992; Biocca, 1988, Livingstone, 1999).

The aspect of this theoretical history that is most pertinent to understand within the interpretive framework of this thesis, is the dichotomy of the active and passive viewer. Table 2.2 contrasts what Biocca (1988) calls the active and passive hemispheres in media theory.

Table 2.2 *The active and passive hemispheres (Biocca, 1988)*

	Passive hemisphere	**Active hemisphere**
Reader	No role for the reader.	Reader is instrumental in a motivational way, i.e. as many meanings as there are users.
Text	Text is central.	No role for the text.
Meaning	Unitary meaning.	Multiple meaning.
Approaches that align with this view	• Classic literary approach. • Effects research (assumes a unitary and influential textual meaning). • Behaviourist (omits the issue of meaning altogether).	• Uses and gratifications approach (presumes that viewer selectively chooses media to fulfil needs). • Reception theory (focuses on the perceptions of the viewer).

Livingstone (1991) suggests that one should avoid such an over simplification and rather acknowledge the structuring role of the text, while allowing for the constructive role of the viewer in negotiating meaning. Livingstone's conviction that social psychology should be used as a tool through which to understand and conceptualise media research, is an integrated, convergent approach of thinking on how viewers interact with television. This thesis aims to generate a psychological

understanding of how viewers interpret and form a relationship with television in general, and soap operas specifically. The work of Livingstone is therefore emphasised, as her approach successfully brings the active and passive hemispheres together.

3.1. Reception theory and Livingstone's application of social cognitive theory

Viewers bring a wealth of resources to the interpretive process. Their contact with a text is positioned against a backdrop of expectations, memories, interests, knowledge and understandings. Because most of the literature on media is written by media scholars who are pre-occupied with the text, the reader, as a resourceful individual, is largely ignored. In a similar way, psychologists, who work within disciplinary boundaries of the individual, ignore the wealth of complex theory about the structuring role of texts. The two disciplines would be much better off learning from each other and taking the best from each other's world (Livingstone, 1998). As Livingstone (1998) argues, "neither approach seems to conceive of both the interpretive resources of the reader and the virtual structure of the text as being schematic, organised and yet incomplete, awaiting the other for the negotiation of meaning" (p. 92).

There is, however, a theoretical approach from each discipline that could be useful in understanding both the structuring role of the text and the interpretive role of the viewer. These approaches (as summarised in Table 2.3) are reception theory and social cognitive theory, from media studies and psychology respectively. Reception theory is a name given to the works in literary studies that explore the central role of the reader in making sense of a text. It sees the meaning of a text (or television programme) as something that is generated through the act of reading (or viewing), rather than something that is objectively inherent to the text (Allen, 1992b). Social cognitive theory is a view of the self and society, which argues that the environment, behavioural patterns and personal factors (such as cognitive, affective and biological events) influence each other bi-directionally. Social cognitive theory therefore sees the viewer or reader as proactive and self-organising in deriving meaning from the world (and media), rather than being simply reactive to environmental happenings, inner forces or meanings conveyed by texts (Bandura, 2001).

Table 2.3 *The parallels between reception theory and social cognition*

	Social cognitive theory	Reception theory
Related fields	Cognitive psychology, social psychology, schema theory, information processing, perception psychology and semiotics.	-
Tradition	Psychology.	Literary theory.
Reciprocal interaction	Interaction between stimulus and individual.	Interaction between text and reader.
Nature of the interaction	Individual has a schema and assimilates or accommodates new information obtained from perceiving a stimulus into	The text provides the framework with carefully selected gaps that the viewer is invited to fill from own experience.

	the schema.	
Summary	Stimulus adjusts (fills in any gaps) in the person's schema (through assimilation or accommodation).	Viewer adjusts (fills in the gaps) in the text (from own experience).

The researcher's tertiary education consisted of a BPsych degree (equivalent to Honours), while her professional career has been focused purely on consumer research with an emphasis on media studies. She has therefore has an appreciation fot the psychological view of the viewer as interpretive agent as well as the literary view which emphases the structuring role of the text in portraying meaning. In this thesis, she wishes to bring these approaches together.

3.2. The appropriateness of Livingstone's approach to the interpretive paradigm

Rogge (1989) states that "in order to do justice to the complexity of human actions in relation to the media, we need a method of hermeneutic interpretation" (p. 172). An approach to media studies in which the social knowledge of the viewer, that is used to construct meanings from text is explained through social psychological concepts, is appropriate within the chosen theoretical framework for this study, i.e. hermeneutic phenomenology (refer to Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion on the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology). Table 2.4 illustrates how the suggested approach is acceptable within a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm.

Social psychological reception theory regards the meaning of any text as subject to the interpretation of the viewer/reader. It does not see the viewer as passively accepting any meaning placed within the text. This is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology's disregard for an objective reality. Social psychological reception theory, like hermeneutic phenomenology, places a central emphasis on interpretation and acknowledges historicity (the notion that interpretation is bound by the background knowledge or the individual cultural background of the viewer), and interdependence (that interpretation is dependant on the social and other contexts of the viewer).

Table 2.4 *The relevance of social psychological reception theory within a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm*

	Social psychological reception theory	**Hermeneutic phenomenology**
Objectivity of reality	Text – be it a book, movie, or other creative work – is not simply passively accepted by the audience.	Reality is not objective.
Interpretation	The reader/viewer interprets the meaning of the text.	Centrality of interpretation.
Bias	Interpretation is based on individual cultural background.	Historicity and interdependence.
Context	Interpretation is based on social and other contexts.	

4.   The resourceful viewer

The soap opera viewer will now be discussed. Liebes and Katz (1989) believe that "the status of the viewer has been upgraded regularly during the course of communications research" (p. 204). Hobson (1994) states that "the process of television communication is recognised as not being complete until it is perceived and understood by the viewer" (p. 167). Clearly, the viewer is seen as an integral part of the meaning-making process.

The social psychological view of media studies sees the viewer as equipped for his/her interpretive role, with a wealth of resources. A discussion on the interpretation of characters illustrates these resources. Characters are portrayed in narratives to represent a range of personality traits, all of which need to be inferred by the viewer through a series of interactions with other characters. This inference is important for the construction of the story, seeing that the characters personify different narrative themes. Characters often represent stereotypes about gender, occupation and values in order to facilitate the interpretation process, and legitimise the application of the viewer's social knowledge (Livingstone, 1998).

When a soap opera viewer encounters a new character, he or she is presented with fragmented pieces of information about the character. The viewer then uses social knowledge to infer a personality for the character from fragmented and gradual incidents. The coherence of a character's personality is then not only constructed by the text, but also relies on the viewers' interpretation, which ensures that their interpretation of the character is in accordance with what they know of other people and characters in the soap. It is only within the context of previous interpretations that a viewer is able to construct a coherent model of how to understand any new information.

One strategy that viewers may use is the fundamental attribution error. The term first coined by Lee Ross relates to the natural tendency to explain behaviour of other people as dispositional (i.e. related to what kind of a person it is), while when explaining our own behaviour (and possibly the behaviour of characters we know well) this tendency is reversed and we tend to draw on situational explanations for the behaviour (Livingstone, 1998). This can be illustrated by considering a situation in a soap opera where a character is diagnosed as being HIV positive. If it is a character the viewer knows well, he or she may wonder what happened to the character for this fate to fall on him/her. While if it is a new character that the viewer does not know well, the viewer might consider what this diagnoses tells him or her about the character.

The viewer will draw on two sets of resources to predict what will happen with the character. For both a known and unknown character, the viewer will be able to infer a few things from his/her social cognitive knowledge (i.e. accumulated from real-life experience): the viewer might expect that the character will be alienated by other characters, that the HIV-positive character will undergo emotional distress at being confronted with a life threatening disease and that the story may show the character

learning to live with the diagnoses and overcoming initial difficulties, such as social judgement. Based on programme knowledge and specifically knowledge of the character, if it is a well known character, the viewer may consider the impact it would have on the character's relationships, goals and how other characters will react when they find out.

This explains why it is often difficult for a new viewer to get involved in a soap. Watching one episode is literally being confronted with a large variety of fragmented information (i.e. middle of the story). The new viewer has very little knowledge on which to base a causal framework and the episode will likely remain meaningless unless themes that he or she can interpret from real-life knowledge is presented in the soap. The second level of interpretation illustrated above will only be possible once the viewer develops background knowledge of the characters.

For the writer or producer, comparing people's social knowledge to that of the text could reveal gaps in the storyline, as well as the kind of expectations the viewer may develop to fill these gaps. It would allow the writer to predict if the story would agree or disagree with the viewer's social knowledge, an ability that could be very useful in creating surprise and intrigue.

In conclusion, it is important to regard the viewer as a resourceful, active agent in the interpretation process. Drawing from social psychological concepts, the viewer is equipped with all the strategies used to make sense of people and predicting their behaviour.

5. Interpretation of the narrative

In the section above, it was argued that each viewer has a unique set of resources which he or she uses to interpret the soap opera. In the next two sections two aspects of soap operas which viewers interpret, namely the narrative (the storylines) and the characters, will be discussed.

5.1. The soap opera as open text

Television is interpreted against the background of existing opinions and knowledge about social life and what is known about the genre (Rogge, 1994). Reception theory argues that the meaning of the text cannot be separated from the reader. Eco (1979) relates this to semiotic principles of coding and decoding, and believes that interpretation is socially positioned. He maintains that the variety of codes and sub-codes contained in a message, the socio-cultural circumstances of the reader, and the initiative taken by the reader, combines into a message that is plural and unique to each reader.

However, the reader is not completely independent of the text. Any text presupposes some interpretive competence from the reader, which can either be inherent to the reader or supported by the text through strategies, such as genre, inference, stereotypical coding, and so forth.

A closed text, such as a James Bond narrative, attempts to take the viewer on a predetermined path and carefully elicits appropriate emotions in the right places to ensure that the expectations created in

the text, matches what will be satisfied by its course being played out. Open texts, on the contrary, encourage a variety of different interpretations, depending on the viewpoint of the reader. It also deliberately emphasises different possible interpretations by drawing comparisons between them, and in doing so, creates irony and contrast. Table 2.5 is a comparison between an open and closed text.

Table 2.5 *Comparing open and closed texts*

	Open text	Closed text
Plots	Multiple, simultaneous.	Single or at most, dual plots.
Ending	Unending narrative strands.	Clear beginning and ending.
Characters	No hero, a community of characters.	A clear protagonist.
Perspective	Multiple, conflicting perspectives that are contrasted.	Shared perspective.

The soap opera is an open text because of the multiplicity of characters and subsequent viewpoints portrayed. In contrast to an action-adventure drama, such as a James Bond movie, the viewer does not identify with one character and strictly follow the perspective of the character. It rather allows the viewer to identify with any one of several characters who – as will be discussed later in this chapter – each represent a contrasting viewpoint on any number of issues (Livingstone, 1998).

5.2. A framework within which to understand narrative drama

Table 2.6 is a schema to understand storylines and drama that combines the narrative structures of Burke (1970) and Van Dijk (1987). Any story can be understood as playing out in the five main phases set out in Table 2.6. Each phase is explained below.

Table 2.6 *A narrative framework*

Introduction (Adapted from Van Dijk 1987)	Setting and orientation.
Disruption of equilibrium (Burke, 1970)	Norms of social order are challenged.
Guilt (Burke, 1970)	The social problem is personified, responsibility and blame allocated.
Restitution (Burke, 1970)	The equilibrium is resolved.
Redemption (Burke, 1970)	The moral implications of the restitution are assimilated into the social domain.

Van Dijk (1987) contributes the first phase which introduces the problem to the viewer. It includes a preface to the story, providing information about relevance and interest, general information as to the location, time and participants (setting), and the special circumstances which lead to the complication (orientation).

Burke's (1970) classic scheme of dramatic narrative consists of four abstract phases: firstly, the norms of the social order are challenged and a state of intolerable disequilibrium results. Secondly, during the guilt phase, the problem is personified by attributing blame to a character. In restitution, the problem is resolved and the community returns to its state of equilibrium. This is followed by redemption in which the moral consequences of the restitution are assimilated back into the social domain.

Van Dijk (1987) also identifies two components of drama, namely complication and resolution, which Livingstone (1998) believes take place at various times on a micro level throughout the narrative. Each phase as set out above may contain complications and resolutions. Complications are events that are contrary to the goals or expectations of the protagonist and may include any interesting interfering events and actions. Resolutions function together with complications as the core of an event and consist of any actions that are in a direct response to the complication – with or without success. The guilt phase is irrelevant for hero stories in which the protagonist and antagonist are clearly identified, but in a soap opera that represents a plethora of characters, interlinked in relationships and actions where morality is ambiguous, this phase is necessary.

5.3. Viewer interpretations of the narrative drama

Livingstone (1998) examined which of these phases were most salient in viewers' recall of soap narratives, and noticed that viewers are selective in their interpretation. Some viewers, when recalling a narrative, would commence the retelling of the drama with Burke's disruption of equilibrium, for example, "It started with a kiss in the office…" leaving out the courtship that lead to the dramatic event. Other viewers would provide a more detailed retelling, including the context and orientation of the problem. Another divergence that was identified was where some viewers would retell all the complications first, followed by the resolutions, whilst others retold the complications and resolutions in pairs.

Most retellings included reference to the disruption and redemption stages, which usually included the most dramatic events, while the middle or the guilt and restitution phase were often excluded. Some would also recall the course of events inaccurately, telling Livingstone of conversations and interactions between characters that never took place. It is important to notice, however, that although some viewers misremembered, they still stayed within the conventions of the genre. Mis-rememberings would still relate to conversations and character interaction, no viewers mis-remembered genre inappropriate behaviour of characters. It is therefore clear that viewers have an understanding of the genre.

Livingstone noticed another form of selective interpretation where viewers would retell a story leaving out reference to certain characters. As Figure 2.2 illustrates, the narrative strictly communicated through the text included four characters, each being connected to all three other characters in some

way. When retelling the story, many viewers would exclude a less central character, i.e. C in the example below.

Figure 2.2. Selective narrative recall (Livingstone, 1998).

Viewers reduced the complex character interactions to a simple love triangle. By emphasising the role of some characters over others, viewers undercut the conventions of the genre that include intricate webs of interactions between relatively equal characters. This is supported by viewers often neglecting to mention supporting characters who are less prominent in the narrative.

In both these examples, however, it is possible that viewers neglecting to mention peripheral characters or minor events are not indicative of them not being aware of them, but rather of the events and characters being less interesting or salient. An analysis of the elements that are recalled can therefore point to the most salient contributors to viewers' interpretation of the narrative.

5.4. Semiotic concerns as additional frameworks for interpretation of the soap opera

Semiotic concerns are narrative characteristics that create interpretive possibilities. Livingstone (1998) identifies three: genre, choice points and levels of meaning.

5.4.1. Genre.

Genre is an important semiotic concern since it frames what viewers can expect from the narrative. Contrasting genres show how the narrative promise in each of these differs. Knowledge of the genre conventions of a narrative equips the viewer with a context within which to approach it. To revisit the comparison between open and closed text conducted above, consider a soap opera and action detective genre as examples of each in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 *Two contrasting genres*

	Open text	**Closed text**
Example	**Soap opera** (Livingstone, 1998)	**Action detective** (Fiske, 1992)
Plots	A series of plots.	The hero's quest.
Ending	Unending narrative strands.	Clear beginning and ending.
Characters	A community of characters.	A hero.
Perspective	Conflicting perspectives personified by characters that create tension.	Shared understanding of the hero's perspective
Focus	Dialogue.	Action.
Story	Domestic and romantic.	Action and suspense.

5.4.2. Choice points.

Choice points are the second semiotic concern identified by Livingstone (1998). Narratives are made up of sequential choice points and choice points are where the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structure of a text comes together.

The paradigmatic significance of an incident in a soap opera lies in how the incident compares to what is already known about the character and plot (what the character has done in the past or what has happened in the past). It is the prior knowledge within which the viewer interprets the current events. The syntagmatic significance of an incident is its sequential placement or relation to other incidents (Livingstone, 1998).

Consider a situation in a soap opera where a secretary is stealing paperwork from her boss' private file cabinet. In one scene she is innocently approaching the file cabinet when her boss walks into the office. In the next scene she successfully takes something from the file cabinet without being interrupted. This narrative creates tension through the paradigmatic possibilities at each syntagmatic choice point. Each time the soap cuts to the secretary (syntagmatic moment), only two paradigmatic possibilities exist – either she will be caught red handed, or not. The viewer's awareness of the two paradigmatic choices is what creates tension.

5.4.3. Levels of meaning.

A further semiotic concern is the levels of meaning contained in each incident. Most narrative incidents have implications that transcend the immediate characters involved, with implications on an individual, social and ideological level (Livingstone, 1998).

One example would be when a character changes her appearance. It would impact her immediate romantic relationship if she has one, or it would open up the possibility of one. It would make other characters notice her and it would likely result in them discussing her change in appearance, as well as her motivations for doing so and the possible implications that could be expected of it (in effect offering several viewpoints on the matter for the viewer to choose from). On an ideological level it may

prompt the viewer to consider (in academic terms) discourses of beauty in the patriarchal or matriarchal society they perceive the character to function in.

6. Interpreting characters

Riegel (1996) writes that "when Dallas's J.R. Ewing was shot, it made the evening news worldwide" (p. 7). As the worldwide interest in the Dallas character JR alludes, it has been suggested that the potential media has for influencing its audience, is located primarily in characters, not the storylines (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 1999; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) and that media does not have a linear, cumulative effect, but rather that certain storylines and characters can have a higher impact on viewers than others (Cohen, 1999).

Understanding how viewers relate to characters, in particular which possible reaction results in the highest viewer involvement, is therefore a crucial part of understanding loyalty to soap operas. Three seminal studies form the basis for this discussion of how viewers interpret characters. The first is Livingstone's (1998) social cognitive character representations, the second is Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures, and the third is Hoorn and Konijn's (2003) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters.

The three approaches converge in defining the viewer as being resourceful and active in the interpretation process and acknowledge how the viewer uses social cognitive knowledge and strategies in his or her interpretation of characters. Each approach also makes a unique contribution to the overall understanding of how viewers make sense of characters. Livingstone illustrates the reciprocal relationship between viewer and text in creating meaning. While defining the viewer as resourceful and active, she shows how viewer representations of characters are framed by the text, as well as how they give rise to narrative possibilities. Her definition of the viewer's relationship with the character is the broadest or most generic of the three models introduced. Cohen introduces four distinct types of involvement that the viewer may form with characters. His typology differs from that of Hoorn and Konijn's by including parasocial interaction and identification. Hoorn and Konijn contribute a process through which they believe viewers interpret characters. A valuable concept in their model is that it is able to explain both the positive and negative dimensions that contribute to the appreciation of a character by the viewer.

6.1. Social cognitive theory of Livingstone (1998)

Theoretically characters are believed to mediate or cause most of the effects of soap operas on viewers through identification, role modelling and para-social interaction. Regular viewers become familiar with characters and feel involved and interested in them.

In a reciprocal fashion, the viewer impacts the text as the text impacts the viewer. Livingstone (1998) believes that although both can be studied separately, it is only when studying what happens when the two come together that the lived reality of soap opera viewing is revealed.

Five main conclusions can be drawn from Livingstone's (1998) discussion on viewers' representations of television characters: 1) characters are primarily interpreted based on three dimensions, namely morality, potency and gender, 2) although pertinent across soaps, these dimensions hold different inferential implications in each soap, 3) characters who represent opposite poles of these dimensions are more likely to interact, than characters representing similar poles, 4) viewers interpret character portrayals within the context of their personal social knowledge, as well as being open to suggestions by the text, and 5) viewers' expectations and predictions of future events, as well as their identification of issues that are at stake, are based on their knowledge of the characters involved.

6.1.1.   Character representations in three major soap operas – Dallas, Coronation Street and EastEnders.

Using a multi-dimensional scaling technique, Livingstone examined the representation regular viewers of three soap operas Dallas, Coronation Street, and EastEnders have of the characters in these soaps. Viewers were asked to judge the similarities between characters by sorting them according to a number of dimensions. Table 2.8, below is a summary of the dimensions that viewers used to judge characters, with an indication of which dimensions were perceived to be associated with, or opposed to each other.

In all three of these soaps, viewers used three distinct dimensions to sort characters. These are: potency, morality and gender. These dimensions have different meanings in each soap. How the interpretation made about potency, morality and gender differ in each soap, while drawing parallels that could be applied to the genre, will now be discussed.

When interpreting the table, notice that when two traits are not associated with each other, it would imply that they are not necessarily used in a similar way for groups of characters. If a character was judged as moral in Dallas for instance, it would not tell us anything about the character's power. Since morality is associated with warmth, however, all moral characters in Dallas could be expected to be warm.

Table 2.8 *Viewer representation of characters*

	Morality	**Potency**	**Gender**
Dallas	Not associated with *potency*. Associated with *warmth* and *belief in family values*. Opposed to *cold* and *hard*.	Not associated with *morality*. Associated with *active* and *values power*. Mostly male. Always opposed to *passivity* and *pleasure oriented*.	Conventional patriarchal, although some counter stereotypical females present. *Masculinity* associated with *immorality*, *hard*, *dominant* and *values power*.

	Morality	**Potency**	**Gender**
Coronation Street	Always opposed to *potency*. Associated with an *old fashioned outlook on life*, *maturity*, *femininity*, *warmth* and *centrality*.	Always opposed to *morality*. Associated with *roguish*, *modern*, *sexy*, *cold*, *immature*, *masculinity* and not *centrality*.	Non-traditional matriarchal femininity. Clear distinction between male and female characters. Femininity is associated with maturity, morality, warmth and centrality to the community.
EastEnders	Always opposed to *potency*. Associated with *likeability*, *family values*, *warmth*, *centrality* and a *traditional outlook* on *life* and *predictability*.	Always opposed to *morality*, *likeability* and *family values*. Associated with a *modern outlook on life*, *coldness*, *temperament*.	

Morality in Dallas was associated with warmth and belief in family values, and was opposed to cold and hard. There was no association between morality and gender. The soap was therefore seen as having moral male and female characters and if a character in Dallas was portrayed as warm and committed to family values, a viewer might have expected the character to be moral. In Dallas morality was also not associated with potency, implying that there was an equal split in power between the moral and immoral characters and that the conflict between good and bad seemed eternal (Livingstone, 1998).

Dallas had a conventional or patriarchal gender narrative. Female characters were mostly soft, warm, submissive, passive and pleasure oriented, while male characters were more dominant, active, hard and power oriented (although there were a few female characters that were counter typical). The soap was also split between a male and female world, the former being more serious and powerful and the latter being hedonistic and weak, with a few exceptions (Livingstone, 1998).

All female characters in Coronation Street were seen as moral, soft, mature, warm, sociable and central to the story, while male characters were seen as peripheral to the story, immature, roguish, cold and immoral. The same was true for EastEnders, where the likable characters represented the good, traditional side of the soap and were associated with warmth, morality and family values, while the disliked characters were unpredictable and complicated. In contrast with Dallas, Coronation Street and EastEnders were therefore more true to the original conventions of the genre in which the female context is centrally portrayed in the narrative.

6.1.2.   Insight into viewers' interpretation of the soaps.

Studying the above character representations provides insight into viewers' interpretation of the soaps. As will now be discussed, viewers' interpretations of characters allow them to make inferences about the meaning of the narrative and the possible outcomes at different points in the story (narrative possibility). It also has an impact on viewers' understanding of the genre conventions of soap opera.

6.1.2.1. Narrative meaning.

The correlations viewers perceive between attributes of characters tell them what to expect of the narrative. In EastEnders, for instance morality, was correlated with family issues, warmth, centrality and being soft. If a moral character was depicted as being in conflict with an immoral character, viewers could realistically have expected the moral character to be defending a family matter and also to lose the argument.

Viewers use their knowledge of characters, for example knowing them to be morally weak, feminine, good, and so forth to complete the narrative. They construct rich, meaningful interpretations from the text through a series of separate incidents related to the character. Using the Gestalt principle of closure, in which we tend to close up or complete objects that are not in fact complete, the viewer will infer motivations for character behaviour and predict possible outcomes for future storylines based on what they know about the characters (Sternberg, 1995). Using cognitive assimilation (where new information fits comfortably into existing knowledge that the viewer has of a topic) or accommodation (where new information requires the viewer to amend his/her existing knowledge), they will elaborate on their understanding of each character, based on the new incidents that come into the story (Sternberg).

6.1.2.2. Narrative possibility.

In the character representation of Dallas general social knowledge may have suggested that morality could be associated with business dealings and immorality with self-indulgent characters, or that power would be associated with only the male or female gender. The fact that these dimensions are not related allows for more narrative possibilities (Livingstone, 1998).

For instance, it allows immoral characters to be more complex - and possibly more true to life - in providing them the opportunity to act in different capacities for different reasons. JR Ewing in Dallas was, for instance, perceived as a cold, immoral, business-oriented character; however, he values family relations and will therefore engage in immoral deals for the benefit of his family.

Male characters in Dallas are either moral and powerful or immoral and powerful, while female characters can represent all four dimensions (moral and powerful, immoral and powerful, moral and powerless, and immoral and powerless). All of this allows for more narrative possibilities.

Character interaction is usually based on characters that represent opposing poles of a theme central to the narrative, and the interaction between two characters is usually based on the theme on which these two characters differ. Characters that are similar are therefore less likely to interact than contrasting characters. The interaction between characters is usually made regular and permanent through work, family relationships, friendships, mutual places of socialising, or other reasons to interact. This is essential because it is only through the acting out of thematic opposing poles – personified by individual characters – that stories become interesting and that themes are explored (Livingstone, 1998). Viewers' knowledge of characters and the representations they create of the characters therefore also allow them to anticipate which characters are likely to interact.

6.1.2.3. The impact of genre conventions on viewer representations.

Character representations also tell us how the soap is perceived in terms of genre conventions. In both EastEnders and Coronation Street, the traditional, value oriented, soft, feminine, and moral characters are the most central to the story and are also the most adored characters. Both these British soaps are therefore interpreted as close to the genre convention of the centrality of the female world.

Dallas moved away from the conventions of the genre by not having female characters and their domestic concerns as its central focus. It was aired in prime time and for this reason had elements of melodrama that would be more competitive in the prime-time slot. Isidingo is also on air in the last early evening slot before the 19:00 news. Parallels can be drawn between Isidingo and Dallas in the inclusion of the male dominated corporate theme in both soaps.

Another implication for the genre conventions visible in viewer representation of the characters, is the interpretation of gender tenets. It is clear from the matriarchal femininity in EastEnders and Coronation Street (where the female characters are not submissive, passive or irrational, but rather mature, warm and central to the soap community) and the counter stereotypical female characters in Dallas (that resemble the strong, immoral male characters), that while the genre might have started out portraying the subordinate female that is worthy of feminist criticism, femininity is no longer portrayed in this way in many soap operas (Livingstone, 1998).

6.1.3.   Reflection on Livingstone's (1998) research.

It is crucial to understand that audiences can no longer be seen as passive, homogenous, mindless receivers of messages. However, the opposite extreme where the structuring role of the text is disregarded is also not a viable option. The dichotomy has to be embraced. If we regard the media as imposing all meaning on the viewer, then we disregard the role of the audience. If on the other hand, we regard the audience as the sole source of meaning, the disregard the structuring role of the things

that people interpret. Livingstone believes it is on the interrelationship between the two that the focus should lie. A theory of how people interpret soap operas should show how they make sense of structured texts, as well as how texts limit the interpretations made by viewers. Two seminal studies will now be discussed to explain how viewers make sense of characters.

6.2. Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures

Several scholars (Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Giles, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Hoorn & Konijn, 2003) have argued that is necessary to distinguish between different types of involvement that viewers can have with characters. Table 2.9 contrasts four distinct responses viewers may have to characters. In the section that follows, the conditions for each of the four types of viewer involvement and its implications will be discussed in search of possible relationships with viewer loyalty.

Table 2.9 *Four types of engagement (adapted from Cohen, 2001)*

	Identification	Imitation	Parasocial interaction	Affinity
Alternative terms	Capture	Wishful identification. Long-term identification.	Abbreviated as PSI.	Liking/Similarity/ Affinity, Interest
Nature of process	Emotional and cognitive, alters state of awareness.	Behaviour	Interactional, (para)social.	Attitude
Basis	Understanding and empathy.	Modelling	Attraction	Perceptions of character and self.
Positioning of the viewer	As character.	As learner (self as other).	As self.	As self.
Associated phenomena	Absorption in text, emotional release.	Learning, reinforcement.	Attachment to character and text, keeping company.	Fandom, realism.
Theoretical roots	Psychoanalysis, film studies, social psychology.	Experimental psychology, social learning theory.	Psychology, interpersonal communication.	Social psychology.

6.2.1.   **Identification.**

6.2.1.1. Definition of identification.

The first possible reaction a viewer can have to a character is to identify with it. Identification is defined as a viewer's tendency to become less aware of him/herself as a viewer, but rather imagining being one of the characters in the story, adopting the values and perspectives of the character and in effect feeling with – rather than for – the character (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Cohen (2001) states, "Unlike the more distanced mode of reception – that of spectatorship – identification is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (p. 245).

6.2.1.2. Characteristics of identification.

When attempting to operationalize identification according to the definition given above, Cohen (2001) identifies four conditions that need to be present in the viewer's account of his or her viewing experience for identification to have occurred. Firstly, the viewer should feel empathy with the character and experience the character's emotions, e.g. feeling embarrassed when the character is embarrassed. Secondly, the viewer should share the perspective of the character. This cognitive aspect could be measured by the viewer reporting that he/she understands the character. Thirdly, the viewer should share the motives or goals of the character and lastly, the viewer should experience a degree of absorption. When experiencing absorption the viewer will forget that he/she was watching television, become less self-aware and go through the experience as if actually being the character (Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Green et al., 2004).

6.2.1.3. Enabling conditions for identification.

Identification is enhanced by a number of factors. Firstly, regular exposure to the character increases the likelihood that identification will take place (Giles, 2002; Green et al., 2002; Cohen 2001). Secondly, longevity of exposure increases the likelihood for identification (Cohen, 2001). Loyal and regular viewers are therefore more likely to identify with characters. Identification is thirdly also more likely to occur in narrative genres (Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002). Any genre in which the viewer is actively addressed – like in a news bulletin or talk show – inhibits the viewer's ability to forget his/her role as viewer. The fourth condition necessary for identification is similarity (Cohen, 1991, 2001; Livingstone, 1998). Similarity can be based on demographic traits, such as age or gender, but also includes similarity in attributes or similarity of situation. Another condition that increases the likelihood of identification, is realism. Realism need not mean that the character replicates behaviour from the viewer's life, but it might also include a portrayal of a stereotype that the viewer holds of a social group being portrayed. One last enabling factor is affinity. Livingstone (1998) found that viewers are more likely to take the perspective (a key characteristic of identification) of characters that are liked over those that are disliked.

6.2.1.4. Effects of identification.

The first theoretical consequence of identification is on the viewer's identity formation. When children identify with a parent or peer, they pay close attention to the person's behaviour and the consequences of that particular behaviour. Cohen (2001) refers to the work of Mead and Ericson to illustrate that identification with others is a fundamental human ability, and that it plays a crucial role in identity formation. For a child to develop an identity he/she must first learn to take on the perspectives of others (compare Mead's work on the difference between individual play and group games where the latter requires an ability to anticipate how others will react to individual actions). Identification is therefore recognised as a necessary part of socialisation (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005) and identity formation (Cohen, 2001).

Persuasion is another consequence of identification. Identification can result in persuasion by making the source of the message, rather than the message itself attractive (Cohen, 2001). That identification is a cause of persuasion, is confirmed in advertising theory where celebrity endorsement is used to allow consumers to identify with the celebrity and imagine consuming the product that the celebrity is consuming. This brings us to the last consequence of identification, namely that it increases the likelihood of imitation or wishful identification (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). Livingstone (1990) also found that viewer relationships with characters and specifically their identification with characters influenced their interpretation of narratives.

Cohen (2001) believes the process through which the viewer loses his or her own identity and assumes the identity of the media character is fleeting and that it can occur in varying intensities throughout the course of a viewing experience. The next type of involvement with a character transcends this fleeting nature of identification with the promise of long-term effects.

6.2.2.   Imitation.

6.2.2.1. Definition of imitation.

Imitation, long-term identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) or wishful identification (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) is the next type of involvement that a viewer can have with a character. It is a behavioural concept in which the viewer will learn new behaviour from a character on television and try to emulate the behaviour or values portrayed by the character in real life.

6.2.2.2. Characteristics of imitation.

This concept differs from identification, as it extends beyond the viewing experience (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). It has parallels with Bandura's social psychological understanding of the concept. Bandura (2001) describes a social matching process through which an observer would change his/her thought patterns, emotional responses, and/or behaviours to match those of another individual. For

various reasons that will now be discussed, the viewer engages in a psychological process in which he/she tries to become like another person (or character).

6.2.2.3. Enabling conditions for imitation.

Similarity between a viewer and a media figure has been found to correlate with the likelihood that viewers would want to imitate (or wishfully identify) with the media figure (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) (Refer to discussion on similarity below). The type of similarity that correlates with wishful identification, includes same gender (although this is more relevant for male viewers), same race, attitude and background (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

Wishful identification is also influenced by character attributes, such as perceived intelligence, success, and attractiveness of the character (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Because these are character evaluations, affinity, as discussed below, is an important determinant of imitation.

One last enabling condition for imitation is the admiration of other characters. Characters that receive positive feedback from – and are admired by – other characters are more likely to enhance wishful identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

6.2.2.4. Effects of imitation.

Imitation has been shown to impact the extent to which viewers attend to, and identify with characters (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), although these authors also believe that identification affects the likelihood of imitation.

Diverse and convincing consequences have been linked to wishful identification with characters; including changing one's physical appearance, drinking behaviour, adoption of goals, and eating disorders (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). It also includes problem solving behaviour in which viewers report learning how to deal with real-life problems from watching and wishfully identifying with characters (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

6.2.3.   Parasocial interaction.

6.2.3.1. Definition of parasocial interaction.

The third type of involvement is the seminal concept – parasocial interaction, coined by Horton and Wohl in the 1950s. Parasocial interaction is a viewer's tendency to imagine interacting with characters on the programme as if they were real people. Contrasted to the individual nature of identification, parasocial interaction assumes at least a degree of distance from the text, as well as a self awareness for the viewer. Where identification would see the viewer experience the story as if *being* the character, a parasocial interaction assumes a relationship *with* the character. Parasocial relationships are rooted in interpersonal communication and are related to how friendships are formed (Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Eyal & Rubin 2003; Giles, 2002).

6.2.3.2. Characteristics of parasocial interaction.

Up to this point, the literature review has produced a number of traits that characterise parasocial relationships. Much of what has been said about parasocial relationships indicates that it is more relevant where the media figure directly addresses the audience – as with newscasters and talk-show hosts (Cohen, 2001, Giles, 2002). Literature does, however, refer to parasocial interactions with narrative, fictional and even animated characters. This section will focus on the latter rather than the former, because of its relevance to the research question.

Parasocial interactions differ from identification firstly due to the fact that viewers remain conscious of themselves as viewers and retain their identity, and secondly, behaviourally interact with a character by, for instance, verbally addressing the character (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Giles 2002; Green et al., 2004). The viewer interacts with the character as if he/she was a person in real life. This includes judging characters in a way that is comparable to judging people in real life, for example, weighing up whether one would be able to become friends with one of the characters (Green et al., 2004).

Many scholars insist that attributes of parasocial interaction resemble real-life interaction. There are, however, convincing arguments for making a distinction between real-life interactions and parasocial interactions. Giles (2002) defines a continuum of social-parasocial interactions, which is contained in Table 2.10. The continuum moves from dyadic, face-to-face interaction on the most social end to what he calls third level parasocial interaction on the opposite end. Social interactions are defined based on the location or proximity of the relationship, the constraints of the relationship and the potential of the relationship.

Table 2.10 *Continuum from social to parasocial interaction (adapted from Giles, 2002)*

Scale	Encounter	Location	Constraints		Potential relationship	
			Formal	**Informal**	**Formal**	**Informal**
Social .... Para-Social	Dyadic	Proximate	Interview	Conversation	Work colleague	Close friend
		Distant	E-mail message	E-mail message	Future associate	Cyber friend
	Small group	Proximate	Working group	Friendship groups	Colleague	Friend
	Large group	Proximate	Board meeting	Party	Future Colleague	Future friend
		Distant	Lecture (re. lecturer)	Lecture (re. fellow student)	Semi-parasocial	Future friend/ colleague
	Encounter with media figure	Proximate	Fan club convention	Chance meeting	Dyadic, but role bound	As normal dyad
		Distant	Phone-in show	"Personal" letter	Dyadic, but role bound	Semi-parasocial
	First-order PSI	Distant	News broadcast	-	Parasocial but chance of contact	-
	Second order PSI	Distant	Soap character	-	Parasocial can only make contact on representative level (i.e. actor)	-
	Third order PSI	Distant	Cartoon character	-	Purely parasocial, no chance of contact	-

It is clear from this continuum that significant differences exist between social and parasocial interactions and it perhaps opens up the question of the authenticity of mediated relationships (relationship which are not face-toface but that take place through a medium such as a computer or television). This has implications for new media in which on-line communication may start resembling real-life interaction to a larger degree, for example, in on-line chat rooms where communication is synchronous (all parties communicating are present at the time that the communication takes place) and reciprocal (two-sided, two directional). It does, however, confirm that interaction in fictional

television remains distinct from social interaction and that the contribution of social cognition only extends to the resources used by the viewer to interpret the (one-sided) communication from the character (Giles, 2002; Livingstone, 1998). Only First Order PSI (i.e. with non-fictional media figures such as news casters) holds the, albeit slim, potential of a future relationship. Second Order PSI (such as with is soap character) is limited to potential relationships on a representative level only, i.e. a viewer could only meet the actor that is portraying the character, while with Third Order PSI (cartoons) a future relationship is impossible.

6.2.3.3. Enabling conditions for parasocial interaction.

Parasocial interaction is enhanced by authenticity and realism (Giles, 2002; Schiappa et al., 2005), prolonged exposure to the character (watching several episodes of the same programme), as well as exposure to the character in different contexts (the actor being a guest on a talk show or being featured in a soap opera magazine (Borchers et al., 1994; Giles, 2002). It is also enhanced by co-viewers of a programme when characters are discussed between viewers as if they were real people (Giles, 2002). Attraction to the character is also correlated with parasocial interaction (Giles, 2002). Television dependency, the amount of time spent watching television, and the perception of television as reality are also correlated with parasocial interaction (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Giles, 2002).

6.2.3.4. Effects of parasocial interaction.

Parasocial interaction has been equated to companionship in real life and the most discussed effect is therefore that viewers achieve a sense of belonging and acceptance. This proves to be comparable to belonging to a real group (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Green et al., 2004; Giles, 2002).

Allport's contact hypothesis states that inter-group contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice. Schiapa et al. (2005) argue that because there are so many congruencies between social interaction and parasocial interaction, the effects of the contact hypotheses are transferable to parasocial interaction, and parasocial contact can therefore reduce prejudice.

Prolonged parasocial interaction results in the viewer feeling that he/she knows the character and understands his/her values and motivations (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). A connection has also been demonstrated between parasocial interaction and persuasion (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), although it is important to note that parasocial interaction does not necessarily imply a desire to imitate (Giles, 2002).

Notice that an effect of prolonged parasocial interactions is that viewers develop an understanding of the character's values and motives (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). Understanding a character's motives is the cognitive condition for identification described by Cohen (2001). The only factor that keeps parasocial interaction from developing into identification is similarity and possibly interest.

Most relevant to the current research objectives is the notion that parasocial relationships with characters are more important in viewing motivation than the programme content itself (Giles, 2002).

6.2.4. Affinity.

6.2.4.1. Definition of affinity.

The last way in which viewers could be involved with characters is by having an affinity to a character (Giles, 2002). This type of involvement is also referred to as liking, similarity (Cohen, 2001) or interest (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). This reaction consists of value judgements based on the perception of a character.

6.2.4.2. Characteristics of affinity.

For a viewer to judge a character (and this reaction is based mainly on an evaluative judgement of the character), he/she has to be aware of him/herself as a viewer and the characters as being separate from him or herself. Having an affinity with a character involves being concerned about what will happen to the character, always taking the character's side, hoping that the character will fulfil his/her goals, and enjoying imagining what the character will do next (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005).

6.2.4.3. Enabling conditions for affinity.

Chory-Assad and Yanen (2005) found that: 1) viewers are more likely to choose a fictional than a non-fictional character as their favourite character, 2) that favourite characters are more likely to be from a drama genre, 3) that favourite characters are usually selected from contemporary programmes (programmes that are on-air at the time of the research) and 4) that male viewers almost exclusively choose a male character as their favourite, while almost half of female viewers also choose male characters as their favourites.

Cohen (1999) identifies three types of factors that impact affinity or choice of a favourite character. They are: 1) character related factors, such as physical appearance, speech characteristics, behaviours, emotional reactions, and non-verbal expressions, 2) star factors which relate to the celebrity status of the actor portraying the role rather than the character portrayed, and 3) textual factors, such as the interpretation of the soap characters based on power, morality and gender (Livingstone, 1998) discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Similarity is also related to an evaluation of the realism of a character (Giles, 2002).

6.2.4.4. Effects of affinity.

Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) found that young male and female viewers reported a higher likelihood of wishful identification (imitation) of characters that were perceived to be successful and intelligent. For female viewers, this extended to characters that were seen as physically attractive and admired by other characters. The effect of affinity is therefore mostly related to increasing the likelihood that imitation will occur.

6.2.5. Realism.

Realism is an important determinant of several of the above reactions. It has been found to increase the likelihood of identification, parasocial relationships, similarity and imitation. It therefore warrants a more detailed look.

In a recent study Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) considered the impact of functionality and perceived realism on narrative comprehension and engagement. They identified three types of 'unrealness': fictionality, external realism (match with external reality), and narrative realism (coherence within the narrative). Fictionality was not found to have a significant hampering effect on viewers' mental processing. Violations of external and narrative realism were, however, problematic in the process of deriving meaning, as they were experienced as inconsistent with existing mental structures constructed to interpret the story. The authors argue that these inconsistencies hold negative implications for viewer engagement, seeing that it impacted on reflective realism (judgement of realism after watching the narrative) and lessened the narrative's persuasive power.

Green et al. (2004) found that enjoyment does not depend on how well a media programme reflects the real world and argues that believable fiction can result in immense viewer enjoyment. They make a distinction between internal and external realism and believe that internal realism is more important in determining enjoyment than external realism.

Fiske (1994) argues that enjoyment derived from regarding the programme as real is dependant on a knowing self delusion. Tager (1997) believes that realism in soap operas facilitate this self delusion as unrealistic features in a soap (such as when an actor is replaced to play a familiar character) hampers the process of involvement in the text. It seems therefore that any theory that attempts to understand the interpretations viewers arrive at regarding soap operas should include a reference to the importance of both external and narrative realism.

6.2.6. Reflection on Cohen's (2001) four types of character involvement.

Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures (characters which viewers interact with through the medium television) offers an understanding of the complexity of involvement with fictional characters. By emphasising individual reactions that viewers can have to various characters it offers substantial, practical evidence of the existence of a heterogeneous audience whom uses information outside of the text (individual real world knowledge) to understand what is portrayed in the narrative.

6.3. The process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters of Hoorn and Konijn (2003)

The model proposed by Hoorn and Konijn (2003) will now be discussed. This model complements Cohen's typology in offering a causal, linear process through which viewers perceive fictional

characters. As is clear from the discussion on the interaction between the types of involvement above, the process of interpreting characters is complex. Hoorn and Konijn's model offers a logical progression that viewers go through in making contact and establishing a relationship with the soap opera, which accounts for contradictions and complexities in how the process unfolds. The reader will hear echoes of identification (similarity and appreciation), wishful identification and affinity in this model. The reason for presenting both Cohen (2001) and Hoorn and Konijn (2003) is because the latter contributes a systematic process, as well as an explanation of how negative character perceptions contribute to viewer appreciation of a character, while the former explains parasocial interaction and identification.

Hoorn and Konijn (2003) suggested that viewers perceive and experience fictional characters in a process that involves three phases. These are: 1) subjective encoding of the text, 2) a comparison with the self, and 3) a response which defines the degree of engagement and appreciation of the text. Figure 2.3 is a visual representation of their model. The dotted lines visible in the figure indicate the partial influence that similarity, relevance and valence has on involvement and distance. The yellow block indicates the additional impact of norms which come to play if individual norms are assessed in comparison with group norms. Each of the phases (encode, compare and respond) will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 2.3. Model of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003, p.259).

6.3.1. Phase 1: Encoding.

The process begins with the subjective encoding of the text by the viewer based on three characteristics: ethics, aesthetics and epistemics. The authors believe that this phase can be conducted relatively independently from the self. A viewer can judge the character JR as powerful and immoral (encoding) without reference to the self (I am not like him).

Each character is interpreted as good or bad (ethics), beautiful or ugly (aesthetics), and real or unreal (epistemics). Depending on the nature of the character and the situation in which the character is perceived, this makes a contribution of involvement or distance. Generally the positive poles of each of these dimensions contribute to involvement with the character, while the negative poles contribute to distance between the character and the viewer. The unique contribution of this model is, however, that it includes the positive effect of negative judgements.

As explained by Livingstone (1998), JR is interpreted as strong, undefeated, hard, masculine and immoral (within the context of the Dallas world, he is an overly negative character), however, he is believed to value his family (a trait associated with the moral characters in the rest of the Dallas ensemble). JR is therefore both good (values family) and bad (immoral, hurts other characters). His good qualities would contribute towards involvement, while his bad qualities contribute to distance. The trick is that he often does the immoral things he does for the benefit of his family. Fictional characters can therefore result in an overall positive appreciation, because their negative features are evaluated as good, depending on the outcome valence. The opposite could also be true where ethical traits are seen within the context of epistemic. A character that is seen to have too many unrealistic positive traits and too few negative traits can irritate.

When a viewer first meets a new individual judgements are influenced by physical appearance, because of the limited availability of other information. Evidence exists that beautiful people are inherently judged as being good. In fiction, aesthetic beauty contributes to involvement, while ugliness contributes towards distancing as an overall rule; however, beauty can also have a distancing effect (too beautiful, too slick), and ugliness an involving effect (e.g. feeling sympathy). Low aesthetic beauty in a successful character can be intriguing, seeing that it invites the viewer to discover what allowed the character to overcome whichever difficulty he/she faces.

Beauty, goodness and realism have optimum levels where the ideal combination of distance and involvement equates to appreciation. Good, beautiful, realistic characters evoke too much involvement and too little distance, while bad, ugly, unrealistic characters may evoke too much distance and no involvement. Overall Hoorn and Konijn (2003) argue that complex characters that are not perceived as either purely positive or negative during the encoding stage challenge the viewer more and result in higher appreciation.

6.3.2. Phase 2: Comparison.

During phase 2, the character is compared to the individual (viewer) in terms of similarity and relevance. This comparison culminates in a valence which is what the viewer would like to see happen to the character.

6.3.2.1. Similarity.

Similarity is believed to contribute to involvement and a positive appreciation of a character. It does not, however, explain ambivalence (characters that viewers love to hate), a fascination with negative characters, or an interest in superhuman characters. Although similarity contributes towards appeal, dissimilarity can also have a positive impact. This explains the idea of wishful identification discussed above. For a viewer to 'wishfully identify' with a character requires that the viewer identifies similarities, but also dissimilarities (traits to which the viewer can aspire) between him/herself and the character.

6.3.2.2. Relevance.

A viewer judges everything perceived in the narrative environment as personally relevant or not. Hoorn and Konijn (2003) disagree with the popular notion that relevance is a prerequisite for emotional involvement, and that if a stimulus is judged to be irrelevant, the emotional processing is stopped. They argue that this is not the case when interpreting fictional characters and that viewers endure a degree of irrelevance until the character satisfies other needs the viewer may have. However, should irrelevance be prolonged, they acknowledge that it will eventually increase emotions such as apathy and boredom (which will increase distance) and that emotional processing may cease. The factors deemed relevant when interpreting television may differ in some cases to the factors that are more salient in real life, as it will depend on the personal goals or motivations that are relevant to the specific viewing experience. In a later article Konijn and Hoorn (2005) define relevance as an indication of the potential impact a feature may have on an individual's goals. Relevance therefore implies a high degree of potential risk or benefit, while irrelevance indicates a neutral state in which there is an absence of both. This definition is suitable within their theory as it allows for high relevance that could also evoke distance (such as in the case of a threat). Where relevance designates the strength of an emotional response to the character, valence determines its positive or negative disposition.

6.3.2.3. Valence (what viewers would like to see happen to the character).

The positive and negative emotions that viewers have of characters are made up of the ethical, aesthetic and epistemic judgements that are relevant to the goals and concerns of the viewer at any given time. These feelings are evident in the anticipated valence of the storyline, i.e. what the viewer would like to see happen with the character.

6.3.3.   Phase 3: Response.

Phase 3, response, is the conclusion of the complex process in which viewers interpret characters. The response a viewer will have to a character is the sum of both the distance and involvement experienced with the character. Hoorn and Konijn (2003) believe there is a constant duality between involvement and distance that are negotiated by elements in the text and their relation with the viewer. These dimensions are independent from each other and an optimum level of each is necessary for a viewer to be interested and engaged with a character and text. A character that elicits too much involvement and no distance will be perceived as boring, while a character with too much distance and no involvement might be irrelevant, both of which will result in low appreciation. The dimensions – involvement and distance, interact on a micro-level within the three phases of the process. Appreciation comprises of the ideal balance of both involvement and distance. Too little or too much of either decreases the overall appreciation of the character (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003; Konijn & Hoorn, 2005; Van Vugt et al., 2005).

6.4.   How viewers relate to different character types

Green et al. (2004) suggest that disposition theory can be helpful in understanding how viewers relate to different character types. Disposition theory (Green et al., 2004) holds that we judge people in real life and hold a positive disposition to people who are perceived to be morally good and a negative disposition to people who are morally bad. It has, however, been illustrated in the discussion on the equal importance of attraction (involvement) and aversion (distance) to character appreciation that this rule does not explain all viewer relationships with characters (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003). Hoorn and Konijn (2005) empirically tested their theoretical model and compared a selection of good and bad, realistic and unrealistic, and beautiful and ugly characters.

Figure 2.4. Comparing involvement, distance and appreciation for characters representing a spread of evaluative traits (adapted from Hoorn and Konijn 2005, p127).

They found that viewers favoured realism in the portrayal of good characters, but favoured fantasy in the portrayal of bad characters. This offers some support to the notion that characters are seen as models of socially desirable action. In situations that are similar to real life, goodness is the norm for behaviour. On the other hand, when exploring badness, characters with unrealistic features are preferred and have to show their unrealistic features so as to reveal that they are abnormal, and therefore should not be imitated. Overall, positive assessments increased involvement with and appreciation of the characters, while negative assessments increased distance from the characters.

Tian and Hoffner (2007) conducted a study to compare parasocial relationships with liked, neutral and disliked characters. They found that parasocial interaction was a predictor for liked characters. Parasocial interaction was also found to be a predictor of influence, while identification was not. In terms of change and influence, they found that lower education and higher similarity predicted change or influence for all three character types. Comparing the three character types, larger degrees of similarity and identification were associated with liked and neutral characters than for disliked characters. It seems therefore that viewers are more likely to like characters that they perceive to be similar to them, and that similarity is associated with influence. This study found that parasocial interaction was only relevant to liked characters. Giles (2002) argues that parasocial interaction can take place without any identification being present, and that this is how viewers interact actively with characters that they dislike. For fictional and fantasy characters, where the realism dimension is too low to sustain parasocial relationships, Giles believes affinity is often the relevant way to describe their relationship with the character.

Tager's (1997) study of black South African women's identification and interpretation of The Bold and the Beautiful found that the majority of viewers identified with the female characters that strongly persisted against all odds. This supports Hobson's (1994) finding that the most popular female characters were those that struggled against the vicissitudes of life. If the characters were able to stay in control, they were seen as admirable and were only excused lapses in strength in extreme cases.

Perhaps both of these studies provide confirmation that although male soap audiences are growing, Borchers et al. (1994) were correct in identifying that soap operas have (and should have) female characters that have always been stronger than the female casts of other media. In soap operas, female characters do not feature only as girlfriends and wives, but as heroines and villainesses acting autonomously.

7. Engagement with the narrative

Two models warrant discussion in this section, as they combine narrative and characters, and begin to explain the complex processes through which viewers engage with a television programme. The first is the Model of Narrative Comprehension and Engagement of Busselle and Bilandzic (2008), and the second is the work of Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004) on transportation into a narrative.

7.1. The model of narrative comprehension and engagement of Busselle and Bilandzic (2008)

Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) combined elements of most of the theory discussed in this chapter into an integrated model that includes the viewer's interpretation of both character and narrative. Their theory of narrative comprehension and engagement consists of three phases, which are: comprehension, engagement and outcomes. Figure 2.5 is a visual representation of the model. They use a mental models approach to understanding how a viewer interprets a television programme.

Figure 2.5. Model of narrative comprehension and engagement. Adapted from Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).

The viewer's comprehension or interpretation of the soap opera consists of models that he/she builds around the story, characters and situation (the setting of the story). The social cognitive view of media and the viewers' interaction with it makes a distinction between the narrative meaning as communicated through the dialogue, and characters and storylines, as well as the viewers' interpretation thereof. Busselle and Bilandszic's (2008) model of narrative comprehensive and engagement makes this same distinction and uses a mental models approach to explain how the process of forming mental representation of the narrative is a necessary step towards viewer engagement[3]. Their main argument is that reality judgements will influence and potentially enhance or inhibit viewer engagement with the story. They identify three levels of reality judgements: fictionality, external reality and narrative reality, and find that only the former does not influence engagement.

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[3] A mental model is a cognitive structure that represents a part of the external world whether it be a process, typical behaviour in a situation, type of person, or any other slice of reality that the individual encounters in life.

The primary mental model in their theory is the situation model. The situation model includes the setting and the accumulated story of the soap opera. It is ever changing, seeing that it is the instrument or mechanism through which the rest of the soap opera is interpreted. When watching a soap opera, the viewer is confronted with loose standing incidents. The situational environment, which includes the rules of the soap (i.e. the narrative possibilities), the setting, the characters, and the story that has been encountered in the past, is the mode through which these individual incidents are stringed together. When encountering a new piece of information, it is compared to previous pieces of information and either accommodated (the mental model is modified since the new piece of information does not fit with the old pieces) or assimilated (added to existing mental models that are similar).

We use the real world as heuristic when interpreting a fictional world. Since it is impossible for a soap opera to provide all the information necessary to convey a coherent story, we use mental schemas of people and situations in real life to make sense of information we encounter in soap operas. Two of these schemas are story schemas and genre schemas.

In contrast to real life, media stories have a beginning, middle and an end. When encountering a story a story schema is triggered. Soap operas signal to the viewer that a story is about to begin through their opening visuals and music. The same effect is achieved in theatre by the opening of the curtain and in a story book by a line such as "Long ago in a land far away…" This technique ushers in the deictic shift and it creates the anticipation that events will be temporally located and that some form of conflict might emerge and will probably be resolved.

Similarly, the activation of a genre schema retrieves knowledge about the conventions of the genre, and creates expectations about the nature of the events that will follow. These expectations colour the interpretation of the story, as each genre has specific narrative possibilities. When seeing a man and woman meeting at a restaurant on screen the event holds different narrative possibilities depending on the genre. If a spy-thriller genre is applied, the viewer might expect that one of the two individuals will hand the other an envelope that contains instructions on a mission. If the same scene is interpreted within a soap genre schema the viewer could realistically expect the man and woman to be in a relationship and that the scene will focus on the content of a dramatic conversation.

Included in the situation model are the character models and the story world models. When first meeting characters in a soap opera, they are represented by stereotypes which are mental models we hold from real life. As the story progresses and the viewer becomes more familiar with the character, the character model develops to include his/her identity, values and goals.

The story world model is the setting of the soap, which includes the place and time, and all that this implies. This setting sets down rules that are universally relevant to the characters and situations within the soap. If it was set in the 1980's for instance, the characters could not have cell phones.

7.2. Transportation

7.2.1. Definition of transportation.

Green et al. (2004) believe that transportation or escaping into a story is in itself motivation to watch the story. They describe transportation as the melding of attention, imagery and feelings between the viewer and the text. They believe this process of being taken into the narrative world is a key aspect to media enjoyment. Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) (discussed in detail in the next section) identifies a concept that is related to transportation. They talk about the deictic shift, which is essential for narrative engagement. The deictic shift is a step in the process of narrative engagement in which the perspective of the viewer changes from his own, within his physical surroundings, to that of the soap. When the deictic shift occurs, the viewer interprets the events unfolding in the soap from a perspective inside the soap, as if he/she is in the soap. This is necessary for the viewer to become involved in the story.

7.2.2. Characteristics of transportation.

In order to understand a story the viewer needs to take on a perspective or deictic position within the narrative. The word *deixis* relates to the context within which other words have meaning. Words such as *I, here, now* only have meaning in relation to the context in which the hearer is located. Usually this deictic centre is the here and now of the viewer's life, but to understand a narrative this needs to change to a position within the narrative. This notion of the deictic shift also explains why viewers have an emotional reaction to events that happen in the story. They are experiencing the events from a viewpoint within the story, and therefore have the impression of a direct experience.

7.2.3. Enabling conditions for transportation.

Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) identify narrative structures that enable the deictic shift to occur. Written narratives rely on language to create a deictic shift, while film and television has camera angles and visual elements to create the setting. In written texts verbal deictic remarks that indicate motive and psychological states create a deictic centre from which to experience the story, e.g. long ago in a land far away. In television the perspective created by language in written text is achieved through visual effects. If a soap opera has regular scenes in a particular office setting, these scenes could be introduced by a shot of the outside of the building – situating the dialogue that follows in a particular context. This has the same effect as a rising curtain; it cues the audience to make a deictic shift in preparation of a narrative experience.

Transportation or deictic shifts are inhibited by things that remind the viewer that he/she is watching or reading a story (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green et al., 2004). Compare watching a movie at home on a high quality DVD to watching a pirated version of the same movie – where often the pirated DVD is taken by a video camera in a cinema. The latter might have poorer sound quality, will probably have recorded any noise the cinema audience made, could have the edges of the cinema screen exposed and could include features of the surrounding environment (the first row of seats, the exit sign), might be from an awkward angle (seeing the screen from the side) and could have someone standing up

during the movie with their profile showing up against the screen. It might be possible to ignore these things and become engrossed in the story, but every time a person stands up, or the audience laughs, the viewer will be reminded of his/her own here and now as opposed to the story's here and now.

Green et al. (2004) found that transportation is exclusive to narrative communication. A viewer could become engaged in, and even enjoy a non-narrative programme, but he/she will not be transported into it. This is because a non-narrative programme, such as a science programme or a speech, does not create an alternative world for the viewer to enter. It does not necessarily have to be fictional. Factual content, such as a documentary can also take the form of a story, but if it does not take the form of a story (and does not create an alternative world), enjoyment is invoked by something other than transportation (for example, information seeking needs).

7.2.4.   Effects of transportation.

Green et al. (2004) found a high correlation between transportation and enjoyment, and found that people who reported high transportation and enjoyment are more likely to recommend a story to someone else. Transportation is therefore an important contributor to enjoyment and overall appreciation. Transportation is also associated with attitude change where viewers, who reported higher transportation into a narrative, had beliefs that were more consistent with the narrative than viewers who reported lower transportation (Green et al., 2004).

8.   Positive viewing experiences

In the sections above the researcher attempted to understand the skills viewers use to interpret soap operas, the processes through which they interpret characters and storylines, and how they are engaged with the soap opera through the process of transportation. Enjoyment was also mentioned sporadically, where it was an outcome of another aspect of viewership.

The focus of this is to understand the positive viewing experiences that culminate in loyalty to soap operas. A final section on what constitutes positive viewing experiences is therefore appropriate. Different terms used to refer to positive viewing experiences will now be identified and the tripartite view of enjoyment, described by Nabi and Krcmar (2004) will then be discussed, as it is a comprehensive model that is most relevant to the research objectives.

8.1. Terms that relate to positive viewing experiences

Several authors (Green et al., 2004; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Raney, 2002, 2004; Raney & Bryant, 2002) attempted to arrive at an academic understanding of the concept of enjoyment and throughout literature, various terms are used to refer to the same concept (see below). The variety of terms used is, however, an indication of the undefined nature of the theoretical landscape.

Terms that can be found elsewhere in this literature study that imply positive viewing experiences include: liking (Cohen, 1991, 2001), affinity (Cohen, 1991, 2001; Giles, 2002), interest (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), preference and attraction (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004), and appreciation (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003; 2005). However, the term most relevant to the current research is enjoyment (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004).

Most of these terms suggest a positive disposition towards media content, while not necessarily encapsulating the experiential part of viewing (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004). A viewer may, for instance, have an appreciation for the soap opera despite not enjoying the actual viewing experience (this apparent paradox is addressed below). The theoretical approach of this study (discussed in Chapter 3) emphasises lived realities and any term used to describe positive disposition to a soap opera should necessarily include the experience of viewing. *Enjoyment* (the conclusion made about the pleasantness of the viewing experience) and its related term derivative – *enjoying* (the experiential part of the concept – to enjoy) are therefore the most appropriate terms to use. The most complete view on positive viewing experiences and how it influences loyalty is Nabi and Krcmar's (2004) tripartite view of enjoyment.

8.2. The tripartite view of enjoyment of Nabi and Krcmar (2004)

Like Green et al. (2004) and Raney (2002; 2004), Nabi and Krcmar (2004) define enjoyment as an attitude with affective and cognitive aspects. Their unique contribution, however, is to add a behavioural dimension to the understanding of enjoyment. Nabi and Krcmar (2004) explain that an attitude is a complex feature made up of cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Cognitively a person develops beliefs about an object based on experience he/she has had of it. These beliefs are either positive or negative, based on the emotions felt during the encounter with the object. Behaviourally the person will then intend to initiate future contact with the object or to avoid it.

Nabi and Krcmar (2004) address the concern some readers might have that attitude is an end-state rather than an experiential process. They argue that attitude (or the cumulative belief) about the programme will fluctuate as the viewer encounters new information. The enjoyment-as-attitude perspective therefore addresses both the end state judgement, as well as the process through which viewing is experienced. Figure 2.6 is a visual representation of the model.

Figure 2.6. Tripartite perspective on media enjoyment. Adapted from Nabi and Krcmar (2004, p.297)

Enjoyment of a television programme consists of an affective, cognitive and emotional dimension. The affective reaction to the programme includes emotional concepts, such as empathy experienced with characters or specific affective states, such as sadness or excitement. The cognitive reaction includes judgements of characters' actions as moral or immoral, story assessments as real or unreal, and personal evaluations of the story as relevant or irrelevant. The behavioural reaction includes the act of viewing itself, as well as actions while watching, such as sitting on the edge of the seat or cooking. Each of these dimensions is influenced by a number of dimensions, such as existing knowledge, personal experience, personality, mood etc. The affective, cognitive and behavioural reactions combine in both an experiential enjoyment (enjoying while watching) and an end-state judgement or attitude. This attitude of enjoyment (or lack thereof) causes the viewer to have positive or negative viewing intentions, and ultimately determines the likelihood of future viewing behaviour (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004).

8.3. Reflection on the relevance of the tripartite view of enjoyment as attitude

Applying the tripartite definition of enjoyment to positive viewing experiences allows one to understand apparent problems posed by the variety of terms mentioned above. Within this understanding it could, for instance, be possible for a viewer to like a certain soap opera, have a general appreciation of the genre or have a preference for South African rather than international soap operas (all cognitive reactions), while not experiencing pleasant emotions (affective experience) while watching a specific episode, because of interruptions by other family members or having to check on dinner during the commercial breaks.

It is useful to think of enjoyment as an attitude in the context of the current study as it contributes a psychological perspective on the interpretive process through which loyalty develops. A cognitive and an emotional experiential process combine to form either a positive or negative belief about a soap opera, which in turn determines whether individual intends to become a loyal viewer. The exact nature of this interpretive process and the factors that influence the positive and negative valence of the affective, cognitive and behavioural responses will be addressed in later chapters of this thesis.

9. Conclusion: The psychological processes that culminate in loyalty to soap operas

In this Chapter, several psychological processes that contribute to audience loyalty to soap operas have been identified and discussed. These include perceiving and interpreting the behaviour of soap opera characters in a way that it is comparable to how we perceive and interpret that of people in real life. A strong argument has also been made for the relevance of the social psychological processes of identification and imitation (wishful identification) in viewers' relationship to soap opera characters, as well as the formation of pseudo social relationships with the characters. Other psychological concepts that have been identified as playing a role in making sense of television include the use of schemas and the fundamental attribution error.

The interpretations gleaned from this literature review have been synthesised into a conceptual model, indicating how psychological processes culminate in audience loyalty. In Chapter 7 and 8, the third hermeneutic will draw on this understanding, using it to further understand the interpretation made in Chapters 5 (the first hermeneutic of the soap opera viewers) and 6 (the second hermeneutic of the market researcher).

Chapter 3 that follows is a discussion of the interpretive framework within which this study was conducted. The chosen interpretive framework is hermeneutic phenomenology. After hermeneutic phenomenology's main components have been identified and explained, a research pathway, based on these ideas are defined. These ideas have, in turn, informed the methodology.

Chapter 3 - Interpretive framework

1. Introduction

Chapter 2 is a detailed account of the literature reviewed for this study. The current chapter is a discussion of the interpretive framework within which the research was conducted. A hermeneutic phenomenological framework was deemed most suitable. As seen in Figure 3.1, as throughout this chapter, is an illustration of how a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway was developed. The chapter comprises of three main sections. The first is a discussion on phenomenology. In this section the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger are contrasted and the researcher's choice of hermeneutic phenomenology is justified. The second section is a discussion of the key aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology that are pertinent to the study. The chapter concludes by setting out a detailed hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway based on these principles.

Figure 3.1. Graphical representation of the contents of chapter 3.

The choice of hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretive framework is especially useful in media studies, as it provides an understanding of the lived reality from the perspective of the viewer. As Rogge (1989) confirms:

> In order to do justice to the complexity of human actions in relation to the media, we need a method of hermeneutic interpretation. Applying such a method to the family in its specific set up as well as its broader social conditions enables us to describe those structural aspects which are relevant to the family's everyday media-related activities. Such an approach may be called hermeneutic and interpretive because it does not lose sight of the actual living situations. Rather, it relates media use to the concrete everyday world of a given family (p.172).

As will be discussed in this chapter, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach assumes that interpretation is necessarily bound to each of these contexts holding the promise of providing an integrated interpretation of the lived reality under study.

2. Phenomenology

This chapter begins with a discussion on phenomenology. A brief description of the history of phenomenology is provided to illustrate the relationship between Heidegger and Husserl. This is followed by a discussion on the ontological convergence and the epistemological divergence between Heidegger and Husserl. This section concludes with a justification for using a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework.

2.1. The history of phenomenology

Phenomenology was established in the early 20th century in the works of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre Heidegger, Husserl and others (Kemerling, 2001; Smith, 2008), and has since developed into arguably one of the most influential philosophical traditions of the twentieth century (Berrios, 1989; Smith, 2008). Husserl is considered the father of this interpretive paradigm and his original phenomenology is the systematic study of consciousness, which is the only phenomenon that one can be sure of as our experience of the world is constituted in and by consciousness. Phenomenology is literally is the study of things as they take on meaning from the perspective of a first person experience (Smith, 2008).

The question of how meaning is attached to objects is fundamental to the development of Western philosophy. It reaches back as far as Plato and Aristotle, through the rationalist-empiricist debate in the 17th century to the present day (Kemerling, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1986; Smith, 2008). Comparing different philosophical paradigms' understanding of how concepts are formed plots the development of phenomenology as it is known today. In an empiricist definition, the phenomena that appear before the mind are the worldly characteristics of things or our sensory perception of those characteristics. In the rationalist tradition, phenomena that appear before the mind are rationally formed ideas of the phenomenon. The question that arose amidst these developments was 'do objects exist outside of the mind or do objects exist only in the mind'? Husserl wanted a theory that was able to accommodate both. He wanted to be able to study the meaning of the consciousness of phenomena without discounting the shared reality of the phenomena that inhabit experiences (Smith, 2008).

Since the turn of the previous century phenomenology has had three major concerns: 1) the manner in which consciousness and the contents thereof relate to the external world, 2) the possibility of differentiating between mental and physical phenomena, and 3) the manner in which phenomena are distinguished from one another (Berrios, 1989; Kemerling, 2001).

Empiricists in the United Kingdom understood the relationship between the mental act, its contents and the external world with the received model (originally proposed by them). The received model holds that the mental experience is constituted by a process through which the external world (as the only source of knowledge) conveyed its information to the subject through the windows of its senses (Berrios, 1989). Consider, for example, Locke's theory of abstraction: ideas become general when the mind removes it from its specific context. If one considers the idea "blue" various instances of blue can come to mind, for example, blue sky, blue water, blue bicycle, blue eyes. All of these objects have something in common and an idea is formed when these instances of the idea are removed from their contexts (Polkinghorne, 1986). Concepts are formed when the mind generalises (finds commonalities between different objects that relate to the idea) and discriminates (ignores traits that are not relevant to the concept) (Polkinghorne, 1986).

Husserl disagreed with Locke on the fact that concepts could only emerge by abstracting experience (comparing different examples of blue). Consciousness could grasp general concepts independent from experience or else it would mean that an object is only blue because of its similarities to other objects, which is problematic, because how was the initial example of blue understood? Husserl insisted that to have consciousness is to grasp concepts and to understand generalities from the singular, to see things as examples. For Husserl, concepts are a way of being open to the world and do not exist exclusively – either physically or mentally (Polkinghorne, 1986). This stands in contrast to positivist approaches that acknowledge the existence of an objective reality that is independent from human experience and consciousness. In phenomenology the meaning of an object is dictated by how an individual is conscious of it in his/her immediate, first person, experience (Smith, 2008).

Today, there are as many as seven branches of phenomenology (Smith, 2008): transcendental constitutive phenomenology, naturalistic constitutive phenomenology, existential phenomenology, generative historicist phenomenology, genetic phenomenology, hermeneutic and realistic phenomenology. Furthermore, researchers often confuse Husserl and Heidegger's work (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003); they claim to have used Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology, while their research is based on Husserl's later transcendental phenomenology (Polkinghorne, 1986). There are distinct differences between transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology that both infer specific research characteristics. These differences and similarities and their implications will be clarified in the sections that follow.

2.2. The ontological convergence of Husserl and Heidegger

The main convergence between Heidegger and Husserl that is relevant to this study is ontological (what reality is), while the difference between them that will most affect this study is epistemological (how reality can be studied). Ontologically, phenomenology sees reality as lived experiences in which the individual who is experiencing the reality cannot be removed or separated from it. This stands in contrast to the Cartesian duality which postulates that reality is something separate from the individual and which can be studied objectively. Phenomenology abandons this positivist stance in favour of

studying lived experiences. For phenomenology, the focus is on how the world is lived by the person and it examines the taken-for-granted knowledge that informs human beings' existence (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

This approach appealed to Husserl for the possibility it offered of uncovering a reality that is based on experience and therefore certainty. His focus was to uncover the essences of experiences through conscious pursuit. Heidegger, on the other hand, believed that all consciousness is already interpretation. Although Heidegger and Husserl agree on what reality is, it is on how this reality can be studied that they diverge (Laverty, 2003).

2.3. The epistemological divergence between Heidegger and Husserl

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology uses a special method of reduction by means of which the invariant aspects of a particular phenomenon are identified and described. All knowledge in transcendental phenomenology is based on absolute certain insights that remain unchanged in any context. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, in contrast, argues that all description – in fact all human awareness - is always already interpretative and that it cannot be removed from the context in which it is experienced (Laverty, 2003; Malpas, 2008; Wilcke, 2002).

Transcendental phenomenology is a way of thinking that aims to describe a reality that exists independently from individual interpretations. A researcher working from this paradigm would aim to identify his/her biases and keep the description of the phenomenon under study *pure* from it, a technique referred to as bracketing. Heidegger, however, argues that all description is always already interpretation. All forms of awareness are interpretive. A researcher working in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition therefore acknowledges that the meaning we make of an object or process cannot be understood in isolation from past meanings. In so doing, he/she will aim to include all elements that contribute to the historicity of the interpretation (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

The main divergence between Heidegger and Husserl is epistemological or concerned with how reality can be studied. Since the researcher's purpose for selecting one of these approaches is to inform a research design and interpretation of data, the choice of interpretive framework is made primarily on the epistemological characteristics of the approach. As will now be discussed, the hermeneutic phenomenological principles of enquiry, as described by Heidegger, are most appropriate for the current research project.

2.4. Justification for using a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework

The study is a secondary analysis of existing data by means of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study since the lived reality under study (loyal soap opera viewership) is situated in an individual, historical, physical and social context, which has to be incorporated into the research design. For Heidegger, our

understanding of the world is inherent and inextricably linked to our being-in-the-world. Day to day knowledge precedes any theoretical understanding and not the other way around (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Paley, 1998). Loyalty to a soap opera necessarily implies that the viewer has a subjective affinity to the programme, which causes him/her to return to watch another episode repeatedly. It is a very individual and psychological set of events.

It could be argued that one who grasps the genre conventions of a soap opera would best understand how the genre practically sustains loyalty. But as the previous chapter showed, the link between a structural (or even procedural) understanding of the genre by the researcher or academic, and the subjective experience of loyalty (by a viewer) is not necessarily apparent. In contrast, Heidegger would assert that the person experiencing loyalty towards the soap opera would have the best understanding of it (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

This study aims to make a contribution to media psychology by bringing the active role of the viewer and the psychological processes that take place as the viewer experiences loyalty into consideration. For this reason, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach with an emphasis on interpretation by the viewer is the most viable interpretive framework.

3. Hermeneutic phenomenology

Some central concepts of Heidegger's philosophy will now be discussed. This section acts as an introduction to the full methodological application of hermeneutic phenomenology in the current study.

3.1. Dasein

For Heidegger, understanding is not a way of knowing facts about the world, but rather a way of being. If Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on Dasein (a term coined in his seminal work *Being and Time*), or the situated meaning of a person in the world (Laverty, 2003; Malpas, 2008). Reality is understood in terms of a human being's physical and temporal relatedness to the world (Malpas, 2008).

3.2. Historicity of interpretation

Forming the backdrop to our existence is a constant hermeneutic interpretation that is inextricably linked to history and the 'structures of interpretation that are in place'. The meaning we make of an object or process at any given time is inevitably built up from past experiences and past meanings and cannot be understood in isolation from it (Malpas, 2008). Participants that took part in the market research would therefore not have been able to express how they made meaning of a preferred soap opera without conscious or unconscious reference to a personal history of television viewing and past narrative moments with personal significance.

3.3. Facticity and the fusion of horizons

Facticity refers to the inseparability of our own being with that of others. We do not exist as individual entities that constitute meanings as individual thinkers, with no relation to others. Our understanding is co-constituted and synergised (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997) in our interaction with others. Heidegger sees our way of being as a reciprocal interdependence between the self, others and objects.

In a research context, hermeneutic phenomenology is therefore concerned with the biases that all interpreting individuals (the participant, the original market researcher and the current secondary researcher) bring to the process; with the acknowledgement that their mutual interaction in the process, in itself, influences the nature of the interpretations made (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997). As the interpreting individual (e.g. the current, academic researcher) develops an understanding of the lived reality under study, this lived reality under study gradually becomes part of his/her bias through the interpretation provided by others before him/her (the viewer). This is the process through which facticity is established, and this process is called *the fusion of horizons.*

The fusion of horizons is a term developed by Gadamer and describes how the frame of reference of the researcher and the lived reality under study come together. A horizon can be understood as the vision (knowledge, pre-understandings) available at a particular point in time and which is not static, but expands as our understanding of a phenomenon deepens (Debesay, Nåden & Slettebø, 2008; Wilcke, 2002).

3.4. Heideggerian prejudice

Heideggerian prejudice is a concept that describes the prejudgements that are necessarily present and influential in all interpretations. While interpreting a lived reality, one necessarily compares new interpretations with fore-meanings (a general grasp of the whole situation in advance). These fore-meanings are based on fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

As discussed above, the issue of prejudice is a key point of divergence between transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology. While the former attempts to bracket off the influence of researcher bias, the latter argues that it is impossible to step outside of your own pre-understanding. Since there is a exchange between the individual and the world as they comprise and are comprised by each other, the researcher should rather "become as aware as possible and account for these interpretive influences" (Laverty, 2003, p. 9).

As one continues with the task of interpretation, one may come across paradigm shifts (hermeneutic turns) or the fusion of horizons (Conroy, 2003; Debesay et al, 2008). A hermeneutic turn or paradigm shift is an instance in which a change takes place in one's understanding of how to interact with the

world (Conroy, 2003). The process through which all of this takes place is referred to as the *hermeneutic circle*.

3.5. The hermeneutic circle

The hermeneutic circle is a central concept in hermeneutic philosophy. It represents the circular nature of the interpretation shared between individuals and their interactions (Conroy, 2003; Debesay et al, 2008; Laverty, 2003). The circle represents how interpretation involves interpreting the parts and the whole within the context of prior interpretations. Figure 3.2 is a representation of the hermeneutic circle.

The parts

The whole

The interpretation

Figure 3.2. Hermeneutic circle.

Neither the whole, nor any of the parts can be interpreted without reference to each other (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). Attempting to interpret any part of the lived reality on its own would mean removing it from the circle of interpretation and its relation to other parts of the whole, and essentially stripping it of its meaning (Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997).

The circle is ever expanding. The researcher approaches the lived reality within the hermeneutic circle with certain pre-judgements (fore-groundings) from which he or she projects an understanding (fore-meanings or anticipation of what the interpretation will be). The researcher then interacts in the hermeneutic circle, and through paradigm shifts allows the interpretation to be adjusted. The circle expands and the process starts again with redefined pre-judgements, a revised anticipation of what the interpretation will be, and the potential of new paradigm shifts or hermeneutic turns (Wilcke, 2002). This process continues until the researcher reaches a temporary place of sensible meaning that is free of inner contradictions (Debesay et al, 2008; Laverty, 2003).

3.6. Changing the hermeneutic circle into a spiral

By definition, the hermeneutic circle is a closed loop. In a research setting, however, Conroy (2003) suggests the opening of the hermeneutic circle into a spiral, where interpretation will no longer be restricted by a closed loop of enquiry. Changing Heidegger's hermeneutical circle to that of a spiral (see Figure 3.3) allows the interpretation of a group of people to build on each other's understanding over time.

Figure 3.3. The hermeneutic spiral.

Hermeneutic phenomenology admits that a researcher can never truly achieve an insider's perspective. A double hermeneutic therefore emerges in which the participant interprets his/her own experiences and the researcher interprets the responses of the participant within the context of the interaction inside the research setting. A secondary analyst therefore creates a third hermeneutic in which the original double hermeneutic is re-examined. The current study is such a secondary analysis. It takes place at the periphery of the spiral and involves the creation of a third hermeneutic.

3.7. Modes of being

Heidegger (Conroy, 2003) distinguished between three modes of being, namely authentic mode of being, inauthentic mode of being and undifferentiated mode of being. While the modes of engagement determine how we interact with our environments, the modes of existence/being relate to the consistency between our actions and our motivations. It is important for the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher to be conscious of the modes of being when interpreting research participants' accounts of the lived reality (Conroy). Figure 3.4 compares the three modes of being. Each mode will be discussed below.

Figure 3.4. Modes of being.

The first mode of being is the authentic. In this mode of existence, a person's actions flow from his/her convictions. A person that exists in this mode is consistent and legitimate in the way that he/she thinks and interacts with the world. This stands in contrast to the inauthentic mode of existence where no consistency can be found between a person's actions and motivations. The most common mode of

existence is the undifferentiated mode of existence. In this mode, people act in the world without thinking about why they are acting in a certain way. There is no congruence between motivation and action. In this mode of existence, people act out of habit or under orders (Conroy, 2003).

3.8. Modes of engagement

Our actions are usually determined by a silent thought that plays on the background of the world in which we interact and behave, without thinking about what we are doing. Only when unusual things happen (in this case, when we are asked to comment on our experiences in a research context*)* are we prompted to assume a meta-thinking that allows us to compromise and reinstate this equilibrium in which we usually live (Conroy, 2003; Palley, 1998; Zahorik & Jenison, 1998).

Heidegger (Conroy, 2003) identified three modes of engagement in which we live in the world: ready-to-hand, unready-to-hand and present-at-hand. Figure 3.5 illustrates the interaction between these modes of engagement. Each mode will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 3.5. Modes of engagement in the world (adapted from Conroy, 2003).

3.8.1. Ready-to-hand mode of engagement.

The first, and most common, is the inauthentic mode of engagement. Most of our actions and daily life take place in this mode. Behaviour in this mode is identifiably automatic, relies heavily on cultural conventions and customs, and does not include meta-thinking and deliberate action. Human beings are born into a society with cultural practices and social conventions. Many decisions about behaviour have already been made and any new members of the society are taught how these conventions work. For instance: people in the USA drive on the right-hand side of the road and the British (and their old colonies) drive on the left. These are simply aspects of the world that we live in. We do not think about the fact that we drive on this side of the road. Unless, our taken-for-granted knowledge is challenged, when visiting a foreign country that drives on the opposite side of the road, we will

continue not thinking about it. This is the silent thought within which we live and our actions are ready-to-hand (Conroy, 2003; Zahorik & Jenison, 1998).

3.8.2. Unready-to-hand mode of engagement.

The second mode of engagement is what Heidegger calls the unready-to-hand mode of engagement. When a person becomes aware that the situation requires deliberate attention, he/she slightly adapts his/her way of thinking about and interacting with the environment to make it all work. Heidegger (Conroy, 2003) offers an example of using a hammer. We will start using the hammer in the ready-to-hand mode of engagement (i.e. using it without thinking of how, or that we are using it). If our use of the hammer fails to achieve the desired results, however, we will recognise that our way of being (our use of the hammer) requires deliberate attention and slightly adjust the way in which the hammer is used. In this way, our engagement with the world is unready-to-hand, as the action required unfamiliar (or non-automatic) behaviour (Conroy, 2003).

3.8.3. Present-at-hand mode of engagement.

Should our use of the hammer still not produce the desired results, we will move over to the last and most strenuous mode of engagement, known as the present-at-hand mode of engagement. In this mode, we actively think about our situation and context, and make a deliberate decision on how to act. Heidegger believed it would be quite impossible to live in this mode and make conscious decisions on all our actions (Conroy, 2003; Zahorik & Jenison, 1998). Objects (and other features of our lived reality) are usually conceived of in terms of usefulness for the task at hand. While one is actively engaged in purposeful action, representations of objects in terms of their stable features are not possible. It is only when this purposeful action is interrupted that one considers the object in terms of its features, in a theoretical, present-at-hand manner (Zahorik & Jenison, 1998).

A television, for instance, is not represented by its features, i.e. square, black, aluminium, but rather for its ability to allow access to entertainment. While using the television, the viewer will interpret the television in a ready-to-hand mode of engagement and will not consciously think of the television. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is necessary for a viewer to be transported into the narrative and to allow him/her to enjoy the programme (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004).

3.8.4. Application of the modes of engagement.

The modes of engagement are useful in wanting to understand how the viewer will engage with the object – soap opera. A soap opera viewer will mostly interact with the soap opera in the ready-to-hand mode of engagement but could, from time to time, be prompted to move into the conscious modes of engagement. This may happen, for instance, if the viewer is confronted with a family member that wishes to watch a different programme (anxiety), requiring the viewer to defend his/her viewing choice, or deciding to watch a repeated episode in another timeslot (unready-to-hand mode of engagement). If this does not resolve the situation sufficiently, he/she may be required to consider the

motivation for and specific role of watching soap operas in his/her life (present-at-hand mode of engagement).

As a participant in a market research study the viewer was in the most strenuous, present-at-hand, mode of engagement, seeing that he/she was required to reflect on the intricacies of the lived reality for an extended period of time. The academic researcher was also in the present-at-hand mode of engagement, as she was actively interpreting the lived reality of soap opera viewing from the different relevant perspectives.

4. Clearing in the woods

To explain the interplay between the world and our engagement with it through the silent thought mentioned above, Heidegger uses the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor. Imagine a person walking through thick woods and suddenly coming to a clearing. If he/she steps into the clearing and turns around to regard the woods from within the clearing, he/she sees the woods for what it really is. The reality of the woods comes up in relation to the clearing. The clearing can only exist in its relation to the woods and someone observing the woods can only come to an understanding of the woods if regarding it from within a clearing. A comparison to Plato's famous allegory of the cave (Dreyfus, 1996; Thomson, 2001) and the 1999 science-fiction adventure film The Matrix (Phillips, 2008) will further explain the metaphor.

Plato describes a situation in which a group of people are placed with their backs to the opening of a cave, facing a wall. The people are chained so that it is not possible for them to turn their heads around and look at the sun coming in from the opening. Various objects from life outside the cave are brought in and the sun casts their shadows on the wall for the group of people to see. If they are never freed from their chains and able to turn their heads around to see the sun, they will never realise that the objects they know and see are only shadows of their full selves. In the same way, the characters in the Matrix will never realise that the reality of what they experience everyday is a product of computer programming, if they are not unplugged from the Matrix (Dreyfus, 1996; Phillips, 2008; Thomson, 2001). The clearing in these metaphors would be Plato's sun or The Matrix's programming. Although it is what sustains reality, it remains in the background, outside of our everyday consciousness. Before setting out the detailed research pathway, the key principles of hermeneutic phenomenology as set out above, will now be summarised in relation to these metaphors.

The cumulative knowledge gained in our lived reality (our historicity of meaning, the total contents of the hermeneutic circle) provides the clearing (the sun or the computer programming). We are *Dasein* or in-the-world (situated inside the woods, chained in the cave, living inside The Matrix) and we remain there for as long as we live in the ready-at-hand mode of engagement and the undifferentiated mode of being. If something happens to disrupt this way of being (if we are asked to comment about the lived experience in a research setting; if we step into the clearing; if the chains are cut or if we

take the red pill) we are forced to assume a present-at-hand mode of engagement with the world. When this happens, we are bound to facticity and hermeneutic prejudice (we can never escape what the group knows collectively about the cave and shadows, or the knowledge we gained while walking through the woods or living in The Matrix). Our interpretation of the world (the sense we make out of the trees we see on the edge of the clearing, the objects that casted their shadows on the cave wall, or the unrecognisable computer code) is bound to what we knew it as while in-the-world. Husserl would urge the observer to bracket this knowledge out and interpret the newly revealed essence of the reality objectively, while Heidegger asserts that this is impossible (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

Our lived experiences (our understanding of being in the world) create the clearing in our lives. It both limits and opens what can be real and what can be done. Our shared experiences become the guide to what can be regarded as things, what can be regarded as human beings, and what counts as possible actions for us to take (Dreyfus, 1996).

The key proponents of hermeneutic phenomenology have been discussed in this section. In the next section this interpretive framework is translated into an actionable research pathway. This pathway was used as a guiding structure throughout the research to ensure that it remains within the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. The research pathway set out in the next section becomes the clearing (the sun, the computer programming) that sets the limits and opens up the methodological possibilities of the rest of the thesis.

5.   A hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway

As research is a self-correcting exercise (where research findings may prompt the methodology to be revisited), constant reflection on the relevance of methods used and the value of insights obtained within a relevant paradigm of what constitutes science, is of critical importance. Methodology has to be congruent to the philosophical paradigm selected for the study, and in a practical way reflect the paradigm as the project progresses (Annells, 2006; Laverty, 2004). The principles of hermeneutic phenomenology have been outlined in depth in the above text. The methodological implications and applications that will ensure that the research is truly conducted within the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition will now be specified.

Like Conroy (2003) the researcher would like to emphasise an allegiance to the theoretical paradigm, by using the metaphor of a clearing to structure the research approach. The methodology is therefore presented as a "pathway in the woods" that unfolds within the natural environment of the lived experience, rather than a concrete road that is set in stone and that necessitates a compromise of the environment's natural character.

As will be described in Chapter 4 when discussing the methodology, the research is a secondary analysis of two sets of existing data (two hermeneutics): the lived reality of the soap opera viewer (the first hermeneutic) and the interpretation of this lived reality by the market researcher who conducted

the original study (the second hermeneutic). As the academic researcher embarked on this study, a third hermeneutic was created while she interpreted the lived reality of the soap opera viewer and the interpretations of the market researcher. The three hermeneutics are respectively represented as "footprints" (the lived reality of the soap opera viewer), "direction markers" (the interpretation of the market researcher) and "a map" (the interpretation of the academic researcher). Figure 3.6 is a graphical representation of the three sets of meaning units in the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor.

Figure 3.6. Three groups of meaning units within the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor.

In defining this metaphor the researcher wanted to find terms that are economical and easy to understand, while still being meaningful and symbolic of the hermeneutic phenomenological process. It is appropriate to refer to meaning units in the soap opera viewer's lived reality as footprints, since they are idiosyncratically left by the individual while bound to the surroundings (blending with materials and other footprints and being affected by the environment) (Conroy, 2003). Similarly, direction markers (or sign posts) in such an environment represent a second-level interpretation of fragmented information that is already present and, like footprints, it cannot be removed from its context without losing all significance and meaning. The name map co-ordinates for the last group of meaning units (that of the academic researcher) is also appropriate as these co-ordinates are (like footprints and sign-posts) inherently context bound, and would lose all significance if not used and regarded in relation to its geographical context. *Footprint*, *Direction Marker* and *Map Co-ordinates* are meaningful terms in this metaphor, as they make symbolic reference to the historicity and contextuality of all interpretations, while conveying the unique role each of these plays in the larger hermeneutic spiral.

The purpose of the research is to arrive at a clearing in the woods in which the academic researcher and the reader are able to look back at the trees (lived reality of soap opera viewership) and achieve a present-at-hand perspective on it (create a model of soap opera viewership that illustrates the link between psychological processes and loyalty). As the academic researcher progressed on this research process, she tracked the footprints of the soap opera viewers and attempted to walk through

the woods in the same path they did. The market researcher has walked on this path once before and has left direction markers at various points to help the academic researcher find the way[4]. The research is therefore mainly situated within the woods, although the soap opera viewer was guided to assume a present-at-hand mode of engagement with soap opera viewership during the market research, and went into the clearing for brief periods of time. As the market researcher followed the footsteps of the viewers with the help of the direction markers left by the market researcher, she gradually drew out a map to this lived experience. Through following this map, the academic researcher's main goal is to stand in the clearing with the reader, looking at the woods before the reader and future readers start making their own footprints in the woods.

5.1. Hermeneutic phenomenological research principles

Practically, a set of research principles can be set out as a pathway to ensure that the hermeneutic phenomenological (HP) tradition is maintained throughout the research process. The principles have been adapted from Annells (2006), Conroy (2003) and Laverty (2004) and guided the research process. They have been grouped into four sub-sets of principles, each set dealing with a different aspect of the approach, namely: a) the researcher's orientation to the narrative, b) sensitivity toward the researcher's own interpretive influences, c) the aim of the methodology, and d) practical ways of implementing the method.

5.1.1.   Orientation to the narrative.

HP principle #1: Extend what is hidden inside the narrative accounts and interpret it based on background understandings of the viewers.

HP principle #2: Promote self-reflective practice by the participants through participation in the research and through offering an account of the researcher's understanding and interpretations.

HP principle #3: View every account as an interpretation made from a individual's background.

HP principle #4: View any statements made by the participant as being significant to him or her on some level.

HP principle #5: Regard every account as having its own internal logic. Whatever is discussed in an interview is considerable to its bearer whether conscious or not.

HP principle #6: Identify and reword to state the full meaning participants understandings within their own modes of existence and mode of engagement.

HP principle #7: Regard hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretation of interpretation made by the participants.

HP principle #8: Look beyond the actions of the participat to a broader background context and its relationship to specific events.

HP principle #9: Stay close to the narrative.

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[4] This is said, however, with the acknowledgement that there may be various other (equally valid) paths.

5.1.2. Sensitivity to own interpretive influences.

HP principle #10: Ensure that the researcher remains aware to his or her own mode of existence, and of engagement and foregrounding.

HP principle #11: Be conscious of the coping tools used by the researcher in any of the modes of existing.

HP principle #12: Allow the researcher's background knowledge to influence interpretation.

5.1.3. Aim of the methodology.

HP principle #13: Constantly maintain a questioning attitude and look for for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings and deeper understandings.

5.1.4. Practical application.

HP principle #14: Explicitly show the shared world of understanding between the researcher and the researched.

HP principle #15: Absorb yourself in the hermeneutical circle throughout the research spiral.

HP principle #16: Demonstrate the immersion of the researcher into the hermeneutical spiral.

HP principle #17: Progress in a circular manner between parts and the whole, what is disclosed and hidden, the world of the participant and the world of the researcher.

HP principle #18: Engage in hermeneutical interpretation along with the participants.

HP principle #19: Remain conscious of movements in understanding, and look for exemplars and principles.

Lastly, the analysis and interpretation has been written using language that remains consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. The term research participants was favoured over the term respondents, as it implies that the viewers who took part in the research co-created the meaning that emerged in the research. The term "findings" was favoured over the term "results", as the latter implies that a final conclusion (that does include the possibility of reinterpretation) has been reached. Overall, the language used in the thesis is focused on conveying that the researcher attempted to explain, understand and explore the lived reality rather than to test, prove or establish beyond all further interpretation any aspect of it.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter hermeneutic phenomenology was contrasted to transcendental phenomenology and it was argued that the former is an appropriate worldview for research in the lived reality of media usage. Key hermeneutic phenomenological concepts were discussed and a set of research principles that guided the practical implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research process were listed. The next chapter offers a detailed discussion on how these principles were applied.

Chapter 4: Methodology

1. Introduction

A discussion on hermeneutic phenomenological methodology should be a demonstration of how good judgement and responsible principles are applied within an interpretive context (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997). The interpretive framework has been discussed at length in Chapter 3. The current chapter deals with the methodology that flowed from the interpretive framework.

As depicted in Figure 4.1, this chapter consists of three main parts: the research context, the analysis process and a reflection on the methodology. The first part consists of a short introduction to the academic study and a discussion of the market research study of which the current thesis was a secondary analysis. It also includes the interpretive influences of the market researcher and the academic researcher. The second part is a detailed discussion of the conceptualisation of the analysis process, as well as the practical steps followed during the analysis. The chapter concludes in the third part with a reflection on the quality and the ethics of the research.

Figure 4.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 4.

2. The research context

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and the introduction to this chapter, this study was a qualitative, secondary analysis of a market research study conducted on behalf of the SABC. The aim of the current study was to understand the psychological processes that underlie positive viewing experiences and loyalty to a soap opera. In order to address this objective, a systematic process of analysis that was grounded in a theoretical framework and informed by a literature study had to be defined.

The reader will have read the discussion on the clearing in the woods metaphor which Heidegger uses to summarise the main principles of hermeneutic phenomenology. As discussed towards the end

of Chapter 3 this metaphor was used to structure the academic process to ensure that the research was conducted within the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition.

The research design was informed by the nature of the data available for analysis and the interpretive framework. The discussion on the methodology will therefore commence with a summary of the data sources.

2.1. Data sources

The perimeter of the clearing in the woods was demarcated by the data at the researcher's disposal. The study benefited from five distinct sources of meaning detailed in Table 4.1. Each of these will be discussed in the section to follow. Due to ethical considerations, only excerpts that relate specifically to the lived meaning of loyal viewership from the focus group transcripts, field notes and market research report was included (see section 4.2 for further discussion).

Table 4.1 *Data sources*

First hermeneutic - footprints *(Interpretations by soap opera viewers)*
1. Excerpts from verbatim transcripts of focus groups conducted nationally.
2. Excerpts from reflective diaries of viewers who participated in the deprivation exercise.
3. Focus group with participants who took part in the deprivation exercise.
Second hermeneutic - direction markers *(Interpretations by the market researcher)*
4. Excerpts from researcher's field notes.
5. Excerpts from market research report.
Third hermeneutic – map coordinates *(The researcher's own interpretations)*
6. Ongoing log book, decision trail and insights journal.

The study consists of three hermeneutics, each taking place at a different position in the hermeneutic spiral. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, the academic research process was designed to allow each level of interpretation to build on the previous, and to allow the researcher's own background knowledge and a literature review to influence the final interpretation. Also indicated in Figure 4.2, the Chapters were written in a sequence that followed the methodological timeline (this is discussed in Chapter 1).

Figure 4.2. Graphical representation of the methodology.

2.1.1. First hermeneutic data – footprints.

Data in the market research study conducted on Isidingo was primarily collected by means of focus groups. Participants' accounts of their experiences (footprints) are the essence of the first level of interpretation. Participants therefore included individuals who have experienced the social reality under study and who were able and willing to engage in conversation about it (Laverty, 2003). During the market research, all participants were recruited with these specific criteria in mind. Additional recruitment criteria included population group, gender, age and location. Participants were recruited by a professional market research recruitment company.

Table 4.2 details the demographic profile of the focus groups included in the sample. Six viewers participated in each focus group and each focus group was 2 hours in duration. Groups were held in market research venues with a one-way mirror to allow the market researcher and the client to view the groups. Groups were tape-recorded and verbatim transcriptions of the recordings were made. Participants received a R200 incentive to take part in a group.

Table 4.2 *The focus group sample*

	POPULATION GROUP	GENDER	AGE	VIEWERSHIP	LOCATION
1.	Black	Female	25-34	Regular	Johannesburg
2.	White	Female	50+	Regular	Johannesburg
3.	White	Female	25-35	Occasional	Johannesburg
4.	White and Indian	Female	25-34	Regular	Durban
5.	White and coloured	Female	25-39	Regular	Port Elizabeth
6.	Black	Male	35-49	Regular	Durban
7.	Black	Male	25-34	Regular	Durban
8.	Black	Female	30-40	Occasional	Johannesburg
9.	White and coloured	Female	18-24	Occasional	Stellenbosch
10.	Black	Male	25-34	Occasional	Johannesburg

A second source of footprints is the reflective diaries of five participants who took part in a deprivation exercise. Five participants were identified in the focus groups as exceptionally loyal viewers[5]. They were asked to stop viewing the soap opera for one week and keep a reflective diary of their experience. (They received incentives of a set of videos of the episodes they missed, as well as autographed photographs of the stars). This small selection of diaries is the second source of footprints. Table 4.3 summarises the demographic profile of the participants in the deprivation exercise. Although their individual ages were not preserved in the data, all participants were between 18 and 49 years of age.

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[5] No formal definition of exceptional loyalty exists. The market researcher subjectively decided from participants' responses in the focus groups whom to include.

Table 4.3 *The deprivation exercise sample*

	RACE	GENDER	AGE	VIEWERSHIP	LOCATION
1.	Black	Female	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
2.	Black	Female	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
3.	Black	Female	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
4.	Black	Male	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
5.	Black	Male	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg

2.1.2.   Second hermeneutic data – direction markers.

Two sources of data are available that represent the market researcher's interpretation and therefore the second hermeneutic (the direction markers): 1) the researcher's field notes and 2) the market research report. The former is an informal document with anecdotal notes and thoughts collected during the course of the fieldwork. The latter – the market research report – is in the form of a PowerPoint document that was presented to stakeholders at the SABC. Excerpts from both these documents, that refer to the lived experience of loyal viewership was included and interpreted in the current study.

The market researcher used an independent moderator or focus group facilitator to facilitate the focus groups and observed each group from an adjacent viewing room. Field notes are therefore interpretive comments generated by the market researcher while observing each group in session. After the conclusion of the fieldwork, the focus groups were transcribed and analysed together with the market researcher's notes. The market researcher lastly prepared the report which was presented to the stakeholders at the SABC.

The academic researcher purposefully consulted both the field notes and the market research report when analysing the second hermeneutic. The former was included in an attempt to stay close to the narrative (HP # 9) and the latter in an attempt to include an integrated understanding that consolidates all interpretations into a conceptual whole (HP # 19).

2.1.3.   Third hermeneutic data – the map.

Interpretation in Heideggerian prejudice implies that the researcher's interpretation is linked to his/her own 'foregrounding' or background and 'fore meanings' or interpretations (HP Research Principles # 10-12). These join the interpretations of others (the first researcher and the participants) in the hermeneutic spiral. During analysis, the academic researcher continued along the hermeneutic spiral of interpretation with a continuous cognisance of the foregrounding to which all interpretations were

inextricably linked and progressed towards the development of principles and a theoretical understanding.

Since Heidegger believes it is impossible for the researcher to distance him/herself completely from his/her own foregrounding, the academic researcher kept a reflective diary or decision log of her interpretive process. These are not presented in a separate chapter, but forms part of Task 2: Interpretation - in the analysis framework discussed later in this chapter.

2.2. The data structure

The academic study takes place on the outside of the hermeneutic spiral and the academic researcher therefore did not have input into the content of the data when it was first collected during the market research study. The content of the data is dependant on the focus group discussion guide in the first hermeneutic and the presentation structure in the second hermeneutic. Detail on these structures will now be provided.

2.2.1. The first hermeneutic – the discussion guide.

The following is an extract from the discussion guide used in the focus groups, including only the questions that 1) did not relate to any of the exclusions discussed in a later section on ethical considerations in this chapter, and 2) held the promise of eliciting interpretations that refer to the current study's research question.

As in all qualitative data collection, however, the discussion guide (see Table 4.4) remains a guide which is often changed to naturally adapt to the conversation. Each transcript discussed in the chapter dealing with footprints therefore did not contain all of the questions included here in this sequence.

Table 4.4 *Discussion guide*

1. <u>General viewing preferences</u>
▪ TV Channel preference. Reasons.
▪ Types of programmes preferred.
▪ Family programmes vs. personal indulgence.
 	
2. <u>Soaps</u>
▪ Viewing behaviour
    ○ Which soaps are viewed?
    ○ Why do you watch soaps?
    ○ Frequency
    ○ Is there someone you watch with?
▪ Comparison

- Elements that would cause a soap to fail.
- (Deprivation) If they had to take all soaps off the air, what would they lose?

3. **Viewer relationship**
- When did they start watching and why?
- Who in household watches? Reasons. Do they influence your viewing choice?
- Main drivers.
- If they had to take Isidingo off the air?
- Why regular/ why occasional.
    o Reasons for changes in viewing behaviour.
- How does Isidingo of say 5 years ago compare with current? Two years ago (mine vs. on media).
- If not mentioned spontaneously:
    o 'Some people say that Isidingo deals with social issues. Have they noticed it? Which can they remember?'
    o What is the family's take-out?
    o How do they handle these issues?
    o Do they want more/less of it in future?

4. **Storylines**
- Recall and appeal of main plots and sub plots.
- What are the really hot themes?
- What types of stories are preferred? *(Deep delving into the appeal of the story…what are the personal touch points?)*
    o Long (e.g. Cherel) vs. short (e.g. Hostage)
    o Social/ private lives vs. business environment vs. suspense stories
- Prompt specific storylines – which preferred etc.
- If they could write the next storylines, what should happen?

5. **Characters**
- Favourites?
- Involvement with characters, i.e. with which characters do they have an almost real-life relationship, with and which not? Who do they talk about at work? Who would they catch themselves thinking of afterwards?
- *Deprivation exercise:* all pictures on the table. Drop characters down a mine shaft one by one. What would the impact be? In-depth exploration of contribution and meaning of main characters.
    o *7 most important and 3 least…*
- Which character do you aspire to most?
- One gets certain types of characters that can be in a story e.g. the Mother, the bitch,

> the tycoon, the village idiot, nice guy, knight in shining armour, antagonist, gangster, villain, cop/law, underdog , rebel, etc.
>   o Which of these types of characters do Isidingo need?
> - How do they feel about the Matebani family?
> - What role do they see Vusi playing?

Footprints were also obtained from the diaries kept by loyal viewers who took part in the deprivation exercise. This exercise was designed to be spontaneous and participants were not given any formal structure within which to make their comments. Viewers also discussed their experiences in a focus group after the conclusion of the exercise.

2.2.2. The second hermeneutic – the presentation structure.

The second hermeneutic is contained within the market researcher's field notes and the market research presentation. The field notes were structured around the same general content as the discussion guide, seeing that they were made during the course of the focus groups. The presentation comprised of the following sections:

<u>Research context</u>
- Background
- Research objectives
- Methodology
- Sample

<u>Key findings</u>
- Understanding the influence of soaps
- The viewer's relationship with Isidingo
- Characters
- Storylines
- Strategic implications

2.2.2.1. *The second hermeneutic is more complete than the first.*

The market research project's data set was wider than the data included in the first hermeneutic, as it consisted of a total of 21 focus groups. The second hermeneutic therefore includes reference to focus groups that were not included in the discussion of the first hermeneutic. The second hermeneutic is also more complete than the first. Less prominent characters were, for instance, discussed in the second hermeneutic that were not discussed in the first. This is due to two reasons: Firstly, the second hermeneutic represents all the market researcher's interpretations, while (for reasons of economy) the first hermeneutic set out in Chapter 5 only represents an extract of 10 focus groups. Secondly, within hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher is encouraged to elaborate

on the interpretations of the research participant in order to create fuller interpretations and rectify incomplete interpretations (HP #13).

2.3. Interpretive influences

In keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenological research principles #10-12, it was important to describe any factors that influence the interpretations made by the market researcher and academic researcher. This was not done in an attempt to protect their interpretation from these biases, but rather to use and acknowledge the influence that it might have.

2.3.1.   The market researcher's interpretive influences.

The context within which the market researcher's interpretation was made is her experience in conducting research on television audiences and programmes, and her personal experience as a soap opera viewer.

The market researcher has several years of experience in conducting market research for local broadcast agencies, including the national broadcaster (the SABC) and the only pay-tv operators DStv and M-Net. Her experience spans all genres and audiences, and includes channel, programme and platform evaluations, channel, programme and platform development studies, genre studies and many audience studies. Within the soap genre, the market researcher has conducted numerous studies on three prominent local soap operas, including Egoli, 7de Laan and Isidingo as well as conducting a study testing concepts for new soaps. The market researcher is personally also an avid soap viewer and at the time of the research, would have described herself as a loyal Egoli and 7de Laan viewer.

2.3.2.   The academic researcher's interpretive influences.

The context within which the third hermeneutic is positioned includes various memories that shaped the academic researcher's understanding of a soap opera. These include early memories of watching soap operas, reading various articles in the media, as well as experience gained in her academic and professional careers.

Her first memory of watching a soap opera is watching the American soap opera - Santa Barbara during the 1980s. She recalls it as being dramatic and lavish. She also remembers watching Egoli with her mother in the soap's early years and writing a review of Egoli for a creative writing class in high school, in which she critiqued the acting of some of the newer members of the cast as over dramatised. She also has a memory of her mother – an Afrikaans language teacher – teaching her that every story has a plot line in which tension and conflict builds to a climax, after which the story is resolved and that readers (or viewers) get engrossed in a story because of a need to see the tension resolved. Her understanding of realism in television is unfluenced by memories of her mother teaching her of the importance of realism in décor, props, costumes and make-up in school theatre productions.

Another piece within the interpretive whole that is her lived reality of soap operas, is that she enjoyed a story a lecturer told her class in her third year of undergraduate study. A very popular female character in a soap opera in India was sent to school in the story and research showed that female admissions to tertiary institutions was statistically significantly higher following the year that the storyline played on air.

After she completed a BPsych degree she pursued a career in market research at a company which specialises in broadcast media research. Before commencing this academic study, the researcher had completed various studies on other television programmes, through which she realised that viewers tend to prefer certain genres; that transportation is a necessary determinant of viewer enjoyment of a story; and that storylines and characters are what interest viewers of narrative genres.

She had never watched the soap opera that forms the main context for this study, Isidingo, and knew it only as a soap opera in which Michelle Botes played the main character (the villainess Cherel). She has encountered most of the soap operas produced locally through other research conducted on television and therefore has an overall perception of the nature of each soap opera.

During the writing of the first draft of this thesis, three incidents took place which had an important influence on her interpretation of the data. She firstly read an interview with Michelle Botes that emphasised the educational possibilities of Isidingo to her. Gray Hofmeyr, the producer of Isidingo asked Michelle Botes if she believed that a television drama such as Isidingo has any value to the nation. She replied that she does believe it has immense value. She believes that the storylines are a reflection of our society and that there are opportunities for education in stories such as Nandipha's AIDS, Agnes's illiteracy, and how to start a small business. This is also true about the role of the law in our society, abuse, violence, etc. She expressed the opinion that it is important that these issues are addressed and explored, and that soaps offer such an opportunity in a non-threatening way (Retief, 2008).

The second incident that transpired during the time of writing was the death of Ashley Callie, the actress who played Lee Haines in Isidingo. The researcher found various comments on web-based viewer forums where viewers expressed their sadness, and she came across a website dedicated to Ashley Callie, created by her fans. These viewer responses reiterated the importance of the characters to viewers in their experience of the lived reality.

The last incident that had an impact on the researcher's interpretation of the data was an article that appeared in a national paper on the first of April 2008. At the time, the country experienced a power crisis with power outages in many areas. The article read that the government had asked that all soap operas be moved from their usual broadcast time in the evening to broadcast times between 12H00 and 14H00 in an attempt to save electricity (Willems, 2008). Viewers were outraged. The realisation

that the paper was able to make a successful 'April Fool's Joke' with this story illustrated the significance of soap time.

This section dealt with the research design, the sources of meaning (data sources), sampling, the structure and content of the data, and the interpretive influences of the two researchers. The next section will deal with the conceptualisation of the analysis process before setting out the detailed steps through which the analysis was conducted.

3.   Analysis and interpretation

The next section describes the process through which the analysis and interpretation was conducted. It firstly deals with the conceptualisation of the analysis and interpretation process, then follows with an overview of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. Lastly the implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway is illustrated.

3.1. Conceptualising the analysis and interpretation processes

In recognition of the hermeneutic phenomenological principle of historicity, it is fundamental to provide an audit trail of the method through which analysis was conducted, as this will allow the reader access to the interpretive process. A discussion of methodological approaches from which the current methodology has been derived, will be presented in this section. The authors referenced are summarised in Table 4.5. Each of these approaches will be described below.

Table 4.5 *Literature review of methodological processes*

Author	Main methodological contribution
Conroy (2003)	A structured hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology.
Laverty (2003)	Contrast between methodological considerations of phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology.
Ratner (2001)	A structured process for the identification and interpretation of themes.
Ryan and Bernard (2003)	Techniques to identify themes.
Thompson (1997)	A narratological interpretation of a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) illustrate various techniques to identify themes. They suggest that analysis should be done through a systematic process involving four main tasks: (1) discovering themes and sub-themes, (2) winnowing themes to a manageable few, (3) building hierarchies of themes, and (4) linking themes into theoretical models.

Ratner (2001) describes a structured process for the identification and interpretation of themes as summarised in Table 4.5. After central themes have been defined, themes are grouped into related

categories using the manipulative techniques of cutting and sorting (grouping individual expressions in which the same themes manifest). Ratner (2001) calls this level of organisation the 'General Theme', which conveys the broader meaning of related central themes. The meaning of each general theme is then explained and developed into a thick description in the General Structure before all general structures are then integrated and compared in the General Summary.

Table 4.6 *The analysis process as described by Ratner (2001)*

Statement	Central Themes	General Theme	General Structure	General Summary
Significant statement quoted verbatim from narrative account.	CT 1	GT 1	A thick description of each General Theme.	All general structures integrated and compared in the General Summary.
	CT 2			
	CT 3			
	CT 4			
	CT 5			

Laverty (2003) explains that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach starts with the researcher engaging in a process of self-reflection in order to use his/her biases and assumptions as an integral ingredient to the interpretive process. Meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched as they engage in the hermeneutic spiral and identify many constructions or multiple realities. Interpretation is influenced by pre-understandings and a movement between the text and its context. Through special attention to language, and an appreciation for the interpretive nature of human existence, an understanding incorporating the perspectives of the researcher and researched emerges.

Thompson (1997) argues that the concept of the hermeneutic circle implies that the research should start with a thorough review of the historic and cultural conditions relevant to the domain of interest. This ensures a broad and thorough frame of reference from which to embark on the interpretive process. He points to five key aspects of the hermeneutic view of stories: plot lines, symbolic parallels, intertextual meanings, existential themes and cultural codes, and continues to demonstrate how this approach generates three levels of interpretation. These are: (1) discerning the key patterns of meanings expressed by a given participant in the texts of his/her consumption stories, (2) identifying key patterns of meaning that emerge across the consumption stories expressed by different participants, and (3) deriving broader conceptual and managerial implications from the analysis of consumer narratives.

The methodology of Conroy (2003) is perhaps the most practical application of an HP research process. She uses a six-aspect interpretive phenomenological approach, which she describes as: 1) attending to footprints and concurrent preliminary interpretation (identifying meaning units and making preliminary interpretations), 2) in-depth interpretation (which involves writing a précis of what was said

and adding to the interpretation), 3) second reader introduction to the narratives (an audit involving five independent readers also contributing an interpretation), 4) paradigm shift identification (where she looks for hermeneutic turns in her own, as well as others' interpretations), 5) exemplar development (identifying representations of consistencies), and finally 6) principle development (integrated interpretations). Her approach moves from the inner core of the hermeneutic spiral (aspect 1 and 2) where there is a more immediate engagement between the researcher and the researched, to aspects 3-6 where there is a broader conceptual interaction with the data. The approach also convincingly illustrates how allegiance to the hermeneutic principles is upheld. Her interpretive framework, in contrast to that of Ratner, has only three levels as illustrated in Table 4.7, the actual narrative, a précis column and an interpretive column. The interpretive column consists of rich descriptions of themes identified and contains all levels of interpretation within the hermeneutic spiral, i.e. her own preliminary, as well as in-depth interpretation and the interpretation of second readers, as well as reference to her on-going log.

Table 4.7 *Conroy's (2003) interpretive framework*

Narrative #1	Précis	Interpretation
Verbal account of participant.	*Paraphrased summary of concept conveyed in the narrative – making the implicit explicit.*	• *Theme labels and explanations.* • *Second reader interpretations.* • *On-going reflective diary logs.*

The précis and interpretation become 'footprints' (her terms for meaning units) in their own right and provide fertile ground for mature interpretive phases of the research. I will now discuss the interpretation framework adapted from these approaches.

3.2. Overview of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway of this study

As Figure 4.3 illustrates, the interpretive framework was designed to follow the hermeneutic spiral of interpretation with each new level of interpretation building on the previous. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, interpretation started at the centre of the spiral with the interpretations provided by the soap opera viewers. These interpretations are elaborated on by the market researcher, which is then completed by the academic researcher.

Figure 4.3. The hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway of this study.

Practically, this interpretive process consisted of three primary tasks: 1) attending to footprints and direction markers; 2) finding themes and 3) drawing the map. The first task, attending to footprints and direction markers involved identifying meaning units (Task 1A) and elaborating on them (Task 1B). This provided a rich narrative from which to identify themes (Task 2). Lastly, the researcher prioritised themes, related them to theoretical thinking and arrived at a final, integrated interpretation. Table 4.8 summarises the steps, as well as the hermeneutic phenomenological principles on which each was based.

Table 4.8 *The interpretation framework*

CHAPTER	**Chapter 5 and 6:** Data			**Chapter 7:** Discussion
TASK	**Task 1: Attending to footprints and direction markers.**		**Task 2:** Interpretation	**Task 3:** Drawing the map.
	Task 1A: Finding footprints.	**Task 1B:** Accentuating footprints.		
DESCRIPTION	Extracting sections from the focus group transcripts and market research report that relate to the research question.	Writing a précis. Paraphrasing initial interpretations to make the implicit explicit and provide a preliminary interpretation.	Finding themes. Identifying re-current ideas that relate to the lived meaning of loyal soap opera viewership.	Organisation and prioritisation of themes and sub-themes; relating themes to literature and creating a final integrated interpretation.
REFERENCE	Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Conroy, 2003; Thompson, 1997; Ratner, 2001	Conroy, 2003; Thompson, 1997; Ratner, 2001	Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Conroy, 2003; Ratner, 2001	Conroy, 2003; Ratner, 2001;Thompson, 1997

HP PRINCIPLES	#2, 6, 9, 14, 17 and 18.	#1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 13.	# 13, 14, 17 and 19.	# 1, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 19.

3.2.1.   Defining a meaning unit.

Interpretation and meaning making in the mature phases of the analysis process was based on a consideration of the meaning units identified in the first, exploratory phases. The validity of the third hermeneutic is therefore entirely dependant on the integrity of the thematic categories identified within the first and second hermeneutic (Ratner, 2001).

Ratner (2001) argues that a meaning unit should be a coherent and distinct meaning extracted from the narrative being studied. To qualify as a meaning unit, it must conserve the psychological integrity of the theme being expressed, by neither reducing it to meaningless abbreviated segments, nor confounding it by making references to other ideas.

Meaning units should also have a direct relevance to the research question. In the analysis, the researcher found ideas that qualify as themes under the above definition, yet held no relevance to positive viewing experiences and subsequent loyalty to a soap opera. In such cases, the meaning unit was not included in the theme hierarchy.

During Task 1 in the interpretive framework, the researcher therefore looked for psychologically significant phrases that represented a coherent and distinct idea relevant to the lived meaning of loyal soap opera viewership. This process was used for the re-interpretation of both the soap opera viewer (footprints) and market researcher's (direction marker) interpretations.

3.2.2.   Defining a theme.

After identifying (Task 1A) and elaborating on meaning units (Task 1B), the researcher looked for themes that reoccurred in the narrative and related to the research problem. The objective was not to arrive at an objective view, but rather to elaborate the interpretation to include all psychological processes that made a significant contribution to audience loyalty.

A theme is an interpretive conclusion that the participant ascribes to and allows to influence his/her behaviour. Participants' descriptions of their behaviour or beliefs are expressions that present the theme to the researcher. The data preserved in verbatim transcripts can be seen as a collection of expressions through which the researcher is able to discover the themes or interpretive conclusions that constitute participants' lived realities (Opler, 1945).

Themes should depict the psychological significance of the meaning units (Ratner, 2001). If a soap opera viewer surmises that she need not be concerned about what other family members would

prefer to watch during soap opera time, it could be inferred that she is emphasising her own needs over that of the family, and that it is a form of self-gratification. Any inference made about the psychological significance of a statement should, however, be consistent with the larger body of text. If it is clear from other parts of the narrative that the whole family consensually watches the soap opera with her, self-gratification would likely not be an accurate description.

Meaning units and themes have now clearly been defined. To follow is a discussion on the researcher's own interpretive framework, based mainly on that of Conroy (2003), yet also drawing from other theorists where deemed appropriate.

3.3. Implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway of this study

The hermeneutic phenomenological analysis pathway of this study has been described above. I will now discuss the practical implementation of each of the tasks identified in the preceding section with reference to specific strategies that were followed to complete the analysis.

3.3.1. Task 1: Attending to footprints and direction markers.

The first task when analysing the first and second hermeneutic was to attend to the footprints and direction markers. In this task, the researcher first identified meaning in the focus group transcripts, diaries, research fieldnotes and market research presentation that held significance to the research question. After these meaning units were identified, the researcher paraphrased the narratives to make their implicit meaning explicit.

3.3.1.1. Task 1A: Identifying meaning units that held significance to the research question.

Since only extracts of the full transcripts are being included (refer to section 4.3 on the ethical considerations), the first step in engaging with the narrative was to make text selections in accordance to the definition of what constitutes a meaning unit (refer to 3.2.1 above). The identification of meaning units requires a decision on what comprises a distinct and coherent theme, Ratner (2001) warns that the identification of meaning units can only happen once the researcher is familiar with the complete account, i.e. once the researcher understands what the soap opera viewer is saying. This sub-task therefore entailed an attempt at "understanding the internal logic of the expression" (HP Research Principle #5) to ensure that the verbal accounts selected were meaningful within context of the larger narrative.

3.3.1.2. Task 1B: Writing a précis - paraphrasing narratives to make the implicit explicit.

Ratner (2001) put forth a procedure for identifying culturally significant themes in narrative statements. He explains that after identifying 'meaning units' the researcher paraphrases them into "central themes".

I revisited the interpretations of the participants and the original researcher with specific focus on drawing out what was hidden in the narrative accounts that the narrators were not conscious of. This allowed the development of principles that are based on the reinterpretation of all interpretations.

The essence of the footprint remained intact (i.e. the conceptual integrity of the expression was preserved), but was made clearer and more pronounced. The original meaning unit was translated, interpreted and reworded to elucidate its full meaning.

Some expressions of themes were palpable while others were subtle, symbolic or even idiosyncratic. The meaning and psychological significance of a theme were therefore not always apparent in the words used to describe its expressions, and had to be inferred based on implicit rules, assumptions, and distinctions.

For this reason, the researcher took note not only of what was said, but also with what was implied or suggested by what was said (Ratner, 2001). It was therefore impossible for the researcher to distance herself from the dialogue. To make the necessary interpretation and provide the additional depth, the researcher stepped into the clearing, bringing with her, her own interpretive influences.

Table 4.9 Conroy (2003) illustrates the interpretive framework within which analysis took place. An excerpt is taken from one of the participants' responses as an example of the analysis in this phase.

Table 4.9 *The interpretive framework – Task 1*

Task 1A: Finding footprints		Task 1B: Accentuating footprints
Narrative #1 *Black female, regular viewers, age 50+*	**Précis**	**Interpretation**
Focus group excerpts in accordance to the definition of a meaning unit.	*Paraphrased summary of concept conveyed in the narrative – making the implicit explicit.*	• *Theme labels and explanations.* • *Includes on-going reflective diary logs.*
M: Which soap do you watch? "I watch Isidingo because it is not as far fetched as Days and Bold"	- An Isidingo viewer yet has some knowledge of Days of our Lives and The Bold and the Beautiful" - Colloquially called "Days" and "Bold" - Groups Days and Bold in one category. - Recognises fantasy storylines in Days and Bold.	T1: Makes distinction between Escapist and Reality soaps T2: Only views soaps within own soap genre. *Diary note 08/01/2008: I learnt today that Days*

	- Inherent value judgement: possibly sanctions disapproval of escapist soaps as expressed by members of her culture or social group. - Perceives realistic storylines in Isidingo. - Preference for Isidingo based on it being different from Days and Bold. - Spontaneously justifies preference for Isidingo.	*started in 1965- even before TV in SA. These (escapist soaps) could be the generic against which all other soaps are compared.*

The first column relates to Phase 1 A: "Finding footprints" and contains verbatim quotations from the text that relate to the research question. The second column consist of what Conroy (2003) calls the précis. Phase 1B: "Accentuating footprints" is recorded here as it is a summary of the narrative, yet makes the implicit explicit.

The précis should be interpretive but the comments should remain meaningful to the context it refers to, as well as relating the full meaning expressed (Conroy, 2003; Ratner, 2001). If a viewer said "I watch my soap every chance I get", it could not be summarised as "regular viewer" or "misses some episodes" or even "internally motivated to watch". Although each is technically accurate on some level, not one of these descriptors succeeds in communicating the apparent, inherent longing that she has to watch more episodes.

In the example in Table 4.9 the précis column presents a summary of all the unsaid but implied content inherent to the statement: "I watch Isidingo because it is not as far fetched as Days and Bold". The speaker could also have said that: 1) she does not watch Days of our lives and The Bold and the Beautiful but she has pre-existing knowledge of it, to the extent of being comfortable to use their colloquial names, that 2) she knows "Days and Bold" has unrealistic storylines, 3) she thinks that soaps with such storylines should not be watched, 4) soaps with perceived realistic storylines are superior to those with unrealistic storylines, and that 5) her choice to watch Isidingo is as much a rejection of "Days and Bold" as it is an approval of Isidingo.

Each one of these statements is a part of the whole experience, however, only when combining them do we "stay close to the lived experience" (HP Principle # 9). These statements did not represent the "theme" as per the researcher's definition. Themes (as defined in 3.2.2) were recorded in the interpretive column.

For this reason, the researcher did not use the interpretive structure put forth by Ratner (2001) above, as she believed it creates the risk of fragmenting lived experiences (a key Husserlian concept) into

disconnected sub-themes, which will necessarily need to be combined in a later stage of the research to retain the psychological integrity that Ratner (2001) sanctions. The Interpretation Worksheet suggested by Conroy (2003) (Table 4.6) and illustrated in Table 4.9 was more appropriate, as it utilises the précis column to accentuate, elaborate and "thicken" the narrative account while allowing the theme to emerge from the collective concept in Task 2.

3.3.2. Task 2: Interpretation.

Tasks 1A and B prepared a rich narrative from which to extract themes. Observational techniques, as described by Ratner (2001) and Ryan and Bernard (2003) were then used to identify themes (Task 2) in the narrative.

The following techniques were applied:

- Repetition: Looking for ideas that reoccurred within and across different accounts. The number of repetitions necessary to constitute a recurring theme was relative to the overall content and nature of the interpretations. For example, some characters were particularly enjoyed by most loyal viewers.

- Indigenous typologies or categories: Looking for terms or expressions that were used in an unusual way by all members of the group, for example, referring to Days of our lives and *The* Bold and the Beautiful as "Days" and "Bold".

- Metaphors and analogies: Looking for metaphoric speech that left out information everyone knows (which is implied by what is said), for example the expression "Watching soaps is like coming home"; leaves out that people are usually relieved when arriving home; feel comfortable in familiar surrounding, experiences a sense of belonging, and usually knows the other people who are also home intimately.

- Similarities and differences: Comparing different groups' answers to the same question. Similarities could lead to themes, while differences could be telling of sub-themes within different demographics. For example, regular viewers were more individually motivated to watch soap operas, while occasional viewers' viewing were more dependant on social influence.

- Linguistic connectors: Looking for words and phrases (such as 'if', 'before', 'instead of') that indicate causal relationships, for example, "I watch Egoli because I recognise some of the places the scenes are filmed in…"

- Missing data: Looking for things that are not mentioned, for example, all male groups mentioned that they like and admire the character Barker, while none of the female groups expressed the same sentiment.

- Theory related material: Apart from identifying indigenous themes, the researcher also looked for confirmation of concepts mentioned in literature, for example, looking for evidence of pseudo-social interaction with characters (Cohen, 2001).

One of the first sources of a-priori themes was the set of interview questions asked (as summarise in the discussion guide). Unlike the literature review, these themes were partly empirical (Ryan &

Bernard, 2003) as they were designed to address a certain problem/objective identified by the commissioning client and already included some hypotheses. Research questions were also adapted within the group to immediately accommodate empirical information that emerged in the conversation with participants. The discussion guide as presented at the beginning of this chapter therefore represents the first collection of a-priori themes that influenced the nature of the interpretations made.

3.3.3. Task 3: "Drawing the map" – final integrated interpretation and theory development.

The concluding task in the HP interpretive framework entailed creating an extensive, integrated description of the lived experience from the individual-level of expressions and meanings (Thompson, 1997). The researcher's immersion in a background of literature on the subject was the most relevant in this stage. Interpretation at this point was neither pulling out a theory from the data nor fitting an understanding derived from literature onto the text. Rather, the researcher's developing theoretical background became an frame of reference within which interpretation took place, while engagement with the participants' narratives allowed the opportunity for these initial (theoretical interpretations) to be changed and extended (Thompson, 1997).

3.3.3.1. Conceptual Preparation – creating an orienting frame of reference.

The researcher's conceptual preparation (Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997) included a literature review and making explicit her own biases and assumptions that were used as an integral part of the interpretive process (HP Research Principles #10-12). The literature review contributed insights on audience research, television research and research on soap operas within different contexts, and equipped the researcher with a broader knowledge base from which to interpret the current data. The reflective diary allowed the researcher to make her pre-existing ideas explicit and actively use it as interpretive influence during analysis.

A literature study could be regarded as an appeal to objectivity through an attempt to gather all information available on the research topic and offering an all-inclusive view of the topic. The literature study in the current study was not included in an appeal to objectivity. Doing so would be diluting the current hermeneutic phenomenological study with a key principle of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. True to the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition the researcher admits that all interpretation remains context bound and that no objective conclusion on the psychological processes culminating in audience loyalty could really be made.

By including the literature study, the researcher allows insights from other studies to become part of the context from which her interpretations are made. All within the understanding that another researcher, interpreting the data following a different literature review could arrive at an interpretation different from her own. A thorough revision of the academic knowledge available on the subject broadens the researcher bias. This is essential as the success of the study depended on the breadth

and depth of the researcher's background knowledge and her ability to make conceptual connections between literature and data (Thompson, 1997).

3.3.3.2. Prioritising themes.

Opler (1945) suggests that the importance of a theme relates to; 1) the frequency in which it appears, 2) if it appears in different types of ideas and practices, 3) the reaction of participants if the theme is violated, and 4) the degree to which a theme's expression is controlled by specific contexts. These guidelines were used to create hierarchies of themes during Task 3.

3.3.3.3. Linking themes into theoretical models.

In Chapter 7 the hierarchies of themes were interpreted in cognisance of theoretical models identified in the literature review, as well as the researcher's own biases captured in the reflective diary. As if in a hermeneutic circle of her own (HP Research Principle #15), the researcher neither 'projected' her background understanding onto the data, nor tried to 'extract' a theory from it. She engaged in a dialectical process, in which the one interpretation shaped the other to arrive at a fuller interpretation that neither of these could have produced on its own.

3.3.3.4. Identifying paradigm shifts.

As explained in Chapter 3, Dasein refers to a person being-in-the-world. If applied to this study it would mean the viewer mostly engages with the soap opera with what Heidegger calls the ready-to-hand mode of engagement. In this undifferentiated mode of existence, silent thought determines his/her actions until the taken-for granted-background is challenged. When this occurs (such as when a soap viewer is asked to overtly comment on her lived experience in a research setting) the soap opera viewer will change her way of being and acting to match her new context.

The same process occurred when the researcher commenced with the interpretive task. The hermeneutic task of interpretation always inherently implies a shared meaning. When trying to understand a text, the comprehension of the reader starts with an understanding she anticipates will emerge. This anticipation or projection is bound by a taken-for-granted background which encompasses the exploratory terrain and determines what the reader expects she will find (Conroy, 2003).

In this way, making sense of other's interpretations provided the opportunity for hermeneutic turns or paradigm shifts to emerge. The researcher looked for themes that alluded to a degree of consistency in interpretation, but she also looked for inconsistencies and fluctuations in the nature of interpretations in all levels of the enquiry. She also expected her own projected understanding to be challenged. This recognition that paradox exists was in keeping with Heidegger's thinking about historicity. It acknowledged that everyday interpretation merges with re-interpretation, and is the practical application of the notion of interdependence, where our knowledge and experience is co-constituted with others (Conroy, 2003).

4.   Reflection on the methodology

The last part of this chapter is a reflection on the methodology. This reflection includes a discussion on the quality of the research and the ethics of the research.

4.1. Quality of the research

Traditionally the quality of research is judged based on its validity (or the extent to which the methodology succeeds in studying the envisaged research topic) and reliability (the extent to which the same results will be achieved by another researcher repeating the methodology). These measures have to be redefined within a hermeneutic phenomenological context, however.

The quality of a study should be judged by the terms of its own paradigm (Golafshani, 2003; Rolfe, 2006). The discussion on the reliability and validity of the research therefore draws on the principles of research within hermeneutic phenomenology as presented in Chapter 3.

4.1.1.   Validity of the HP research pathway.

In hermeneutic phenomenological research, validity is an issue of rigour (Laverty, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1981) provide four tests of rigor which are useful to increase the validity of hermeneutic phenomenological studies. The tests are:

1) Truth value (credibility), which refers to how close the interpretation conforms to what the participants are trying to say. Truth value can be increased if participants are able to review their own narratives, as well as interpretations made in later stages of the research (HP Research Principle #2). Seeing that the researcher is unfamiliar with the original participants and this falls outside the scope of a secondary analysis the researcher stayed as close to the narrative as possible when reviewing the first and second hermeneutic. HP Research Principle #9.

2) Applicability (fittingness), which is how useful the research is considered to be by those who read it. As discussed in Chapter 8, the current study makes a useful contribution to media psychology, media studies and research methodology.

3) Consistency (audit-ability), referring to equal treatment of all participants' data. A semi-structured analysis procedure, as is set out above, guides the interpretation process and ensured consistency in the analysis of each account. One set of theme identification techniques was used where appropriate, while the research adheres to the HP Research Principles throughout.

4) Neutrality (confirmability) or the extent to which the research is objective from researcher bias. Neutrality and confirmability can never be achieved completely within the hermeneutic

phenomenological paradigm since each reader brings with him/her a different background that will necessarily create different interpretations. A clear decision trail has, however, been left to allow the reader access to the full interpretive process (HP Research Principles #10 and 11).

4.1.2.　　Reliability of the HP research pathway.

Reliability, or the possibility that another researcher performing the same study will arrive at the same findings, is another aspect of methodological rigour that is traditionally discussed when considering the quality of research. Like validity, this notion also has to be redefined within a hermeneutic phenomenological context. With its emphasis on interpretation and historicity, no hermeneutic phenomenological study would qualify as reliable, since each reader or subsequent researcher will add a unique history to the study.

Where bracketing (keeping the research pure from researcher bias) is a core principle in transcendental phenomenology, multiple instances of interpretation that allow patterns to emerge, a detailed discussion on how these patters emerged, as well as the interpretive process itself, is critical to reliability in hermeneutic phenomenological studies (Laverty, 2003). This, as well as most of the goals discussed under validity, can be achieved by keeping a decision trail that documents rational, procedure, outcome and a prolonged persistent engagement with the narrative (Laverty, 2003).

Within this context, I have attempted to address the issues of research quality in the following ways:

a. By making explicit the order in which chapters were written and reviewed to allow a subsequent researcher to re-walk the same path as I did (although he/she will leave their own footprints).
b. By providing a detailed account of the methodology in earlier sections of this chapter.
c. By separating the third hermeneutic from the first and second to ensure that the reader can effortlessly follow the researcher's decision trail.

4.2.　　Ethical considerations

Two major ethical considerations arise when conducting secondary analysis of archived qualitative data. The first is preserving the confidentiality and anonymity of original research participants, and the second is the protection of copyright and the complex issues of ownership and control of research data (Mauthner, Parry & Backett-Milburn, 1998).

Debate on the ethics of revisiting archived qualitative data includes the preservation of contextual information that could arguably make the data more useful to secondary researchers. Mauthner et al. (1998) argue that this information does not necessarily increase the value of an archived data set to be equal to when it was used in primary research. According to them even if contextual information was preserved, the meaning does not in the data but in the process of interpretation employed to make sense of it. This view is congruent to the hermeneutic phenomenological approach followed in

the current secondary analysis, although some contextual information was preserved in the dataset that was analysed. Contextual information that was preserved and used in this study includes the age, gender, race, location and viewing behaviour of the research participants. The above information does not pose significant ethical challenges because no identifying information was captured and used. The research participants were therefore anonymous to the researcher, addressing Mauthner et al.'s (1998) first ethical consideration.

Not being able to identify research participants does, however, pose a challenge in itself. Ideally, the secondary researcher should contact the original research participants and obtain consent to re-use the data (Heaton, 1998). However, Heaton argues that when a secondary researcher is not able to contact the research participants of the primary research to obtain additional consent, the researcher should make a professional judgement on whether the secondary analysis violates the agreement made with the research participants in the primary research.

Informed consent was obtained from participants in the primary research by Qualitative Intelligence (QI). The process through which consent is obtained in all QI's studies follows a two-phased approach. During the process of identifying and recruiting potential research participants, the interviewers who are tasked with recruitment are given a recruitment script. The recruitment script discloses the purpose of the research and asks the potential participant if he/she would be interested in participating in the research, should they qualify. The first consent is then given verbally by the participant as a willingness to be screened for possible inclusion in the research. Participation is therefore voluntary and research participants obtain a financial incentive to thank them for their contribution to the research once they have contributed. The second consent is obtained at the commencement of the focus group. The moderator welcomes the research participants to the focus group and begins by explaining the purpose of the session and the role of the observers in the adjacent viewing room. The moderator assures respondents of anonymity and obtains permission to record the discussion and transcribe it for further analysis.

As suggested by Heaton (1998), the academic researcher made a professional judgement that the study does not violate the agreement made with participants. This judgement was based on an analysis of the consent described above. Firstly, participants are not identified by personal information and the agreement that their anonymity will be protected remains intact. Secondly, participants gave permission for the focus groups to be recorded, transcribed and used in further analysis. The term further analysis was not defined when the original agreement was made. The academic researcher therefore makes a professional judgement that secondary analysis conducted months after the conclusion of the research is included in this term.

The second ethical consideration identified by Mauthner et al. (1998) is the protection of copyright, ownership and control of the data. The data-owner is the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) who commissioned the market research study. The SABC has provided written permission for

the data to be used in the study. The broadcast media industry is, however, an increasingly competitive environment. The researcher therefore took the following precautions to ensure that the competitive intelligence of the data-owner is protected:

1. The complete transcripts of focus groups with viewers of the soap opera were analysed, but only excerpts that allude to the psychological processes that contribute to the formation of loyal viewership were included as verbatim quotations in the chapter dealing with footprints.

2. The complete market research report was analysed, but only excerpts that allude to the first researcher's interpretations on the psychological processes necessary for the formation of viewer loyalty were included in the chapter dealing with direction markers.

3. The following elements of the market research study did not form part of the current study:
    a. The market research brief detailing the SABC's strategic objective with the soap opera, the research and envisaged changes to the soap opera.
    b. The strategic recommendations made to the SABC in the market research report.

A last ethical consideration is the protection of the propriety information of the market research agency who conducted the primary research. Propriety information of the market research agency includes their interpretation of the client brief and their approach to compiling the market research proposal and presentation. The market research agency, Qualitative Intelligence (QI), has provided written permission that the data may be used in the study. The researcher did, however, take caution to protect the research agency's competitive intelligence by not including the market research proposal or the full presentation in the study. By only including excerpts that make significant contributions to the interpretation of the lived reality under study, QI's propriety information is protected.

The research was also approved by the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities. The committee considered all possible ethical difficulties associated with the research including: a) informed consent, b) risks and possible disadvantages to the participants in the original market research, the data-owner (the SABC) and the market research agency (Qualitative Intelligence), c) the anonymity of the participants in the market research study, d) the protection of proprietary information of the data-owner and the market research agency, e) the dissemination of the research results, and f) the storage of research data.

5. In conclusion

Chapter 4 is a detailed discussion of the methodology used in the study. It sketched the context of the study with reference to the market research study on which the current study is a secondary analysis.

It provided a brief introduction to different authors' approach to secondary analysis and interpretation within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. The current study draws mostly on Conroy (2003) and follows an interpretive framework that – consistent with the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor – completes a hermeneutic spiral. The methodology consists of three primary tasks which, completed with cognisance to the HP Principles outlined in Chapter 3, produced an integrated, rich interpretation of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty.

Chapter 5 includes Task 1 and 2 for the First Hermeneutic. It deals with participant's understanding of their lived meaning and includes the meaning units and themes that relate to the psychological processes they experience as conducive to their loyalty to a soap opera.

Chapter 5: The first hermeneutic

1.   Introduction

The methodological application of the theoretical perspective was discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The study is structured around three hermeneutics: that of the research participants, the first researcher in the market research study and the current study. The current chapter analyses and summarises the first hermeneutic or the soap viewers' interpretation of their lived reality. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, the content of this chapter consists of four main sections. The chapter commences with a description of the sample and a presentation of the meaning units. Following the presentation of the sample and meaning units, the ten themes identified in this hermeneutic are presented and discussed. Lastly, one inconsistency in the data (which is considered a hermeneutic turn in the interpretation) is discussed.

Figure 5.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 5.

2.   Description of the sample

The sample consists of 10 focus groups as well as a set of diaries from a group of participants who participated in a deprivation exercise, and a focus group with the participants who took part in the deprivation exercise. A total number of 65 participants' interpretation is included in the first hermeneutic. Each group is defined as consisting of either loyal or occasional viewers and also represent a spread of gender, age and race groups[6]. Table 5.1 summarises the sample of the focus

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[6] The academic researcher is aware that race in South Africa is contested (Posel, 2001). In an attempt to stay as close as possible to the narrative (HP#9) these classifications are used as they are used in the original market research proposal. This also follows the categories currently used by Statistics South Africa to classify people (Lehohla, 2005).

groups and the participants (referred to collectively as one group) who participated in the deprivation exercise.

Table 5.1 *Sample summary*

GROUP	RACE	GENDER	AGE	VIEWERSHIP	Location	N
1.	Black	Female	25-34	Regular	Johannesburg	6
2.	White	Female	50+	Regular	Johannesburg	6
3.	White	Female	25-35	Occasional	Johannesburg	6
4.	White & Indian	Female	25-34	Regular	Durban	6
5.	White & coloured	Female	25-39	Regular	Port Elizabeth	6
6.	Black	Male	35-49	Regular	Durban	6
7.	Black	Male	25-34	Regular	Durban	6
8.	Black	Female	30-40	Occasional	Johannesburg	6
9.	White & coloured	Female	18-24	Occasional	Stellenbosch	6
10.	Black	Male	25-34	Occasional	Johannesburg	6
Diaries and focus group	Black	Male & Female	25-49	Regular	Johannesburg	5
TOTAL						65

3. Presentation of meaning units

In preparation for this chapter, the academic researcher read through the focus group transcripts in search of verbatim quotations that related to the research questions. As illustrated in Table 5.2 each verbatim quotation was then paraphrased into a précis to explicate its inherent meaning. After writing each précis, the academic researcher identified the meaning units that relate to the research questions (footprints) in each focus group. The academic researcher lastly compared the footprints present in all the groups and calculated the total number of groups that mentioned each footprint. Table 5.3 summarises the result of this calculation.

Table 5.2 *The process through which footprints were identified*

	Task 1: Attending to Footprints		Task 2: Recording footprints.
TASK	**Task 1A:** Finding verbatim quotations.	**Task 1B:** Accentuating verbatim quotations.	
DESCRIPTION	Extracting verbatim quotations from the focus group transcripts that relate to the research questions.	Writing a précis. Paraphrasing verbatim quotations to make the implicit explicit.	Identifying re-current meaning units in the précis that relate to the lived meaning of loyal soap opera viewership.

LOCATION	Analysis document not included in the thesis.	Analysis document not included in the thesis.	Table 5.3

Table 5.3 lists the footprints on the left and indicates: 1) the total number of groups that mentioned each footprint, 2) which groups mentioned the footprint, and 3) whether the groups that mentioned the footprint were regular or occasional viewers. To reduce data, only footprints that occur in the interpretation of three groups or more are included in the summary, as a general rule. Exceptions are when a footprint expressed by only two groups could be considered a violation (or opposite) of another footprint (e.g. four groups believe storylines in local soaps are resolved quickly and two groups believe storylines in international soaps drag out) or if it was expressed by groups of the same demographic (e.g. two black male groups appreciative of the fact that the Matebanes retain links to their cultural heritage).

Table 5.3 *Footprint summary*

Footprint	No of groups	Which groups	Regular or occasional viewers or some of both (mixed)
Motivation for viewing			
1. Viewers are very interested in certain characters and less interested in other characters.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
2. Viewers are interested in following the resolution of storylines.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
3. Psuedo-social interaction.	5	1, 4, 5, 9 and 11	Mixed
4. Loyalty based on being up to date with the storyline and not necessarily watching every episode.	3	4, 5, 10	Mixed
5. Soap's proximity to real life as a motivation for watching.	5	1-3, 5 and 6	Mixed
6. Loyalty is compared to an addiction.	4	2,5,9 and diaries	Mixed
7. Viewership is positively influenced by the specific timeslot in which the soap airs.	5	1, 3, 6, 8 and 9	Mixed

146. Escapism[7]	3	2,3, 5	Mixed
Soap repertoires			
8. All watch Isidingo.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
9. Watch 7de Laan, which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo.	5	2, 3, 5, 9 and 10	Mixed
10. Watch Backstage, which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo.	4	3, 4, 8 and 10	Mixed
11. Watch The Bold and the Beautiful.	7	1-5, 9 and 10	Mixed
12. Watch Days of our lives.	4	1, 4, 5 and 10	Mixed
13. Viewership includes local soap operas (other than Isidingo).	10	1-10	Mixed
14. Viewership includes international soap operas.	7	1-5 and 9-10	Mixed
15. Soap repertoire includes three or more soaps.	7	1-5, 7-8	Mixed
Viewing behaviour			
16. Watch Isidingo during the prime timeslot at 18:30 on weekdays during which the new episode is aired.	6	1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
17. Watch any of the repeat transmissions including the next day repeat in the morning or the weekend omnibus.	6	4-7, 9 and 10	Mixed
18. Viewers channel hop during commercial breaks.	3	8-10	Occasional only
19. Watch soaps with female family members.	7	1-3, 5-7 and 10	Mixed
20. Watch soaps in a mixed group of family members.	4	3, 6, 7, and 9	Mixed
21. Was introduced to Isidingo by other family members.	4	2, 7, 8 and 9	Mixed
22. Have developed own loyalty since being introduced by another family member.	4	2, 7, 8 and 9	Mixed
23. Discuss what happens in Isidingo with other people.	6	1, 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10	Mixed
24. Time in which the soap is watched is regarded as a time for physical and/or mental relaxation	3	1, 2 and 9	Mixed
25. Non-TV related responsibilities (such as chores) sometimes compete with Isidingo.	4	1, 3, 8 and 9	Mixed

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[7] This footprint was identified after all the other footprints and true to the hermeneutic phenomenology principle of historicity, it was numbered accordingly.

26. Viewership of Isidingo extends many years.	7	1-3, 6, 7, 9 and 10	Mixed
Beliefs about soaps			
27. Good soaps have realistic storylines.	8	1-6, 9-10	Mixed
28. International soaps are different from local soaps.	4	1, 2, 4 and 10	Mixed
29. Prefer storylines that are realistic.	6	1-3, 6 and 9-10	Mixed
30. Dislike unrealistic storylines.	4	1, 4, 5 and 6	Regular only
31. Storylines progress quickly in good soaps.	4	2-4 and 9	Mixed
32. Dislike when an actor is replaced.	3	5-7	Regular only
33. Good soaps are technically realistic (incl. acting, sets and production quality).	4	1, 2, 4 and 10	Mixed
34. Soaps have storylines that are generic to the genre.	7	1-3, 5, 6, 8 and 10	Mixed
35. Dialogue in local soaps includes vernacular, South African languages.	3	4, 5 and 10	Mixed
36. The storylines in local soaps are up to date with current events and are resolved quickly.	4	3-5 and 9	Mixed
37. Storylines take very long to resolve in International soaps *(Relates to previous footprint).*	2	4 and 9	Mixed
38. Storylines in local soaps resemble real life.	3	2, 5 and 10	Mixed
39. International soaps are more likely to have unrealistic storylines than local soaps.	4	1, 4, 9 and 10	Mixed
Beliefs about Isidingo			
40. Isidingo is appreciated for having quality acting.	3	2, 5 and 10	Mixed
41. Isidingo is appreciated for having storylines that are resolved quickly.	3	1, 2 and 4	Regular only
42. Represents an ideal South Africa in terms of race relations.	3	3, 8 and 10	Occasional only
43. Isidingo is for mature audiences.	3	6, 7 and 10	Mixed
44. Has storylines based within a business context.	5	3, 6, 7, 8 and 10	Mixed
45. Has characters that resemble people the viewer could know from real life.	5	1-4, 6 and 10	Mixed
46. Is a serious soap.	4	1-3, 5	Mixed
47. Has strong characters that challenge each other.	3	1-3	Mixed

48. Has intriguing storylines.	4	1-4	Mixed
Isidingo and social issues			
49. Isidingo deals with social issues.	10	1-10	Mixed
50. Isidingo educates people on how to deal with social issues.	8	1, 3-8 and 10	Mixed
51. Isidingo deals with HIV/AIDS	10	1-10	Mixed
52. Isidingo deals with mixed race couples.	10	1-4, 5-10 & diaries	Mixed
53. Isidingo deals with homosexuality.	3	1, 3 and 6	Mixed
54. Isidingo teaches viewers about people who are different from themselves.	3	5, 8 and 10	Mixed
Storyline preferences			
55. Viewers speculate about what will happen in storylines.	6	1, 4-6, 9 and diaries	Mixed
56. Enjoy short storylines more, but understand the need for longer storylines.	5	2, 4-7	Regular only
57. Storylines should involve both the business and private lives of characters.	4	2, 3, 6 and 7	Mixed
Storylines recalled			
58. Revenge and conflict between Cherel and Barker.	11	All groups and diaries	Mixed
59. Joe and the chicken.	5	2-4, 7 and 10	Mixed
60. Barker setting up Rajesh	4	1, 4, 6 and diaries	Regular only
61. Cherel murdering Duncan.	6	1,2,4,5, 9 and diaries	Mixed
62. Zeb's infidelity and child.	3	1, 6 and 10	Mixed
63. Tanya's suicide	6	1-4, 6 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Barker Haines			
64. Involved with and knowledgeable about Barker	10	1-10	Mixed
65. Like and admire Barker (males only).	3	6,7 and 10	Mixed
66. Barker is invincible.	5	2, 4-6 and 10	Mixed
67. A need to see Barker's humane side, which is Lee.	4	2-4, 9	Mixed
68. Barker should get punished for all he did.	3	2, 6 and 9	Mixed
69. Barker manipulates in relationships	3	1, 2 and 4	Regular only

70. Barker is immoral.	3	3, 9 and diaries	Mixed
71. Barker and Cherel are rivals.	10	1-10	Mixed
72. Learn from Barker not to be an overprotective father.	3	3, 6 and 7	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Cherel			
73. Barker and Cherel is the core of Isidingo's appeal.	5	3, 4, 5, 9 and 10	Mixed
74. Very involved with Cherel, have very strong opinions on her.	10	1-5, 7-10	Mixed
75. Cherel is resilient.	4	1, 4, 5 and 10	Mixed
76. Cherel is strong.	5	1, 3, 6, 8, and 9	Mixed
77. Cherel should get punished for murdering Duncan.	3	1,6 and 9	Mixed
78. Cherel also shows her vulnerable side.	4	2-4, 9	Mixed
79. Have knowledge of her past and have empathy for her.	6	1-5, 9	Mixed
80. Cherel is determined.	3	1, 8-10	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Lee Haines and Rajesh			
81. Involved with Lee, have empathy for her.	7	1-4, 8-9 and diaries	Mixed
82. Lee is under the influence of her father.	8	1-6, 10 and diaries	Mixed
83. Lee could and should stand up to her father.	6	1-4, 9 and 10	Mixed
84. Lee is a strong business woman.	6	1-4, 8 and 9	Mixed
85. Lee should develop and attain the same success in her personal life as she has in her professional life.	4	4-6, 9	Mixed
86. Lee could take over from Cherel as the main bitch.	4	3, 5, 7 and 10	Mixed
87. Viewers have empathy for why Lee is as naïve as she is.	4	1, 3 and 6	Mixed
88. Know Rajesh.	4	2-4 and 9	Mixed
89. Rajesh was framed by Barker.	3	1, 3 and 6	Mixed
90. Lee and Rajesh in a relationship.	5	1, 3, 5, 6 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: The Matabane Family			
91. Love the Matabanes.	7	1, 2, 4 and 6-10	Mixed
92. The Matabanes retain links to their cultural heritage *(two black males groups).*	2	6 and 10	Mixed

93. Would not like the Matabanes to go through financial trouble again, but understand that it would be reality if they did.	3	2, 7 and 9	Mixed
94. Have watched the Matabanes work very hard for what they have achieved over the years.	3	6-7 and 9	Mixed
95. The Matabanes are admired as a real family.	5	4-6, 8 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Agnes			
96. Like and admire Agnes.	8	1-4, 6-7, 9 and 10	Mixed
97. Agnes will do anything for her family.	3	1, 2 and 10	Mixed
98. Agnes is strong.	5	1, 2, 6, 7 and 9	Mixed
99. Agnes is recognised as fulfilling a mother role.	7	1-5, 7 and 9	Mixed
100. Agnes should be unfaithful to Zeb.	3	2, 6 and diaries	Regular only
101. Take Agnes's side over Zeb.	6	1,2,4, 7-9	Mixed
102. Agnes worked very hard.	4	1, 2, 5 and 6	Regular only
103. Agnes is recognisable as someone that one could know in real life.	3	1, 2 and 4	Regular only
Beliefs about characters: Zeb			
104. Like and identify with Zeb.	3	6, 7 and 10	Mixed
105. Strongly dislike Zeb.	3	2, 3 and 9	Mixed
106. Have empathy for Zeb.	5	1, 2, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
107. Recognise Zeb as someone they could know in real life.	5	2, 3, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
108. Zeb is in conflict with his daughter.	6	1-4, 6 and 10	Mixed
109. Zeb teaches viewers how not to behave	4	4, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
110. Zeb is old fashioned and too traditional.	3	2, 4 and 9	Mixed
111. Zeb rejects Agnes.	3	2, 6 and 9	Mixed
112. Disapproves of both his children's relationships.	3	2, 3 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Lettie and Joe			
113. Know Lettie.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
114. Know Joe.	11	1-10 and	Mixed

			diaries	
115.	Lettie and Joe's relationship.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
116.	Watched Lettie grow up on screen.	5	1-3, 6 and 7	Mixed
117.	Lettie is in conflict with her father.	6	1-4, 6 and 10	Mixed
118.	Lettie should stand up to her father.	3	2-4 and 6	Mixed
119.	Approve of Lettie's relationship with Joe.	4	2,3, 6 and 7	Mixed
120.	Lettie should continue the relationship with Joe.	4	4, 5, 7 and 10	Mixed
121.	Lettie should be reunited with Vusi – her ex-boyfriend.	6	1, 4-5, 7-8 and 10	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Nandipha and Parsons				
122.	Know Nandipha.	8	1, 3-4, 6-10	Mixed
123.	Nandipha is HIV positive	8	1-4, 6, 8, 9 and 10	Mixed
124.	Nandipha is an essential character because of her HIV status.	3	1, 3 and 10	Mixed
125.	Nandipha teaches one how to deal with HIV/AIDS.	3	1, 3, 6 and 9	Mixed
126.	Nandipha should get ill – her HIV should progress to AIDS.	3	6, 8 and 10	Mixed
127.	Know Parsons.	7	1-4, 6 and 9-10	Mixed
128.	Nandipha and Parsons are married.	4	1, 3, 6 and 9	Mixed
129.	Should adopt a child.	2	3 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Papa G				
130.	Enjoy and like Papa G.	10	1-3, 5-10 and diaries	Mixed
131.	Papa G is humorous.	4	4-5, 8-9	Mixed
132.	Papa G is a bad guy who has taken a good turn after jail.	3	4,6 and 9	Mixed
133.	Papa G is enjoyed for his particular way of speaking, which is colloquially referred to as "Tsotsi taal".	5	4-5, 7-9	Mixed
134.	Papa G is involved in organised crime.	3	4-6	Regular only
135.	Papa G is using both Cherel and Barker.	3	3, 6 and diaries	Mixed

Beliefs about characters: Maggie			
136. Know and like Maggie.	6	1-4, 6 and 7	Mixed
137. Maggie is a gossip that interferes with other people's business.	3	4, 6 and 10	Mixed
138. Maggie should get a relationship.	3	1, 3 and 4	Mixed
Other characters			
139. Know Frank Xavier.	8	2-10	Mixed
140. Frank Xavier is a worthy adversary to Barker.	6	2-4 and 6-10	Mixed
141. Know Harriet as Barker's secretary from his past.	3	1, 3-4	Mixed
142. Anticipation of what Harriet will reveal.	3	1,3,4	Mixed
143. Vusi used to be in a relationship with Letti.	6	1,4,5,7,8 and 10	Mixed
144. Should get back together with Letti.	6	1,4,5,7,8 and 10	Mixed
145. Len is liked for his demeanor.	3	4,9 and 10	Mixed

Table 5.3 above represents a complete record of footprints that are prominent across the interpretation of viewers. The data will now be presented as it combines into themes of interpretation. Footprints are not mutually exclusive, seeing that some may contribute to more than one theme. After the presentation of the data in themes, one inconsistency in the data that is regarded as a Hermeneutic Turn will be discussed.

4.   Presentation of themes

As discussed in the previous chapter, a theme is an interpretive conclusion that the participant ascribes to and allows to influence his/her behaviour. Participants' descriptions of their behaviour are expressions that present the theme to the researcher. The footprints can therefore be seen as a collection of expressions through which the researcher is able to discover the interpretive conclusions that constitute participants' lived realities. From the footprints presented in Table 5.3 10 main interpretations or themes emerged, some consisting of a number of sub-themes. In keeping with the hermeneutic principle of historicity, these themes are presented in the order in which they were identified, rather than ranked in order of prominence.

Table 5.4 *List of all themes*

Themes from the first hermeneutic
Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour.
Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters.
Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.
Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.
Sub-theme 2.3: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters and viewers relate differently to these two types of characters.
Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.
Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?
Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.
Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines preferred.
Theme 4: A preference for all things real.
Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.
Sub-theme 5.1: Isidingo's characters are real.
Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.
Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational.
Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcasted.
Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership.
Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour.
Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre.
Sub-theme 9.1: Local and international soaps represent two sub-genres that are distinct because of the difference in realism between them.
Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism.

Each of these themes will now be discussed. The discussion of each theme will commence with a listing of all the footprints on which it is based. The numbers in brackets next to the footprints indicate the number of groups that mentioned the footprint. For this purpose the group of participants in the deprivation exercise is regarded as one group, i.e. the same as a focus group. A discussion then follows on how different footprints combine into a theme and verbatim quotations from the focus group transcripts or the précis are mentioned to further illustrate the meaning of the theme.

4.1. Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour

Footprints:

#8 Isidingo watched by all (11).

#22 Have developed own loyalty since being introduced by another family member (4).

#6 Loyalty is compared to an addiction (4).

The first theme that emerges collectively from the footprints is that viewers have developed loyalty or a desire to watch Isidingo on a regular basis. Footprint #8 assures the researcher that viewers watch Isidingo and would be in a position to make meaningful interpretations about it. This is supported by footprint #22 which implies that although viewers might have been introduced to the soap by family members, they have since developed a personal interest in the soap. The last footprint, #6, supports the notion further. Regular viewing of Isidingo has become such a regular occurrence in some viewers' lived realities that they equate it to an addiction, as captured in the précis below:

> The word addiction is used to describe the viewer's interpretation of her inclination to watch the soap daily. Addiction usually includes a need for continued exposure to a certain substance at regular intervals. It also includes a loss of control over if the substance will be used or not. By using the word addictive, the viewer is implying that she has a very strong need to watch every episode.
>
> (Précis, group 2, line 110)

As the précis extract from Group 2 above suggests, an addictive behaviour could be expected to be so entrenched that the viewer feels an overwhelming, almost uncontrollable urge to satisfy the need. One of the participants in the deprivation exercise also compared her longing for the soap which she was not allowed to watch for a week, to feeling withdrawal to an addictive substance: "I [feel] like I missed a daily tablet that I'm addicted too. Not watching Isidingo is not very easy for me" (diary entry, black, female, regular viewer).

Within this context, all other footprints represent a rich narrative from which to understand how viewers experience loyal soap opera viewership. The research methodology therefore holds a legitimate promise of answering the research questions.

4.2. Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters

Continued viewership or loyalty to the soap opera is primarily motivated by viewers' interest in seeing specific characters. This lies at the crux of the viewers' interpretation of their soap viewing experience and most other discussions or interpretation of the soap relates to how they perceive certain characters and the storylines that surround them. These are some of the strongest footprints, seeing

that all 11 data sources (i.e. all 10 groups as well as the diaries) give evidence to it. This theme consists of three sub-themes.

4.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.

Footprints:

#1 Viewers are very interested in some characters and less interested in other characters (11).

Researcher's interpretation of footprints #64-#145 – all footprints on individual characters.

#57 Storylines should involve both the business and private lives of characters (4.)

Being familiar with a character's history and knowing him/her as a full, integrated individual contributes to the viewer developing a relationship with the character. This background knowledge creates a backdrop within which they interpret and react to characters' actions, and shapes the viewer's expectation on future developments. Although most know that Barker and Cherel started out as a married couple, they have watched them scheme and plot against each other even to the extent of committing murder.

> Do you think she [Cherel] could ever get back together with Barker?
> I don't think either of them will let that happen.
> Maybe they will.
> Yes, because they are so alike.
> Yes, but still I wouldn't want to get back together with someone that killed my son,
> there is too much water under the bridge between them.
> Maybe it wasn't her.
> Hah! We all know that she did it!
> (Group 9, line 751-763)

When one participant in the group, quoted above, is willing to give Cherel the benefit of the doubt, she is quickly dismissed with a call to the group's collective knowledge about her: we all know better. This same background knowledge explains why viewers are able to empathise with Cherel. They know that she has suffered abuse in her childhood and yet, despite a series of challenges, she has developed into a strong person who is able to cope with adversaries and who does not easily give up.

In the same way they have also watched Agnes work hard to achieve the financial security her family enjoys today. They know that her family is her first priority and that she has proven her ability to overcome difficulty. This background shapes how viewers empathise with her when her husband does not see her as his first priority, and it also explains why they expect the Matabane's to follow the same path of success should they be challenged with more financial difficulty.

Viewers have a need for knowing characters as complex and not one-dimensional. During the discussion on storylines, participants were asked if they prefer storylines that deal with characters' personal or private lives and it was shown that viewers prefer that both of these enjoy attention. Having access to characters' private and professional lives, allows the viewer to understand the character better and knowing characters intimately, makes viewers interested in their storylines and encourage regular viewing behaviour.

4.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.

Footprints:

#1 Viewers are very interested in some characters and less interested in other characters (11),

#3 Pseudo-social interaction (5)

Throughout the narrative it becomes clear that loyal viewers develop a relationship with characters that resemble relationships they have with people in real life. Viewers discuss the characters with friends and family as if they are talking about real people. When they are unable to watch the soap (as simulated in the deprivation exercise) viewers miss the characters as if missing friends whom they have not seen in a while. They use words like "people" and "person" to refer to characters and when characters die, viewers feel heartbroken as if losing a friend or family member in real life.

> How do you feel about death and murder and when characters end?
> Upset, it is very sad.
> Yes, because you get used to that person and then they are not there anymore.
> (Group 5, line 435-439)

> I think you get so involved with the characters. Yes, they become almost real for you.
> (Group 2, line 118-119)

> Why do you talk about soaps more then you talk about other stories?
> Because it is like people's lives.
> (Group 9, line 170-172)

Further proof of the notion of pseudo-social relations is viewers being so involved with the storyline in context of the personification of characters that they fantasise about interacting with characters:

> It's like you are in it with them. Like that scene last week with Lee. I told her.
> What do you mean you told her?
> [I told her to] confront her father. It is almost like something you can relate to in your
> own personal life as well.
> (Group 9, line 220-223)

You actually fantasise if you were there what you would do. Especially when it comes to Barker because he is always up to something.

(Group 5, line 295)

4.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters and viewers relate differently to these two types of characters.

Footprints:

#1 Viewers are very interested in some characters and less interested in other characters (11).

Researcher's interpretation of Footprints #66-#127 – all footprints on individual characters.

Refer to Table 3 below.

One hermeneutic turn that strikes the researcher as helpful in understanding the research question was sparked by a discussion on "hate" characters and "normal characters" in Group 5. Since these terms were only mentioned in one group, they do not qualify as a theme. Nonetheless, in line with HP principle number 8 *(HP #8 That the researcher should look beyond the participants' actionsto a broader background context and its relationship to individual events)*, the researcher assumes that this dynamic is true for the larger sample. Through the application of HP #1 she has therefore drawn out what is hidden in the larger narrative in search of proof that this interpretation is true for more viewers. (See extract from group 3 below)

There are some characters that [are extremely irritating], but because they are part of the plot you can't actually see them off.

So characters that you hate might actually be good for the show?

Yes I think so.

I think the hate character is the best thing that can happen to a soap.

Yes (laugh).

They actually bring you back because you want to see what rubbish they are up to now.

Exactly.

They are normally unpredictable as well.

If you see the mother figure in the soap then that mother figure is predictable to me because I am a mother, like if I see a hate character that person is constantly unpredictable and you want to know what is the next mischievous move.

(Group 5, line 153-169)

Zeb makes me cross.

Then he should be in the story because you need a few characters that cause a bit of problems.

(Group 3, line 728)

According to these two groups some characters are strongly disliked, but because they are the main cause of conflict they actually encourage repeat viewership. Viewers look forward to seeing what the "hate character" is getting up to. Hate characters are unpredictable and manage to surprise on a regular basis and this surprise is very enjoyable to watch. Hate characters stand in contrast to more traditional characters that are well known, understood and predictable. One example of the latter would be a typical mother figure which, by being a mother herself, a viewer may be able to understand and predict. Although liked more, the mother figure is not necessarily enjoyed more.

Table 5.5 is a summary of the themes relating to what viewers know about and think of the most prominent characters. In keeping with HP principle number 9 *(HP# 9: Stay close to the narrative)*, the researcher uses group 5's terminology of "hate" and "normal" characters. And based on group 5's definition, the researcher subjectively labelled each character as either a hate or normal character, based on the interpretation that viewers have of him/her. Hate characters are defined as those who cause conflict for other characters and who elicit negative emotions, strong opinions and anticipation from viewers. Normal characters are defined as those portraying characters that could be recognisable from real life and that viewers typically identify with.

Participants were asked to identify the most and least important characters in Isidingo. The frequency in the prioritisation column in Table 5.5 relates to the number of groups who selected the character as one of the essential characters. When regarded in context of the rest of the table, the *Prioritisation* frequency provides a useful measure by which to gauge if the character is of interest and by implication contributes to loyalty.

If one regards the traits viewers associate with each character, a conceptual interpretation of the personality traits that influence viewers' relationships with a character begins to form. Barker, Cherel and Zeb emerge as the hate characters and since interest in two of the hate characters, namely Barker and Cherel is the highest, it seems that characters that cause conflict and whose behaviour is motivated by malicious intent contribute significantly to loyalty.

Character type can, however, not be the only factor that influences loyalty, as Agnes and Lee – both normal characters – are ranked high, while Zeb – a hate character – is lower. The character type is more telling with regards to the type of relationship viewers develop with the character.

Table 5.5 *Summary of viewers' interpretation of the most prominent characters*

	What viewers know about Barker	What should happen in future	Viewer relationship	Character type	Priority - number of groups that think character is essential
Barker	Immoral (3) and invincible (5). Manipulates people, incl. Lee for his own gain (3). Cherel's archrival (10).	Should reveal his humane side (4). Should get punished (3).	Love to hate him. Admiration from males.	Hate	10 groups
Cherel	Have been through a lot in her past (6). Barker's archrival (10). Resilient (4) and determined (3). Strong (5) but also shows her vulnerable side (4).	Should get punished (3).	Love to hate her. Admiration from females.	Hate	10 groups
Agnes	Works hard (4). Strong (5). Family is her first priority (3). A mother (7). Could know her in real life (3).	Should be unfaithful to Zeb (3).	Endearing	Normal	8 groups
Papa G	Humorous (4). Bad guy who has taken a good turn (3). Speaks in Tsotsi taal (5). Involved in organised crime (3). Use both Cherel and Barker (3).	Eager to have him surprise them. (Researcher's interpretation)	Endearing	Hate and normal.	7 groups
Lee	Under the influence of her father (8). Strong	Should stand up to her father (6).	Amicable to endearing (females).	Normal	6 groups

	business woman (6). Was in a relationship with Rajesh (4). Understand why she is so naïve (4).	Should be as successful personally as she is professionally (4). Could become the main bitch (4).			
Lettie	Saw her grow up on screen (5). Is having a relationship with a white man (11). In conflict with her father (6).	Divided opinion on whether she should continue this relationship (4) or settle in another one (6). Should stand up to her father (3).	Younger females identify with her. Males are enjoying her for the conflict she is causing.	Normal	6 groups
Maggie	A gossip (3).	Should get a relationship (3).	Distant for males and younger females. Endearing for older females.	Normal	5 groups
Nandipha	Is HIV positive (8). Married to Parsons (3).	Should get ill (3). Should adopt a baby (2).	Distant interest.	Normal	5 groups
Zeb	In conflict with his daughter (6). Tests the white boyfriend (5). Rejects his wife (3). Old fashioned and too traditional (3). Is someone you could know in real life (5).	Should get punished for what he did to Agnes (3). Should continue to torment Joe (black males) (2).	Strongly disliked by white females. Strongly like by black males.	Hate for females. Normal for males.	5 groups

Rajesh	In a relationship with Lee (5). Framed by Barker (3).	Should get revenge towards Barker (Researcher's interpretation.)	Interest	Normal	3 groups
Frank	Worthy adversary to Barker (6).	Viewers unsure. Waiting to see what will happen. (Researcher's interpretation.)	Distant interest	Potential hate.	0 groups
Joe	In relationship with Lettie (11). Managed to pass Zeb's test (5).	Should get challenged further (2). Divided opinion on whether he should continue this relationship (4) with Lettie or break up (6).	Interest in him extends only as far as his relationship with Lettie goes.	Normal	0 groups
Parsons	Married to Nandipha (3).	Should adopt a baby (2).	Distant interest.	Normal	0 groups
Harriet	Barker's secretary who knows him from his past (3).	Betray Barker (3).	Distant interest.	Normal	0 groups
Vusi	Was in a relationship with Letti (6). Training as a Songoma (2).	Should be reunited with Letti (6).	Distant interest.	Normal	0 groups
Len	Liked for his demeanor (3).	-	Distant interest.	Hate and normal.	0 groups

Hate characters like Barker and Zeb cause conflict in the viewer's emotional experience of the soap, as they bring new twists to the plot that normal characters have to deal with. Normal characters such

as Agnes, Maggie and Lee serve a different role. They are liked and viewers associate with them. It is possible that viewers are vicariously reacting to the hate character as if they are themselves the normal characters.

> Sometimes you get so involved in the soap, like with Barker, sometimes you get so frustrated and angry and you feel like you can get inside the show and just attack them.
> (Group 5, line 277)

Two characters warrant further discussion in this dynamic, i.e. Papa G and Zeb. Papa G is interpreted as a very complex character. He is generally liked and viewers interpret him as someone they may know from real life. Viewers know that this character has a history of involvement in organised crime and appreciate that the character has attempted to deviate from his past criminal ways. All are aware that he is pretending to be a confidant to both Barker and Cherel for his own gain. This, combined with his idiosyncratic demeanor which is humorous, yet believable, makes him a character that is thoroughly enjoyed by a range of viewers from different backgrounds. He successfully combines the intriguing qualities of a normal character with that of a hate character. The former successfully nurturing an attraction with the viewer, while the latter ensures that there is enough mystery to him to keep viewers interested and guessing at his next move.

> Why are Georgie and Cherel always scheming? Is he Cherel's informer or is he Barker's informer? He's a real conniver. He comes across with his sweet talk but I maintain he's real corrupt yet a great charmer, 'Ek sê ek sê'. Pretty dangerous (diary entry, black, male, regular viewer).

Another interesting character is Zeb. Zeb illustrates that viewers may react to characters like they would to people in real life. White female groups emphasise with Lettie in her relationship with her father and they also take Agnes's side over him. They are extremely critical of Zeb, accusing him of being old fashioned, too traditional and stubborn. For this group of viewers, Zeb is clearly a hate character.

> He doesn't deserve his wife he should just go to his girlfriend.
> (Group 9, line 603)

> Everything he does irritates me, he destroys the story, it is modern times and he can't get with it.
> (Group 3, line 506)

For black males, however, Zeb is a source of enjoyment. They understand him, defend him and encourage him. After thoroughly appreciating Zeb torturing Joe with the chicken incident, for example,

they would like to see Zeb confront Joe with even more African traditions, like making him pay Labola for Lettie's hand. They also approve of him being unfaithful to Agnes.

> Zeb is the King. He has his own palace. He knows when he gets home, he is king.
> He is 'Tau ya Africa' (African Lion).
> (Group 10, line 331)

> I like Zeb. What if you marry someone who cannot bear children, what do you do?
> You do it like Zeb, you find a second wife (laughter).
> (Group 10, line 203)

> She's so sweet and she's married to that idiot who doesn't see what he's got. But
> that's how we all African men are. (Laughter).
> (Group 7, line 312)

The enjoyment these viewers experience from watching Zeb relates to their identification with him, while the white and coloured female group feels antagonised by him. Characters can therefore be classified as both hate and normal characters depending on how the audience interprets them.

4.3. Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines

4.3.1. Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?

Footprints:

#100 Agnes should be unfaithful to Zeb (3).

#83 Lee could and should stand up to her father (6).

#135 Papa G is using both Cherel and Barker (3).

#111 Zeb rejects Agnes (3).

#60 Barker setting up Rajesh (4).

#61 Cherel murdering Duncan (6).

A dramatic technique that viewers find particularly intriguing is waiting for characters to find out what they already know. Viewers speculate about when Zeb will notice that Agnes has undergone a make-over and how he would react if he found out that she has a potential suitor. They are frustrated with Lee for not realising her father is manipulating her and long to see her stand up to him. They enjoy sharing in Papa G's secret that he is using both Cherel and Barker without them realising it. In his case, they hope that Cherel and Barker does not find out and have immense respect for the fact that he succeeds to fool the archrivals.

You know exactly what she [Cherel] did but no one else does, they don't know so that
is what makes her appealing.
(Group 9, line 532)

I am curious to know whether Aggie is still carrying on with her affair with Pula.
Should Zeb find out I think Hell will break loose (diary entry, black, female, regular
viewer).

The entertainment value of anticipating how the story will change once the character finds out what they already know is immense. This sub-theme also resonates with the next one in which viewers speculate about upcoming twists in the plot.

4.3.2.   Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.

Footprints:

#2 Viewers are interested in following the resolution of storylines (11).

#23 Discuss what happens in Isidingo with other viewers (6).

Soap operas linger in the viewer's mind after the conclusion of an episode; a viewer reflects about the characters they are interested in. Viewers who participated in the diary exercise made various comments that illustrate how this theme emerges between viewing occasions: "I wonder what will happen…", "I think…", "I can imagine…", "Curious to know", "Dying to see", "Nosy to see", "My gut tells me that…" (diary entries). Viewers assimilate new information they learnt into existing knowledge of the characters and wonder about what will happen next. This makes its way into conversations with fellow viewers and links the one episode with the next, as it provides a motivation for viewing.

Every Friday, I have noticed, the soap ends with an event that forces you to watch on
the Monday.
(Group 5, line 81)

I wonder what will happen after last week's drama. After the Pule and Lettie drama. I
think the Matabanes must forgive each other and move on. Zeb must have learnt his
lesson [that matchmaking doesn't work]. He must accept Joe and Lettie's relationship
and learn to live with it (diary entry, black, male, regular viewer).

You can also speculate and discuss every day what you think is going to happen
because it has that element of surprise to it.
(Group 9, line 186)

This is an important footprint in finding the path to understanding viewer loyalty. The storyline is the first point of contact with a new viewer. Once the viewer is intrigued by a storyline he/she is motivated

to start watching on a regular basis, with the promise of a resolution as reward. At this early stage, character involvement is not yet relevant, as the viewer has no knowledge of the characters, their past or motives. Once the viewer grows in knowledge about the soap, he/she develops a preference and special interest in specific characters. At this point it seems as though the storyline diminishes slightly in importance. It becomes part of the background through which the character is communicated and the viewer sustains a relationship with the character. The storyline becomes part of the taken-for-granted knowledge of experiencing the soap. This is clear when one considers that most viewers in the current study, answered firstly with reference to a character when motivating viewership. As this quote from Group 4 illustrates; they are responding to a question on what made them start watching initially:

> Something will happen that catches your attention and draws you and then you want to know what will happen next. Maybe like someone gets shot and then you want to know who shot that person and why and I think once you start watching then you get into it.
> That is how I started watching Days I wanted to see what will happen next and then it took weeks for that thing to happen so I got into it.
> It is always a drawn out long thing with Days.
> Yes (laugh).
> (Group 4, line 47-69)

Viewers are first introduced to the soap in the manner described above (through interesting storylines). As time progresses, they become involved with the characters, as this quote from group 5 illustrates: "You become addicted to the characters and what is going on in their lives" (line 91).

This also explains why viewers prefer shorter storylines but admit that longer storylines are necessary. Shorter storylines that are resolved within a few days allow the pleasurable resolution after tension to happen more often than not. Longer storylines, such as the underlying plot of Barker and Cherel's continuing feud is necessary background within which to interpret shorter storylines. Without the longer storylines or themes that reoccur within the soap, the viewer cannot get to know characters and build lasting relationships.

4.3.3. Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines preferred.

Footprints:

Refer to Table 5.6 below.

Research participants were asked to name the storylines they recall following in Isidingo and to indicate which of these they particularly enjoyed. They were also asked to indicate preferences for specific outcomes in the storylines of characters. From these discussions, the researcher was able to identify plot types that viewers interpret as interesting and that they would be likely to follow in the

manner discussed above. Table 5.6 summarises how storylines are grouped under plot types. Storylines are not mutually exclusive, as some contain more than one pertinent theme.

The most pervasive theme that emerges is storylines that deal with individual characters, their development, personal challenges, vices and virtues. This is followed by conflict, romantic relationship conflict, immorality and its consequences, humour and social issues.

Table 5.6 *Storyline summary*

	Individuals, their development, personal challenges, vices and virtues	Immorality
Character development		
• Lee could and should stand up to her father.		
• Lee should develop and attain the same success in her personal life as she has in her professional life.		
• Lee could take over from Cherel as the main bitch.		
• Joe and the chicken.		
• Lee could develop into more.		
• Nandipha should get ill – her HIV should progress to AIDS.		
• Papa G is a bad guy who has taken a good turn after jail.		
• Maggie should get a relationship.		
Character vulnerability		
• A need to see Barker's humane side, which is Lee.		
• Have knowledge of Cherel's past, have empathy for her.		
• Involved with Lee, have empathy for her.		
• Viewers have empathy for why Lee is as naïve as she is.		
• Have empathy for Zeb.		
Personal challenge		
• Barker setting up Rajesh.		
• Joe and the chicken.		
• Would not like the Matabanes to go through financial trouble again, but understand that it would be reality if they did.		
• Have watched the Matabanes work very hard for what they have achieved over the years.		
• Nandipha should get ill – her HIV should progress to AIDS.		
Immoral behaviour		
• Cherel murdering Duncan.		
• Barker manipulates relationships.		
• Revenge and conflict between Cherel and Barker.		
• Zeb's infidelity and child		

• Papa G is involved in organised crime.			
Malicious intent			
• Barker setting up Rajesh.			
• Anticipate that Harriet has something up her sleeve.			
Punishment			
• Barker should get punished for all he did			
• Cherel should get punished for murdering Duncan.			
Romance			
• Lettie and Joe's relationship.			
• The possibility of Agnes having an affair.			
• Approve of Lettie's relationship with Joe.			
• Lettie should continue the relationship with Joe.			
• Lettie should be reunited with Vusi – her ex-boyfriend.			
• Maggie should get a relationship.			
• Lee should develop and attain the same success in her personal life as she has in her professional life.			
Conflict in romantic relationships	Romantic Relationships		
• Barker setting up Rajesh (and sabotaging Lee and Rajesh's relationship).			
• The possibility of Agnes having an affair.			
• Barker manipulates relationships.			
• Take Agnes's side over Zeb.			
• Zeb rejects Agnes.			
Conflict in other personal relationships	Business Relationships		
• Revenge and conflict between Cherel and Barker.			
• Barker and Cherel are rivals.			
• Frank Xavier is a worthy adversary to Barker.			
• Anticipate that Harriet has something up her sleeve.			
Family conflict	Family Relationships	Conflict	
• Lettie and Joe's relationship.			
• Zeb's infidelity and child.			
• Lee is under the influence of her father.			
Humour	Other		
• Papa G is humorous.			
• Joe and the chicken.			
Dramatic climax			
• Cherel murdering Duncan.			

• Tanya's suicide.	
Social issue	
• Lettie and Joe's relationship.	
• Nandipha teaches one how to deal with HIV/AIDS.	

4.4. Theme 4: A preference for all things real

Footprints:

#5 Soap's proximity to real life as motivation for watching (5).

#27 Good soaps have realistic storylines (8).

#29 Prefer storylines that are realistic (6).

#30 Dislike unrealistic storylines (4).

#32 Dislike when an actor is replaced (3).

#33 Good soaps are technically realistic (including acting, sets and production quality) (3).

The realistic, everyday content of some soaps is what distinguishes it from other genres. It consists of normal, recognisable characters that deal with normal, realistic issues. This need for proximity to the lived reality seem to be a pervasive theme as 1) it appears often, 2) it is expressed in reference to behaviour of characters in Isidingo and competitive soaps, in the appearance of characters and the nature of storylines i.e. across different contexts, and 3) viewers react negatively when this theme is violated in each of these contexts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

> How does one classify a soapie, how do we say this is a soapie and this is not a soapie? "It goes about us. Yes, about people. It is about ordinary people and what happens in their lives, I think that is why people are so involved in soapies."
> (Group 3, line 2-16)

The participants prefer storylines that are familiar from their own livelihoods over storylines that are unfamiliar, and dislike any storylines that include elements that could be seen as fantasy. Viewers prefer storylines that are culturally relevant and familiar.

> It's very rare in our culture to see people having affairs between family members, so such things we don't relate to.
> (Group 1, line 48)

> For me it is very unrealistic like people being possessed by demons and things like that, but that is just for me, I know other people enjoy that but I don't like that.
> (Group 5, line 139)

The participants are very sensitive to inconsistencies in characters. A story told about a character should make sense as a whole. Any portrayals of the character, e.g. his/her physical appearance,

place of residence, values, and behaviour - should fit within his/her background and offer a legitimate motivation for it.

> They [stories on business and private lives] go hand in hand. That's the reality check again. On Days you see Hope living in a mansion, but she does not have a job and Bo is a policeman. (Laughter).
> (Group 7, line 262)

Anything that reminds the viewer that he/she is watching a fictional story acts as a hurdle for the viewer to move into the ready-to-hand mode of viewing. They therefore also dislike any technical aspects that diminish the perceived reality of a soap opera. This includes storylines that take too long to get resolved, actors who are replaced to play the same character, poor acting, or an unrealistic set.

> On Isidingo, if they changed Papa G that would be very discouraging. There are just some characters you can't replace. The actors live the characters in a way that no other actor can.
> (Group 6, line 58)

> You need a hospital [as part of the set], it is part of life, I mean babies are born, people get sick, and it is a part of life.
> (Group 2, line 278)

4.5. Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality

Viewers interpret Isidingo as a unique soap within the larger soap genre on offer in South Africa, because of its ability to simulate South African reality. Throughout the narrative it is clear that viewers appreciate the fact that Isidingo is an accurate portrayal of their lives and offers this quality as an explanation on why they watch Isidingo.

> Why do you watch Isidingo?
> It was also different from other soaps, and it still is different. Other soaps are mainly for youngsters and about love only. I thought I was the target market for Isidingo, because it addressed things happening at work, at home… things that I could associate with.
> It also showed South African diversity, all races are represented… that's what also attracted me.
> (Group 8, line 52-54)

[Soaps] symbolise our every day life. On Isidingo Zeb failed to notice that his wife has changed dramatically. She started wearing make up and did her hair up, but he did not notice, and someone else did. That's exactly how we are in real life.

(Group 6, line 22)

4.5.1.　　　　Sub-theme 5.1: Isidingo's characters are real.

Footprints:

#35 Dialogue in local soaps include vernacular, South African languages (3).

#45 Has characters that resemble people the viewer could know from real life (5).

#103 Agnes is recognisable as someone that one could know in real life (3).

#107 Recognise Zeb as someone they could know in real life (5).

#40 Isidingo is appreciated for having quality acting (3).

In Isidingo, this phenomenon is enhanced by the fact that a number of characters are believed to be so realistic that they resemble people one could know in real life. Characters that are regarded as especially realistic include Agnes, Zeb and Papa G. Character portrayals, including acting, dialogue and appearance are also seen as being close to reality.

He [Papa G] is like an uncle we know. Our uncles are like that you know…

(Group 10, line 309)

Isidingo characters are natural and they keep their culture, the South African culture.
If you have short hair, you keep your short hair, they don't make you wear fake extensions and wigs.

(Group 1, line 62)

There are, however, a number of characters – specifically Barker and Cherel who are the most popular characters – that are not overtly interpreted as people one could know from real life, but viewers try and make sense of them realistically. They long to see Barker's humane side and they justify Cherel's personal traits from "knowing what she has been through" (Group 4, line 642).

4.5.2.　　　　Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.

Footprints:

#41 Isidingo is appreciated for having storylines that are resolved quickly (3).

#43 Isidingo is for mature audiences (3).

#46 Is a serious soap (4).

#49 Isidingo deals with social issues (10).

#51 Isidingo deals with HIV/AIDS (10).

#52 Isidingo deals with mixed race couples (10).

#53 Isidingo deals with homosexuality (3).

Isidingo's content is interpreted as real. It is perceived to be up to date with current events and stands in contrast to international soaps. Storylines in Isidingo are also resolved as quickly as they would unfold in real life. The storyline moving so quickly encourages regular viewership, as viewers are hesitant to miss any important developments. This sustains a healthy and entertaining build up and resolution of tension, and it contributes to the perception of realism.

> If Christmas is being celebrated – they are celebrating also. Like yesterday they were talking about a game of Bafana Bafana – and that they were going to watch the game at half past 8. So they are up to date with what is happening in life.
> (Group 7, line 244-248)

> What are those things that make you sit and watch Isidingo and not other soaps at that time?
> Days and Bold can take two to three weeks on one issue. On Isidingo, it takes a week at most. You have got to keep up or you miss a lot.
> Isidingo is an everyday thing.
> (Group 1, line 117–122)

> I mean if someone is getting married, it will take two or three days maybe a week, but there [In Days of our Lives] it will take a month.
> (Group 4, line 83)

Isidingo also addresses a number of issues pertinent to the South African society. Social issues mentioned throughout the narrative include corruption, drugs, abuse, rape, sexuality, homosexuality, family conflict, and particularly interracial relationships and HIV/AIDS. Viewers' insistence that Nandipha's HIV should develop into AIDS points again to a need for proximity to reality. If she does not become ill, viewers may forget that she has HIV, and the message that her character can communicate will be lost. Some viewers also expressed the sentiment that Nandipha should adopt a baby, bringing yet another issue into the narrative.

4.5.3. Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational.

Footprints:

#50 Isidingo educates people on how to deal with social issues (8).

#54 Isidingo teaches viewers about people who are different from themselves (3).

#42 Represents an ideal South African in terms of race relations (3).

#72 Learn from Barker not to be an overprotective father (3).

109 Zeb teaches viewers how not to behave (4).

One theme provides an explanation for why the realism of local soaps and Isidingo in particular is so appreciated – the educational value inherent to it. The social issues addressed and the problems

characters face, are so realistic and close to viewers' own experiences that they learn from the soap. Through watching the characters solve problems, viewers learn how to solve their own problems.

> Sometimes you have a problem and you see the same problem on the soap and it helps you to solve yours.
> (Group 1, line 9)

Viewers learn from characters' mistakes and successes and internalise the lessons learnt by the characters:

> There are things that you can learn especially from Isidingo. That's why I'm watching it – there are things you can learn and practice. Like what things? Okay, like what I've recently seen in Isidingo with Mr. Matabane choosing for Lettie. I have a daughter and I mustn't be like Mr. Matabane. So when my daughter brings a white guy into my place, my home, then I won't say 'Why are you bringing this guy' you know. So you're prepared? Yes – I am prepared – it's happening.
> (Group 7, line 58 – 80)

> It's not in our culture, men generally don't cook. In soaps men cook and support their wives doing house chores. That's encouraging to us. I find myself helping more around the house because I know it's acceptable for me to do that. It also makes my wife happy and proud of me…
> (Group 6, line 139)

The soap is trusted for giving good advice and many viewers rely on the soap to educate family members:

> I think people can learn from it when they are watching it. For instance my Dad is very strict, a lot like Lettie's dad, interrogates her boyfriends and things like that. And then when we watch Isidingo I just give him the look and you can see he relates and feels bad.
> (Group 4, line 357-359)

> I'm divorced and my daughters live with me. My eldest one is 13 years old. I can't speak to her about sex and condoms and stuff. I basically rely on television to educate her about that. I have seen many episodes of Isidingo where they address sex and AIDS and condoms, but I can't bring myself to talking about it with my daughter. I should just call her to sit and watch Isidingo with me, next time the topic comes up.
> (Group 6, line 133)

Finally, the soap opera shapes viewers' interpretation of social issues and viewers believe that it may have an impact on how issues are perceived by the larger population:

> Isidingo is a vision that all South Africans should be striving towards as a rainbow nation.
>
> I can actually see it changing other people, not necessarily me, but I now understand why people do the things they do. Nandipha is HIV positive and married to Parsons who is negative. That can only be the meaning of true love.
>
> (Group 10, line 195 – 197)

4.6. Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcast

Footprints:

#24 Time in which the soap is watched is regarded as a time for physical and/or mental relaxation (3).

#25 Non-TV related responsibilities (such as chores) sometimes compete with Isidingo (4).

A new episode of Isidingo is broadcast every evening at 18:30. For many viewers, the convenience of the timeslot is a major determinant of regular viewing. Late afternoon and early evening is a time in the household when the family arrives home and many chores are being done before settling down for the evening. It is a thoroughly planned time of the day in which the household routine is built around the soap. The female viewer especially, would make sure that her chores are either completed by the time Isidingo starts or that she is able to finish what needs to be done during the commercial breaks in the soap. It is also a time that many viewers regard as a time for mental and physical relaxation that does not require too much effort from the viewer. The timeslot is just before primetime when most families settle down in front of the TV. This offers a unique viewing opportunity that more often than not results in the family watching soaps because of the convenience of the timeslot.

> It is a nice way to come home and wind down.
> (Group 4, line 226)

> Also people that work I think sit down maybe with a glass of wine or a cigarette or whatever and that is their time out period.
> (Group 2, line 95)

> At the end of the day, 18:30 is the time when we all sit down and relax with our feet up, and Isidingo tended to be what was playing while we all had our feet up, and I suppose we make a habit of it.
> (Group 8, line 46)

One male group explained that:

> They [soaps] are a part of our household. You come in and you switch on the TV, the mood is right for soaps, they warm the house up.
> (Group 6, line 108)

Soaps are an ideal complement to the mood and activity in the household at that time. In the same way smells and sounds can make one feel at home and comfortable as if one is in a safe, familiar place; soaps can enhance or create a certain atmosphere at home. It is associated with the good feelings of arriving home after work and looking forward to a relaxing evening with family. It makes one feel comfortable and welcome at home, and complements other positive feelings one might have when arriving home after work.

A number of soaps are on air during this time and the few hours preceding it. This results in a soap block where some viewers watch a few soaps one after the other.

> I start with Days of our Lives then Bold then Egoli then I switch over to Isidingo.
> (Group 2, line 6)

> That's the only thing I do at home, when I finish cooking and cleaning, I just watch soaps.
> (Group 1, line 5)

Non-TV related responsibilities sometimes compete with soaps because it is such a busy time in the evening:

> I come home around 5pm and I have house chores to do.
> (Group 8, line 74)

4.7. Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership

Footprints:

#19 Watch soaps with female family members (7).

#20 Watch soaps in a mixed group of family members (4).

#21 Was introduced to Isidingo by other family members (4).

#22 Have developed own loyalty since being introduced by another family member (4).

#23 Discuss what happens in Isidingo with other people (6).

The following quotes illustrate the importance of the social aspect of viewership.

I have a friend and she is English and she watches East Enders on DStv. I am not allowed to phone during that time, and I don't phone because I know she is going to be upset.

(Group 2, line 117 – 126)

At the beginning, I watched because my daughter watched it. Now I watch it even when she's not there… it doesn't matter.

(Group 8, line 32)

I give in to my children sometimes. They want to watch Backstage and they nag and nag, so some of the days I just let them you know.

(Group 8, line 76)

Soap opera viewership has a social dimension for viewers. Many viewers were introduced to Isidingo through another person in the household and often continue to watch the soap with that person every evening. Viewers are conscious of the soaps that friends and family members watch. They respect each other's soap time and speculate together about what is going to happen in future storylines.

Why will you talk about soap operas and you won't talk about dramas or comedies with your friends? Because everyone watches them. Yes, you have something in common. You can also speculate and discuss everyday what you think is going to happen because it has that element of surprise to it. You get a top up every day.

(Group 9, line 180-190)

4.8. Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour

Footprints:

#4 Loyalty based on being up to date with the storyline and not necessarily watching every episode (3).

#16 Watch Isidingo during the prime timeslot at 18:30 on weekdays during which the new episode is aired (6).

#17 Watch any of the repeat transmissions including the next day repeat in the morning or the weekend omnibus (6).

#18 Viewers channel hop during commercial breaks (3).

#13 Viewership includes local soap operas (other than Isidingo) (10).

#14 Viewership includes international soap operas (7)

#15 Soap repertoires includes three or more soaps (7).

One difference between loyal and occasional viewers is that the latter often define loyalty loosely and would include following the storyline, i.e. being up to date with what is happening, as loyalty. While the

regular viewer would insist on watching every episode and even every minute of every episode (as the quote on the telephone call below illustrates), the occasional viewer is satisfied with watching a few episodes a week or watching at intervals in which interesting storylines pull them in.

> Last night it upset me because just when I wanted to watch - it was where Maggie and them wanted a party and they wanted some booze – the phone rang and it was that political thing and they were asking me if I was an ANC supporter so I missed a bit.
> (Group 2, line 25)

Some viewers follow two soaps in one timeslot. They supplement the prime slot viewership with repeat broadcasts such as the weekend omnibus, but mostly they watch both soaps at the same time. This involves that they switch between the two competing soaps during add breaks. Should a plot catch their attention in one, they might invest more viewing time in the particular soap until the storyline is resolved.

> You know what happens to me, there is maybe a piece in Isidingo like when that black girl brought that white guy home, now I am anxious because I want to see what the father is going to do, and then I want to see what is going on there and I am not worried about other soapies. Then maybe on the other soapie there is something else I want to see like that other girl that committed suicide then I wanted to see that.
> (Group 3, line 60)

> I watch Backstage sometimes, so when Isidingo is not so exciting, I watch Backstage, and when Isidingo is exciting I stick with it. But I keep flipping back to Isidingo even when I watch Backstage, just to see if something dramatic has happened or not.
> (Group 8, line 78).

At first, the academic researcher considered that this behaviour implies that regular viewers' loyalty is based more on character relationships, while occasional viewers follow storylines only. However, this cannot explain the full lived reality, seeing that many occasional viewers also have a history of watching Isidingo for years, and should have developed character relationships.

Many occasional viewers also have a wide knowledge of the characters (transcending the immediate storyline), as well as strong opinions on what should happen to the characters in the future. There is also evidence of occasional viewers discussing characters with other viewers, as well as speculating about what will happen. All tell-tale signs are thus present in occasional viewers' interpretations to indicate that there are indeed character relationships.

One could also assume that occasional viewers have a broader repertoire that extends beyond Isidingo and local soaps, but a comparison of the repertoire of occasional and loyal viewers (Table 5.7) indicates no differences.

Table 5.7 *Soap repertoires of regular and occasional viewers*

	Size of repertoire	**Local or international soaps**
Regular viewers of Isidingo	Average of 4 soaps	Both
Occasional viewers of Isidingo	Average of 4 soaps	Both

The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mostly related to viewing behaviour. As Table 5.8 illustrates, occasional viewers are more likely to occasionally follow interesting storylines in competing soaps than regular viewers.

Table 5.8 *Viewing behaviour of occasional and regular viewers*

Occasional viewers:	**Regular viewers:**
Get pulled into competing soaps with interesting storylines.	No evidence of being pulled into competing soaps with interesting storylines.
Interrupt viewing at the resolution of major storyline.	Less likely to interrupt viewership at the resolution of major storylines.
Evidence that viewership is supplemented with repeat broadcasts, including the omnibus.	Watch Isidingo during prime time premier every evening.

4.9. Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre

Footprints:

#34 Soaps have storylines that are generic to the genre (7).

#5 Soap's proximity to real life as a motivation for watching (5).

#9 Watch 7de Laan which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo (5).

#10 Watch Backstage which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo (4).

#11 Watch The Bold and the Beautiful (7).

#12 Watch Days of our Lives (4).

#13 Viewership includes local soap operas (other than Isidingo) (10).

#14 Viewership includes international soap operas (7).

#15 Soap repertoire includes 3 or more soaps (7).

Soap viewership is also interpreted as an interest in the soap opera genre. Each group of participants watch at least one other soap opera, while seven of the groups watch three or more soap operas. The soap operas that are watched include a range of local and international soaps and include soap operas that are broadcast in the same timeslot as Isidingo.

Viewers recognise that there are types of storylines that are common to the soap genre that are repeated on a regular basis across all the different soaps. Storylines mentioned include characters becoming ill and going to the hospital, weddings, pregnancies, marriages, relationships and physical intimacy. They also recognise characters that are found across the genre. One viewer in Group 3, for instance, believes that Barker is the JR of Isidingo.

4.9.1. Sub-theme 9.1: Local and international soaps represent two sub-genres that are distinct because of the difference in realism between them.

Footprints:

#28 International soaps are different from local soaps (4).

#35 Dialogue in local soaps include vernacular, South African languages (3).

#36 The storylines in local soaps are up to date with current events and are resolved quickly (4).

#37 Storylines take very long to resolve in international soaps (contrasted to preceding theme) (2).

#38 Storylines in local soaps resemble real life (3).

#39 International soaps are more likely to have unrealistic storylines than local soaps (4).

Viewers experience a clear distinction between local and international soaps, and the distinction relates mostly to the perceived realism that they put forth. Local soaps are believed to portray real life and being up to date with real-life events. They also include vernacular South African dialogue.

Overall, international soaps are believed to contain more elements that could be interpreted as unreal. International soaps are seen as having more unrealistic storylines than local soaps and taking too long to resolve these storylines.

4.10. Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism

Footprints:

146 A need for escapism (3).

#24 Time in which the soap is watched is regarded as a time for physical and/or mental relaxation (3).

Viewers enjoy watching Isidingo because it allows them to immerse themselves in the narrative and forget their day-to-day concerns for a while. The problems portrayed are not the viewer's own, it becomes a way to escape from their own problems.

> It is the only time that you can fantasise and leave your world that you are in.
> (Group 5, line 299).

> You imagine you are in it. You transport yourself into the fantasy.
> (Group 5, line 287-293)

5.   A hermeneutic turn: understanding the motivation for watching international soaps

While the first hermeneutic explains clearly why viewers enjoy local soaps, it does not sufficiently explain why viewers watch international soaps. In particular, the academic researcher expected that the strong emphasis on realism as an enabling factor for viewership of local soaps, combined with the perception that International soaps are unrealistic would imply that viewers do not watch international soaps. As Table 5.9 reveals, however, this is not the case, as three international soaps are prominent in the repertoires of a range of groups:

Table 5.9 *Viewership of international soap operas*

	Number of groups	**Which groups**
Bold and the beautiful	7	1-5, 9 and 10
Days of our lives	4	1, 4, 5 and 10
Passions	2	4 and 5
All my children	1	5

The HP principles of research provide guidance on how to deal with inconsistencies. While in Husserlian, transcendental phenomenology, inconsistencies would indicate errors. This is not the case with the current philosophical paradigm of hermeneutic phenomenology. Inconsistencies are different dimensions to the full reality under study. The researcher can therefore deal with these inconsistencies within the hermeneutic spiral without the fear of compromising the integrity of the study. The following HP principles provide guidance on how to deal with contradictions and viewers' motivation on why the watch International soaps will be explored based on these principles:

HP# 5: Deem every account as having its own internal logic; whatever is brought to an interview is significant to its bearer, consciously or not.

HP# 9: Stay close to the narrative.

HP# 8: The researcher should look beyond the participant's actions, events and behaviour to a larger background context and its relationship to individual events.

HP# 1: Draw out what is hidden within the narrative accounts and interpret them based on background understandings of the viewers.

The academic researcher will assume that although the data is apparently contradictory or problematic, it is not a the case and that there is logic that simply needs to be discovered. Since the first hermeneutic was primarily concerned with interpreting the experience of viewing Isidingo, the academic researcher will draw on the second hermeneutic, as well as on literature in an attempt to understand this inconsistency in viewers' own interpretation. She hopes that in doing so she will arrive at a fuller, more complete understanding in Chapter 7.

6. Conclusion

Ten themes that relate to how viewers interpret the lived reality of loyal soap opera viewership are present in the first hermeneutic. These include how viewers interpret and relate to characters and storylines, the importance of realism, the role that the timeslot plays in sustaining viewership, and the role that genre plays in viewers' overall likelihood to encounter the soap opera. It also illustrates the need for escapism that lures some viewers to the soap opera and demonstrates the main difference between loyal and occasional viewers to be their viewing behaviour.

Chapter 6 deals with the market researcher's interpretation, or the second hermeneutic. To ensure that the research process is a spiral where one interpretation builds on the other, Chapter 6 will be presented with a general structure derived from the themes identified in this chapter. A discussion of an integrated understanding of these two sections within the literary background will form the first part of the third hermeneutic in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6: The second hermeneutic

1. Introduction

This chapter represents the market researcher's interpretation of the lived reality. The analysis process through which the findings in this chapter have been structured was discussed in Chapter 4. As Figure 6.1 illustrates, the chapter consists of two main parts: the presentation of the themes and the movement in interpretation from the first to the second hermeneutic. The interpretive framework of Chapter 5 was revisited from within the second hermeneutic. The second hermeneutic largely elaborated on the interpretations of the first hermeneutic, although a few unique contributions were added to the interpretation. Eleven main themes were identified which will now be discussed in detail.

Figure 6.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 6.

2. Presentation of the second hermeneutic themes

Interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenology takes place in a spiral in which the second interpretation builds on the previous interpretation. This chapter is therefore based on the thematic structure of the previous chapter, and is designed to comment on the themes based on the findings from the first hermeneutic.

2.1. Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour

The market researcher recognised that some viewers have developed an addiction to Isidingo based on years of viewership. This was particularly prevalent in a focus group held with the viewers who participated in the deprivation exercise. In addition to asking them to keep diaries, the market

researcher also held a focus group in which the participants were asked to talk about the experience during the week. Viewers found that breaking the habit of watching Isidingo daily was extremely difficult. The market researcher noticed that some of these participants experienced severe symptoms of loss during the course of the week, attributing it to their so-called addiction to and withdrawal from the soap opera. Although a psychological diagnosis of the participants' symptoms was not made, the market researcher felt that using the term 'anxiety attacks' was warranted.

Some respondents felt the loss so acutely that they experienced anxiety attacks. The feeling of loss also resulted in mood swings. Emotionally they experienced turmoil, that left them feeling almost desolated, depressed. Tremendous experience of loss resulting in self-pity, restlessness, apprehension. Huge threat to their comfort zone (market researcher field notes, deprivation group).

There was also evidence of other habitual behaviour affected, for example, not having the usual evening cup of tea in front of the television, nor discussing the episode with other people. Most profound was the fact that none of the participants in this exercise substituted watching Isidingo with another television programme.

Not one respondent went to another television programme. Instead they frantically tried to keep themselves busy with trivial household chores, some went to bed and one respondent listened to 702. Others went socialising or went to church, but it's interesting that no other television programme seemed to have the influence to lure them in (market researcher field notes – deprivation group).

This theme, and especially the fact that loyal viewers did not replace the soap with another television programme, relates to the recruitment process. The presence of this theme affirms that some viewers who engaged in the research process, were in fact loyal Isidingo viewers. Since they are aware of the fact that they are regular viewers, they would have been able to interpret this lived reality and provide useful input into what makes them loyal to the soap opera. The presence of this theme confirms that the rest of the study holds the promise of revealing the psychological processes that are inherent to pleasant viewing experiences and loyalty to soap operas.

2.2. Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as involvement with characters

The most significant loss experienced during the deprivation exercise was a loss of the characters themselves. Papa G, Georgie, Barker, Cherel and Zeb were amongst the characters that viewers mentioned in their diaries, indicating that the motivation to watch is based on character involvement.

When trying to explain declining interest or reasons for viewers to interrupt their viewership, the market researcher found that viewers very seldom cite storylines as a reason, but rather the disappearance of characters. This, together with the wealth of data in the larger focus group sample

on characters, convinced the market researcher that loyalty to Isidingo is strongly linked to character involvement.

This also relates to the concept of vicarious living (living through what one observes in another)f. The market researcher believes that the blur between fantasy and reality leads to viewers believing they can create a healthier or more exciting lifestyle, based entirely on the behavior of the soap characters. Through vicarious or substitute living they live the lives of their characters.

2.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.

Isidingo has a strong legacy and an aging audience that literally grew up with it. Viewers saw the soap make the transition from the mine setting to the media world and have watched characters mature. The market researcher noticed that the majority of loyal viewers have been watching Isidingo for many years and concluded that their loyalty must, in part, be related to their familiarity with the soap and its characters.

2.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.

Viewers favour specific characters over others and become so engrossed in the storyline that the distinction between reality and fantasy diminishes. Viewer identification with the character and his/her storyline is so strong that events and emotions affecting the character are experienced in such clarity that it resembles real life, personal experiences. This involvement with characters as if they are real people, is both a cause and result of continued, loyal viewership. The market researcher attempts to understand this phenomenon and mentions Dunbar's number as a possible explanation.

Figure 6.2. Dunbar's number (from market research presentation).

The second hermeneutic includes a reference to Dunbar's number as an explanation of why soap opera viewers become so involved in the soaps (see Figure 6.2 which is an extract from the presentation made to the client by the market researcher). Robin Dunbar is a British anthropologist who, by using studies of different anthropologists, discovered that there is a relationship between the size of the neo-cortex of each of the 36 primates studied and the size of the social groups within which it functions. He arrives at a mathematical formula and by using this formula, he predicted that 147.8 is the average group size for humans. According to the market researcher, this number corresponds to data available on various village and tribe sizes in many cultures. Dunbar (2003) believes that humans are able to form meaningful social relationships with a maximum of 150 people. Since we are limited in the number of people we can know at one stage, we place excessive value on these slots. The second hermeneutic concludes that because of the amount of time regular viewers invest in soap characters, they are able to take up some of these positions, therefore possibly replacing other social relationships.

2.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer in terms of an emotional reaction to the character.

The second hermeneutic asserts that many characters evoke strong emotions in viewers. This relates to the concept of 'normal and hate' characters as the emotions evoked are essentially positive or negative, and the characters that evoke negative emotions from viewers are the hate characters which were identified in Chapter 5, while the characters who elicit positive viewer emotions are the normal characters identified in Chapter 5. For example, Agnes is believed to play a mother role for many characters, not only her children. The power struggles between Cherel and Barker (and some other characters) create a feeling of power, control, frustration and achievement. Zeb's traditional thinking frustrates especially young women while men enjoy and relate to the control he has. Vusi's window into the traditional black spiritual realm pleases some black viewers, but makes others feel exposed and vulnerable to being misunderstood by the viewers of other races on a cultural level.

The market researcher believes that because viewers are so emotionally involved with characters, they find it difficult to conduct an objective character evaluation. The market researcher warns the production team before presenting her feedback on the characters that they should keep the viewer's inability to distance him/herself from the emotional experience of the characters in mind and realise that it is part and parcel to the appeal of the soap. Negative feedback should therefore not be understood as necessitating intervention, but rather as an indication of the emotions that are evoked by the character. (Please refer to Chapter 7 for the academic researcher's opinion on this issue).

> With this [viewers inability to be objective about characters] in mind, their [viewers'] criticism in the following character descriptions does not necessarily warrant change…it is rather an indication of how characters are

currently positioned as a basis for future development (extract from research presentation).

Character segmentation is an analytic tool that is often used in media market research (Livingstone, 1989, 1998). Character segmentation can be done in different ways depending on the study and purpose. Livingstone (1989) asked viewers to sort Coronation Street characters based on perceived similarities in personality. The data was analysed by using statistical multi-dimensional scaling software and the characters were plotted on three scales, namely: masculine/feminine, staid/roguish and modern/traditional in approach to life. Through the same methodology Livingstone (1998) conducted character segmentations of the characters in Dallas, EastEnders and Coronation Street. Characters were plotted on a wide variety of scales including, amongst others: male/female, immoral/moral, business oriented/pleasure oriented and so forth. Through this character segmentation, Livingstone was able to identify character traits that are aligned and opposed. She discovered, for instance, that a character that is seen as being family oriented would also be seen as warm, likeable, steady and moral. The market researcher also conducted a character segmentation to prioritise characters in terms of their contribution to loyalty to Isidingo. This character segmentation was, however, done based on qualitative data and did not involve multi-dimensional scaling. The character segmentation that will now be discussed was based on the market researcher's interpretation of viewer discussions of the individual characters.

The market researcher segmented the Isidingo characters on two variables, namely importance and number of viewers emotionally involved with the character. The importance variable relates to the number of characters connected to a specific character's storyline. Figure 6.3 is an extract from the market research presentation and represents the result of the segmentation.

Figure 6.3. Character segmentation (from market research presentation).

The vertical axis (the number of viewers emotionally involved in the character) is an indication of viewer interest in the character. Characters that are placed toward the top of the vertical scale are therefore important contributors to overall viewer loyalty to the soap. The researcher also segments characters in terms of the number of storylines that were connected to the character (horizontal axis in Figure 6.3) at the time of the research. Characters toward the right of the scale have a potential impact on a large number of storylines and other characters, while characters to the left of the scale exist largely in isolation. Combined, these two measures provide a useful map of the weight that different characters hold in influencing loyalty.

Characters that fall in the top right-hand quadrant are characters that are both connected to many storylines and enjoy strong viewer involvement. These characters were prominent in the storylines at the time of the original research, as well as being the characters that viewers had significant emotional investment in. These characters can realistically be seen as the largest contributors to viewer loyalty at the time of the research. Characters in the top left-hand quadrant were perhaps less prominent in storylines at the time of the research, but because of established viewer relationships with these characters, they still enjoyed great viewer interest. Characters in the bottom right-hand quadrant are characters with which not many viewers have strong relationships, but they were perceived as instrumental to storylines at the time of the research. Lastly, characters in the bottom left-hand quadrant represent characters that were neither instrumental to the storylines at the time of research, nor did they enjoy significant viewer interest. These are background characters that are not critical to any storylines and are there purely for the sake of other characters. The top two quadrants

are relevant to the current research question, as characters in these two quadrants can be expected to increase viewer interest and saliently influence loyalty.

2.2.3.1. *Quadrant 1 (upper - right).*

Quadrant 1 (upper - right) consists of characters that elicit strong emotional response from viewers, while also being connected to many storylines.

2.2.3.1.1. *Barker.*

Viewers are very invested in Isidingo's immoral tycoon. He elicits negative emotions for most, yet he is thoroughly enjoyed. Viewers love to hate him. He escapes all retribution and his continued ability to do so entices continued involvement with the character. Barker is compared to Stefano DiMera in Days of our Lives and JR Ewing in Dallas, and the market researcher calls Barker "an institution". Viewers are ready to see Barker punished for what he has done, although he should again prevail after some punishment. The sentiment is that any betrayal from Lee will have the most hurtful effect on Barker.

2.2.3.1.2. *Cherel.*

Female viewers love Cherel for her strength and drive. They respect and aspire to her. Male viewers do not have the same identification with her, but love the scandal that follows her. Viewers have a wealth of knowledge about Cherel and she evokes emotional involvement with the large majority of the audience. She evokes a range of positive and negative emotions, including: being admired, aspired to, venerated, envied, held in awe and despised. She portrays strength and influence, determination and 'raw guts' – all of which intrigue viewers.

The prospect of Barker and Cherel rekindling their love is met with extreme (positive and negative) emotion. This is yet again witness to the fact that almost all viewers are emotionally invested in them, and that most storylines between them would be met with increasing enthusiasm.

2.2.3.1.3. *Papa G.*

Papa G or Georgie is tremendously liked by a large demographic spread of viewers. They love his unique way of speaking, which is named 'Tsotsie taal'. Especially black males recognise him as someone from the townships or from their immediate environment. He is described as a 'cool operator'. He is seen as a gangster gone right and viewers enjoy watching his unique style. His reformation from a gangster to a legitimate business man was inspiring to many viewers.

2.2.3.1.4. *Zeb.*

Zeb is recognised as a portrayal of a typical African father. Black viewers relate to him as the family provider. When his strict control of his family goes too far, it frustrates viewers, especially younger

women. This real representation of a traditional African man is appreciated by many as a window into black culture.

2.2.3.1.5. *Letti.*

Many viewers have strong opinions about the character Letti, which is indicative of high emotional involvement with her. There are two contrasting ways in which the character is perceived, however. She is seen as strong and determined by white and coloured female audiences, but is also seen as a 'spoilt little brat' by black females. Younger black males believe her attractiveness adds to the appeal of the soap.

2.2.3.2. Quadrant 2 (upper left).

Quadrant 2 (upper left) represents characters who elicit strong emotional response from viewers but who less connected to other characters.

2.2.3.2.1. *Ma Agnes.*

Agnes is experienced as a true mother – many viewers referring to her as Mamma Aggie. As the pillar of strength of her family, young women aspire to her, older women admire her and males take comfort in her. She contributes a sense of stability and strength to the soap and is believed to be as much a rock for the soap as she is for her family. Very high levels of positive emotional involvement are visible for this character from all sub-segments in the audience. Financial difficulty for the Matebanes would achieve high emotional involvement from large parts of the audience. If possible, good should prevail for them.

2.2.3.2.2. *Lee.*

Viewers have empathy with Lee because they have witnessed her undergo many obstacles. Most viewers agree that she has the potential of becoming stronger in her private life and gain as much control there as she has at work, "She must come out of her cocoon". She is seen by many as a worthy successor to Barker and formidable rival to Cherel. Viewers do not believe that she can become evil like her father.

2.2.3.2.3. *Rajesh.*

Rajesh is mostly evaluated in a positive way. He is very popular, especially amongst female viewers. During the time of the research, perceptions were that he could become stronger.

2.2.3.2.4. *Nandipha.*

Little is known about Nandipha, apart from the fact that she is HIV positive and is in a relationship with Parsons. She is perceived as having a positive attitude toward being HIV positive and is therefore seen as inspiring. This is particularly true of viewers who increasingly experience the effects of HIV and AIDS around them. Viewers also appreciate Nandipha's soft and down-to-earth nature.

2.2.3.2.5. Len.

Len is loved for his straight-forward honesty. His demeanor adds excitement ('spice and spunk' according to participants). Female viewers also find Len attractive. He is recognised as a type of character that appears in many soap operas and his type of character is experienced as a "refreshing balance to the conniving characters".

2.2.3.3. Quadrant 3 (lower right).

Quadrant 3 (lower right) includes characters that do not elicit strong emotional response from viewers, but were instrumental in the storylines at the time of the research.

2.2.3.3.1. Frank.

Frank is respected and liked by most viewers. Viewers believe he has the ability to go head to head with Barker; however, he will not succeed in replacing the tycoon. He is seen as an innovative and unpredictable character and this creates both excitement and expectation that something interesting will unfold.

2.2.3.3.2. Maggie.

Maggie is appreciated as a gentle female, but many viewers find it hard to connect with her. This is especially true for male viewers who dislike her for being a typical gossip. She is described as a relative who you are not too fond of – illustrative of the fact that she is well known, but not necessarily liked.

2.2.3.3.3. Joe.

Joe is exclusively known as Letti's white boyfriend. Most viewers who are interested in the storyline of Joe and Letti's relationship invest emotionally in Letti and Zeb, rather than Joe. He is, however, integral to the conflict Letti and her father is experiencing.

2.2.3.4. Quadrant 4 (lower left).

Quadrant 4 (lower left) consists of characters that do not elicit strong emotional response from viewers and that were not instrumental in the storylines at the time of the research.

2.2.3.4.1. Harriet.

Some viewers find Harriet, Barker's secretary, frustrating as she is yet another character that Barker manipulates. Viewers anticipate that she will grow to become more of an individual than merely an employee. There is also the anticipation that she could betray Barker.

2.2.3.4.2. Vusi.

For many viewers, Vusi's disappearance from the immediate storylines left a gap that has not been filled by any other character. Some black male viewers experience frustration at his career choice of

leaving a prominent position in the mining industry to train as a sangoma, and feel that it was a mistake. Overall, viewers react positively to the prospect of having him return.

2.2.3.4.3. Lolly.

Viewers do not display strong opinions over Lolly, and this is diagnostic of their low involvement with her. She is interpreted as young and fun, and viewers believe she managed to turn difficult circumstance into her favour.

2.2.3.4.4. Parsons.

Viewers have warm feelings towards Parsons, however, these emotions are diluted by the perception that his role has reached a climax and that he is not interesting any longer. He is still appreciated for being genuine.

2.2.3.4.5. Mandla.

Mandla, Barker's lawyer, is not particularly valued by any viewer segment. Much criticism is aimed at him being a lawyer, with most viewers agreeing that he isn't strong enough at present.

2.2.3.5. Other characters.

There are a few characters that viewers have not made an emotional investment in. These include: Tim, Dumisani, Erin, Kyle, Leon, Natasha, Niemand, Paul, Pule, Siyanda, Stella, Steve and Tandeka.

2.2.4. Sub-theme 2.4: Representation as agent of identification.

Most viewers have a need for relating to at least one character. The norm seems to be that viewers form more meaningful, stronger relationships with characters that are of their own race. This is confirmed by Eyal and Rubin (2003) and Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) who believe that viewers are more likely to imitate characters from the same gender, race, attitude and background than their own. Certain cultural attributes may also contribute to viewers having a strong affinity to a character. This is true, for example, of Zeb's traditional, patriarchal values or Papa G's manner of speech. Viewers also feel closer to characters that are in a similar life stage than themselves. For example viewers, who are mothers themselves, easily identify with Agnes and younger females' negative reaction to Zeb illustrates how they identify with Letti. But the set of attributes with perhaps the broadest reach, are values and attitudes which are able to sustain strong affinity with characters across age or race barriers. A white female may identify with the way Agnes handles a problem, or a young black male may aspire to Barker's power.

The following is a summary of the distinct viewer groups in the study based on their values, TV viewing behaviour and the characters in Isidingo that they most relate to. This summary is based on the market researcher's analysis of the different viewer segments.

2.2.4.1. Students aged 18-24 years old.

The youngest segment in the study includes male and female viewers between the ages of 18 and 24 years. These viewers are leaving home, and although families are still important they seem to be less of a priority than friends. A "cultural convergence" between race groups was identified in the more affluent part of the segment where racial differences in interests and aspirations are dispersed. This segment is highly experimental and disloyal in their media preferences, although it includes soaps and series with a preference for humorous content. They are also aspiring to be serious and up to date with current happenings and therefore also appreciate news and actuality content. The characters students identify with most include Barker, Cherel and Georgie for the males, and Cherel, Agnes, Lolly, Georgie, Barker and Lee for the females. Younger females across race groups have a fairly negative investment in Zeb.

2.2.4.2. Adult male viewers 25-34 years old.

The next segment is adult males aged 25-34 years. They are getting settled in their family and careers and have very specific priorities. Their view on life tilts towards the more serious aspects, such as planning for the future and coping with increasing economical demands. Their viewing repertoire consists mainly of series, news and a definite focus on sport. The distinguishing factor between loyal and occasional Isidingo viewers in this segment is that loyal viewers tend to watch with their family, while occasional viewers have no social incentive to watch. The Isidingo characters they relate to strongly are Barker, Cherel, Georgie, Parsons, Zeb and Lee.

2.2.4.3. Adult female viewers 25-34 years old.

Like their male counterparts, adult female viewers are also focused on getting their careers and family settled. They fear failure and are very focused on specifically defined personal goals. They are very avid television-watchers, watching much more television than male viewers as well as older and younger female viewers. They enjoy watching a wide selection of soaps, talk shows and series. Characters they are specifically interested in include Agnes, Cherel, Barker, Georgie, and Vusi.

2.2.4.4. Mature male viewers 35+ years old.

The mature male viewers' careers are established and reaching a high point. They are interested in news happenings and sport, and they use the media to wind down from a day at work. For them, TV ownership (or being able to make the viewing choice) is largely restricted to the prime-time news bulletin during the week and sport on Saturdays. During other times in the week these viewers – some of whom are fathers - often succumb to the preferences of other members of the family. Their viewing repertoires therefore also include family viewing, such as soaps, reality game shows, series and movies. Their viewership of Isidingo is fairly superficial and uninvolved. Characters they are most interested in are Barker, Cherel, Zeb and Georgie.

2.2.4.5. Mature female viewers 35+ years old.

The last segment is female viewers over 35 years of age. These viewers are more often than not mothers and being very family oriented, often place the needs of their family before their own. They are concerned with the health of themselves and their families, and the long-term stability of the country. Together with their male counterparts, some of them remain active in their career and other areas later into their lives (50+). The mature female viewer appreciates viewing occasions that join family members together. This would include the Sunday movie or everyday local soaps. Personally she likes talk shows, romantic and sentimental genres. This group is possibly the most loyal soap viewing segment of all. They have a very strong affiliation with Agnes, but also relate to Lee, Cherel, Barker and Len.

2.3. Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines

Loyalty to Isidingo is sustained first and foremost by an emotional investment in specific characters. It is through the storylines in which these characters are involved, that the viewers get to know them. Understanding characters is therefore also related to understanding their storylines. For this reason, unpacking popular storylines provides insight into the behaviour, motivation and character traits viewers enjoy in characters.

The following storylines are identified in the market research report as prominent storylines that are recalled and enjoyed:

- Every storyline between Barker and Cherel.
- Mama Agnes's success story from rags to riches.
- Georgie's sordid success story of shebeen to club.
- Letti and Joe's interracial relationship.
- The Matebane family's life experiences.
- Lee's affair with Rajesh.
- Cherel killing Duncan.
- Doep investigating Cherel.
- The sadness of Doep and Tanya marrying and Tanya then committing suicide.
    - It left audiences sad and in a rage, but it worked precisely because it is so <u>true to life,</u> i.e. the realness factor that only Isidingo offers.
- Barker setting up Rajesh.
- Lee's kidnapping.
- Vusi's dilemma between becoming a traditional healer and his ordinary work.
- Tanya, the father, the grandfather and the rape.

2.3.1. Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?

This theme is not addressed in the second hermeneutic. It is likely that the market researcher did not regard this sub-theme as salient in the original market research in context of the larger, more pervasive themes.

2.3.2. Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.

Cliffhangers are storylines that build to a climax and is left unresolved at the end of an episode. The market researcher believes these, together with other storylines, enhance the entertainment value of the soap opera, but are less critical than character involvement in sustaining loyalty.

2.3.3. Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines that contribute more to loyalty.

The market researcher identified a number of essential ingredients to make storylines intriguing. These are: strong female role models; malevolent human nature to revel in other human beings' suffering; complex social relationships made comprehensible to the ordinary viewer and maintaining real-life circumstances to assure the integrity and believability of the South African lifestyle. The last two are discussed under theme 5 - *The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.*

2.3.3.1. Strong female role models.

Female viewers are very involved with the strong characters in Isidingo, and their relationships with these characters are based on identification and aspiration. Strong female role models are therefore an essential element in sustaining viewer interest. The first example of this dynamic is viewers' relationship with Agnes. They admire Agnes for her relationship with her family and the fact that she regards her family as her first priority over anything else. Cherel is another example. Although much of Cherel's appeal lies in viewers enjoying her devious scheming, she is admired for her unwavering courage towards all adversaries. This is particularly true for her ability to challenge all the male adversaries that cross her path. Nandipha is another strong woman whose positive attitude to HIV/AIDS is encouraging as well as educational and female viewers adore her for this reason. More evidence to the importance of this theme is viewers' tendency to express a need to see the moral fibre of female characters develop. They wish, for example, that Lee will realise that her father manipulates her and become stronger in her personal life; that Agnes would defy her husband and that Letti would stand up to her father.

2.3.3.2. Malevolent human nature to revel in other human beings' suffering.

Another important story element is the destruction of relationships, which the market researcher believed to be something the depraved human heart takes pleasure in. She mentioned a few storylines to illustrate how this story characteristic is practically played out: Cherel's scheming to destroy Barker; Cherel's quest for revenge; Cherel's suffering in prison, and Barker's brilliant masterminding crime.

The market researcher then made reference to a study conducted in Scotland that possibly explains why malevolence appeals so much to soap opera viewers. Figure three below is an extract from the market research presentation.

Figure 6.4. Understanding why malevolence appeals (from market research presentation).

The researcher explains that psychologists in Scotland invented a memory test similar to the game known as Chinese whispers. Ten volunteers were required to read four different texts and then to write down on paper what they could remember. They were then passed onto another ten who did the same. The process was repeated four times. A comparison between the final versions of the texts and the originals, showed that "gossip-like" information was best remembered and passed on with higest degree of accuracy. This included information regarding deception, infidelity and the interactions of other people. Purely descriptive information about individuals and their surroundings were recalled much less accurately. The researchers concluded that personal and social data are highly relevant to humans, and that it could be related to a primal survival mechanism where a key survival mechanism is paying attention to other people's private lives and interactions.

2.4. Theme 4: The importance of fantasy and realism

The second hermeneutic does not make specific reference to viewers' preference for realism. It rather discusses realism contrasted with fantasy, as important variables when comparing soaps (refer to discussion of Theme 9 below) and that viewers have an appetite for both. When understanding loyalty

to Isidingo, however, the market researcher acknowledges that the soap's status as one of the most realistic soaps on offer on TV, contributes to the loyalty of viewers.

This reiterates the hermeneutic turn identified at the end of the Chapter 5. Viewers clearly watch both local and international soaps, and subsequently have a need for both the realism in the former and fantasy in the latter. A need for realism is therefore not a driver in loyalty to all soap operas but – as illustrated in Theme 5 below – it is a driver of loyalty for Isidingo.

2.5. Theme 5: The Specific Appeal Of Isidingo Is Interpreted By The Viewer As Its Ability To Simulate Reality

2.5.1. Why Isidingo is real

Despite the above, Isidingo is clearly positioned as a realistic soap. Isidingo is perceived by both loyal viewers and viewers who are less intrigued by the soap as the leading South Africa soap in terms of realistically portraying South Africa as it is today. This is especially intriguing for male viewers who favor realism in their overall viewing diet.

> Isidingo compares well with other soaps in terms of its South Africanness (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, aged 30-39 yrs).

> Isidingo is considered the leader of South African soaps, really reflecting the different races (market researcher field notes, mixed race female group, aged 25-34).

> Isidingo although not viewed regularly, is the leading South African soap in terms of realistically portraying South Africa as it is today. Viewers believe the racial mix and the sensitivity of racial interaction are exceptionally well done (market researcher field notes, white and coloured female group, aged 25-34).

2.5.1.1. Maintaining real-life circumstances to assure the integrity and believability of South Africa lifestyle.

A key to Isidingo's appeal lies in its ability to portray the everyday lives of South Africans. This specifically includes being representative of social groups that are both traditional and non-traditional in outlook. It also means making characters as believable as possible. Papa G with his typical demeanor is a success story in this regard.

(Please refer to essential ingredients of storylines under Theme 3 above).

2.5.1.2. Sustaining identification.

The realism of Isidingo as communicated through its realistic storylines and lifelike characters has a very important implication for loyalty. The market researcher believed that the more realistic the soap is, the easier it is for viewers to identify with characters and the challenges that they face. And because identification with characters seems to be one of the most important influencers in loyalty, realism by implication becomes an important element in understanding loyalty.

2.5.2. Sub-theme 5.1: Most of Isidingo's characters are real.

Papa G, Agnes and Zeb are specifically identified as characters you could know from real life. As discussed earlier, the market researcher acknowledged that there are two characters in Isidingo – specifically Cherel and Barker – that are not seen as realistic.

2.5.3. Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.

An important part of Isidingo's appeal is its ability to include social issues in its storylines in an entertaining manner, and making complex social concerns comprehensible for the ordinary viewer. The soap succeeds in tutoring viewers on how to deal with social issues in a way that almost goes undetected. For a South African audience to whom social issues such HIV and AIDS, depression, corruption and racial conflict remains very relevant to their everyday livelihoods, this "edutainment" will remain important.

2.5.4. Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational.

Viewers spend time with soap characters and storylines every day and when they strongly identify with characters the soap plays a significant educational role. The market researcher explained, for instance, that black viewers relate so strongly to the Matabane family that they acquire life skills through following their storylines. Through their identification with the Matebanes the viewer learns how to deal with everyday problems, as well as more serious tribulations.

To them, soaps are the main tutor of the school of life. They are so immersed in the unfolding of the characters' lives that they relate very strongly to it . Not only do they believe they get advice on how to deal with real-life problems, but they also pick up tips in terms of a whole lot of other things relating to fashion, social behaviour, speaking English, raising children, etc. (market researcher field notes, black female group, 35-49 yrs).

2.6. Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcast

The second hermeneutic includes a reference to a viewer's need to maintain sanity between the stress of the day at work and coping with domestic demands at home. The market researcher was convinced that soap operas provide a much needed time for relaxation during which the viewer is able to recuperate after the day's work and the evening's demands at home.

The market researcher described the time during which soap operas are on air as a highly planned, "ritualised" time in the household. Tasks and chores are planned in accordance to when the soap opera is on air. Family members do the same things every night at that time. The adult female family members watch soaps, young children play outside to not disturb the soap viewers and may

occasionally also watch soaps. The male family members tend to be busy elsewhere in the home and may occasionally also join in watching the soap.

> Reluctant admittance to watching some soaps, mainly because they allow their wives to 'reign' during those hours (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, 25-34 yrs).

The market researcher called this time an "emotional time-out" that all family members need and enjoy. The timeslot in which the soap opera is broadscast is integral to its appeal in this regard.

2.7. Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership

The market researcher noticed that viewers are influenced by family members with whom they share their TV. They tend to watch soaps with family members and when family members do not agree on the specific soap to watch, the children often get their way. The market researcher believed that mothers often relinquish control of the remote, and by implication the viewing decision, to other family members.

> Backstage is preferred by their kids and they have no interest in fighting with their children about it. It seems as if Generations is more the soap families prefer to watch to get their soap fix (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, aged 30-39yrs).

The tendency to discuss the soap opera with fellow viewers – as identified in chapter 5 - was also confirmed by the market researcher: They love being able to discuss it at length with colleagues/ friends (market researcher field notes, white & Coloured female group, aged 25-34).

2.8. Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly character involvement

The most important cause of fluctuating viewer interest identified by the market researcher, is involvement with a specific character. When key characters disappear, interest and loyalty fluctuates. She mentions examples of Cherel, Vusi and Derek, but emphasises Cherel.

She also believed that when lapsed viewers[8] try to recommit to Isidingo, they find it difficult to become used to new characters and form relationships with new characters. And they are subsequently lost again easily.

> I wanted to see what was going to happen with Refilwe – the lady that had a baby with Matabane – and she disappeared (market researcher field notes, interview with a black, female lapsed viewer, aged 45 yrs).

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[8] Lapsed viewers were not part of the academic study's sample but were included in the larger study and are therefore mentioned by the market researcher. Please refer to the introduction of Chapter 6.

2.8.1. Sub-theme 8.1: Character involvement vs. interest in storylines.

There is a difference between viewers who watch regularly and those who watch less regularly. As regular viewership increases, so does the closeness of the engagement with the characters and storylines.

Despite knowledge, they (young occasional viewers) don't seem to have any poignant relationship with any of the characters, with the exception of Cherel, for whom they have admiration because of her potency and determination (market researcher field notes, mixed race female group, aged 18-24 yrs).

Inevitably they get involved with the storylines and develop a kind of spectator fascination rather than getting too involved with the characters (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, aged 30-39 yrs).

Younger occasional viewers are less involved in the characters and storylines than older more regular viewers. Their irregular viewing patterns are due to lifestyle factors, such as social commitments and the general low priority of television in their lives. They reject the younger characters in Isidingo, thus indicating that character identification is not such a prominent part of their interpretation of the lived reality of soap opera viewership than would be the case for older females. They accept the typical characters portrayed, such as the bitch, the father, the tycoon etc. and have no need to find role models in the soap. Some of them do, however, have a stronger affinity towards Backstage, a soap that is broadcast in the same timeslot on another station that has a predominately younger cast.

Male viewers in general are believed to be more passive viewers than their female counterparts. Their viewership is motivated more by the social dynamic of being with their spouses, than necessarily a personal interest in watching. They also seem to be more involved in storylines than in characters and are subsequently easily lost if a compelling storyline is resolved. For them viewership is simply not a priority, as tasks around the house could easily take precedence over viewership. The market researcher described their viewership as 'superficial, uncomplicated, and their expectations low.'

2.8.2. Sub-theme 8.2: Competing soaps.

Afrikaans-speaking occasional viewers, including the white and coloured audiences balance watching 7de Laan and Isidingo. The soaps are broadcast in the same timeslot every day. 7de Laan is a more colloquial setting with a focus on family-oriented, family friendly storylines and characters. It lacks the irreverence of Isidingo and it also offers more lighthearted entertainment. Although no groups with only Coloured research participants were included in the academic study's sample, the market

researcher singled out their responses while observing the groups and mentions that they find it easier to relate to the small-town nature of the soap, as well as identifying with the predominately coloured cast of 7de Laan.

2.8.3.   Sub-theme 8.3: Alternative viewing opportunities.

Occasional viewers, who do not watch every weekday episode, are not truly lost to Isidingo. Occasional viewers make use of the myriad of alternative viewing opportunities, including a 09:30 repeat on SABC 1, a 15:00 repeat on SABC 3, as well as the omnibus on Saturdays. Although the soap faces considerable competition from Backstage for the younger black viewer and 7de Laan for the white and coloured viewer, no single satisfactory substitute emerged during the deprivation exercise. For the market researcher, this was proof of Isidingo's unique role in the soap repertoire of the viewers who watch more than one soap.

2.8.4.   Sub-theme 8.4: Production quality.

The market researcher also believes that production quality cannot be blamed for occasional viewership. She explained that there are usually tell-tale signs of production problems, such as viewers expressing that the soap "just looks local" or "that it is not as good as international soaps". Comments like these were absent from her understanding of occasional viewers' experience of the soap, and viewers' perception of the production quality of Isidingo is therefore an unlikely cause of occasional viewership.

2.9. Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre

Four main local soaps emerged to make up the competitive environment for Isidingo. Although not all are broadcast within the same timeslot, these soaps shape viewers' expectations of what a local soap operas should be. Isidingo viewers also watch a variety of other soaps, indicating that the genre in itself is appealing. Figure 6.5 is an extract from the market research presentation. It represents a segmentation the market researcher made of the soap operas on air at the time of the research.

Figure 6.5. Soap segmentation (from market research presentation).

The market researcher segmented the soaps on offer on local television at the time of the research into three distinct groups (Figure 6.6): aspirational soaps, commercial soaps and realistic soaps, and defined them as follows:

Aspirational soaps: based on wealth, sophistication, corporate themes and physical beauty ("the beautiful people"). These include the soaps Egoli, Days of Our Lives and The Bold and The Beautiful.

Commercial soaps: based on more approachable everyday characters, sometimes underscored with bizarre themes and romance ("Commercial" as in supplying the "popular"/ mass ingredients). Included in this group is Generations, 7de Laan, Days of our lives and The Bold and the Beautiful.

Realistic soaps: based on common, everyday people. Attempt to mirror society and the mores of the common people within an often colloquial and familiar setting. This group, the largest on local television, includes Isidingo, Egoli, Muvhango and Backstage.

Generations is likely to be the most popular soap amongst black viewers, it being extremely aspirational, and full of high profile, powerful characters. 7de Laan has a malleable and uncomplicated approach that results in high appeal amongst Afrikaans-speaking audiences, in particular viewers with young children. Egoli has similar values as 7de Laan, but more intrigue and aspirational value. Backstage has the advantage of a narrowed, young character cast which allows for strong peer identification, as well as an intense portrayal of interracial relationships.

Each soap has a unique style and appeal, and interestingly enough, viewers adapt to each soap's style. The market researcher explained, for instance, that coloured and white females watch both the contrasting Isidingo and 7de Laan, and when watching the latter, they accept the soap's softer, humorous style. They would not expect 7de Laan to come up with the same challenging storylines (dealing with serious, difficult issues) as Isidingo.

And this is true for the larger soap genre as well. Each soap is enjoyed for its unique mix of characters, storylines and settings. The current study provides an in-depth explanation of this dynamic for Isidingo, however, future research may examine how this differs for South African viewers when watching the wide variety of other soaps available.

2.9.1.   Sub-theme 9.1: International soaps are more unrealistic than local soaps.

The notion that international soaps are more unrealistic than local soaps is confirmed in the second hermeneutic. The market researcher made a clear distinction between realistic and fantasy soaps, and includes international soaps in the latter category. Figure 6.6 is an extract from the research report in which the researcher plotted the soaps on a continuum with fantasy and realism as the two contrasting extremities.

Figure 6.6. How soaps compare in terms of realism (from market research presentation).

International soaps are placed on the fantasy side of the continuum, while Isidingo is placed on the realism side. This is largely because of Isidingo's portrayal of hard-hitting social issues, as well as having some characters that are undoubtedly recognised as being realistic. However, the malevolent characters – most notably Barker and Cherel – add a fantasy element to Isidingo. Since local viewers have an appetite for the real and fantastical, Isidingo succeeds very well with its mix of realism and entertaining fantasy-like, malevolent characters.

In the final interpretation, the current theme could therefore not be seen as a sub-theme to Theme 4 of the first hermeneutic, i.e. a preference for all things real. Although international soaps are clearly perceived to be more unrealistic than local soaps, this cannot purely imply a preference for realism, seeing that international soaps are still watched by loyal viewers of local soaps, and even Isidingo contains elements of fantasy.

2.10. Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism

This theme is not addressed in the second hermeneutic. It is likely that the market researcher did not regard this sub-theme as salient in the original market research within the context of the larger, more pervasive themes.

2.11. Theme 11: The importance of the setting of the soap

The setting of the soap is another less important determinant of viewer interest, as it provides the backdrop to the type of characters and stories one could expect to find there (e.g. a soap with a corporate setting would have corporate characters and corporate storylines). A soap, such as Backstage for instance, appeals to younger viewers because of its portrayal of a student community, while 7de Laan offers a small-town charm where everyone knows each other. Egoli and Isidingo are both corporate settings interspersed with family and home environments.

Isidingo started out in the mining industry and a few years ago substituted this setting for the current television environment. The market researcher believes that viewers experienced this transition as natural and that viewers who were familiar with the mining heritage are also comfortable with the new setting.

3. The movement in interpretation from the first to the second hermeneutic

As discussed in Chapter 3, a complete understanding can never be achieved within a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, because all consciousness is already interpretation (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). It is, however, possible to reach reasonable understanding, even though it cannot be absolute (Debesay et al., 2008).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the epistemology (what can be known about reality) of hermeneutic phenomenology is that any knowledge represents what has been accumulated about a certain topic thus far, not what is ultimately and objectively available to be known about the topic. Interpretations in the current chapter were made on the basis of the interpretations in the previous chapter. Added to these is the background knowledge of the second interpreter (for this reason the hermeneutic circle becomes a spiral that enlarges as it moves outward). The second hermeneutic therefore represents a more complete or larger interpretation of what is ultimately real, but this interpretation cannot be separated from the interpretations that have already been made.

Table 6.1 below summarises how the first and second hermeneutics build on each other. This table will be revisited again in the third hermeneutic and will then include a column indicating if information relating to each theme was found in literature. Table 6.1 therefore represents the themes as identified in the first hermeneutic and the new names for the themes which are more apt at describing the full meaning of the themes that have just been elaborated on or are not present.

Table 6.1 *The reinterpretation of themes from the first hermeneutic*

Chapter 5 **The soap opera viewer**	Chapter 6 **Market researcher**
Themes from the first hermeneutic	**Themes rephrased in the second hermeneutic**
Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters.	Renamed to: **Theme 2:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as <u>involvement</u> with characters.
Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.

Sub-theme 2.3: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters and viewers relate to these two types of characters differently.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme 2.3:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer in terms of an <u>emotional reaction</u> to the character.
-	Additional sub-theme: **Sub-theme 2.4**: Representation as agent of identification.
Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?	Not present in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines preferred.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme 3.3:** Types of storylines that contribute more to loyalty.
Theme 4: A preference for all things real.	Renamed to: **Theme 4:** The importance of fantasy and realism.
Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 5.1: Isidingo's characters are real.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme 5.1:** Most of Isidingo's characters are real.
Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcast.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour	Renamed to: **Theme 8:** The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly character involvement
Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre.	**Theme 9:** Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre.
Sub-theme 9.1: Local and international soaps represent two sub-genres that are distinct because of the difference in realism between them.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.

Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism.	Not present in the second hermeneutic.
Not present in the first hermeneutic.	Additional Theme: **Theme 11:** The importance of the setting of the soap.

4. Conclusion

In Chapter 6, the researcher revisited the interpretive framework of Chapter 5 from within the second hermeneutic. The second hermeneutic largely elaborated on the interpretations of the first hermeneutic. There were, however, a few unique contributions to the interpretation. Most notably, the second hermeneutic repositions *interest in characters* as a determinant of loyalty to an *identification with characters*. This identification with characters is supported by the soap's ability to provide representation of a number of attributes through which the viewer can form a relationship; viewers' emotional reaction to characters and the soaps' accurate portrayal of reality. The second hermeneutic also introduces the importance of the setting of a soap in creating a backdrop from within which the larger soap is experienced. Lastly, the second hermeneutic includes the importance of the broader genre in the interpretation of the lived reality.

In the next two chapters, the researcher will be presenting the third hermeneutic. The third hermeneutic is primarily a reflection on the movement of interpretation from the first to the second hermeneutic. Once this is established, the researcher will add her own interpretation by consolidating the second hermeneutic with existing knowledge on the subject as set out in the literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter 7 – The third hermeneutic: interpretation

1. Introduction

Chapter 7 is a discussion of the research findings within the context of the literature review and theoretical framework. It takes place on the outer edge of the hermeneutic spiral and therefore represents the third hermeneutic.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the interpretive framework, the reciprocal interpretation of the hermeneutic process ends when the researcher reaches a temporary place of sensible meaning that is free of inner contradictions. It involves a series of interpretations and reinterpretations that constantly build on each other. This chapter is therefore structured in a way that allows the reader to follow how the researcher's interpretation is built up over the course of her reading of the first and second hermeneutic and the literature.

Figure 7.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 7.

As Figure 7.1 illustrates, the chapter is structured around four parts. In part 1, the researcher summarises her understanding of the first and second hermeneutic on an overall level. This section is built around three main graphical summations of her understanding of the main hermeneutics and acts as an introduction to her engagement in the hermeneutic spiral.

In part 2 – the most substantial part of the chapter – the researcher applies the different approaches offered in the literature review to the first and second hermeneutic to arrive at a more complete interpretation of the lived reality. Since this chapter represents the third hermeneutic, the judgement of what constitutes a more complete interpretation, is her (the academic researcher's) own.

Part 1: Reinterpreting earlier interpretations

This section is a summary of the academic researcher's understanding of the earlier interpretations. Each hermeneutic is summarised in a graphical model and then discussed. This section acts as an introduction to the third hermeneutic.

2.   The academic researcher's understanding of the first hermeneutic

The academic researcher understood the first hermeneutic as portraying several aspects that contribute to loyalty to a soap opera. Figures 7.2 and 7.3 summarise how she understood the first hermeneutic. The former is a preliminary conceptual model of the lived reality of the participants and the latter is a visual representation of the process through which a viewer develops loyalty to a soap opera. Arrows in the model indicate the process through which the viewer's interpretation takes place.

Figure 7.2. The first hermeneutic: conceptual model of the factors that impact loyalty.

The main factors that influence loyalty to Isidingo are: an interest in characters, interest in storylines, a need for realism, interest in the genre, the social aspect of viewership, and the timeslot in which soap operas are aired on television. Most of these consist of a number of sub-factors. An interest in characters is interpreted as a combination of viewer knowledge of a character, pseudo-social relationships formed with the characters, as well as the difference between hate and normal characters. The interest in storylines consists of an anticipation of what will happen when the characters find out what has already been revealed to the viewer, an anticipation of what will happen

next, as well as the contribution of different types of storylines. A preference for realism is another aspect that contributes to the interpretation of loyalty and relates strongly to the specific appeal of Isidingo. Isidingo's realism is a result of realistic character portrayals, realistic storylines and viewers' belief that Isidingo is educational. Viewers also have an interest in the genre as a whole and they identify two sub-genres available in South Africa, namely international and local soap operas. In this respect, the unrealistic nature of international soaps is contrasted to Isidingo's realism. The social aspect of viewing Isidingo and the timeslot in which the soap is aired are the last two factors which do not consist of any sub-themes.

Another aspect to the first hermeneutic is identified as the difference between loyal and occasional viewers (indicated in a free-standing circle in Figure 7.2). The difference between loyal and occasional viewers cannot be defined clearly in the process that is illustrated in Figure 7.2. It can, however, be explored further in explaining the process through which loyalty is developed. Figure 7.3 below summarises the development of loyal viewership by emphasising different aspects of the soap opera at different stages of developing loyalty.

Figure 7.3. First hermeneutic: conceptual model of the development of loyalty.

The academic researcher's understanding of the first and second hermeneutic is that non-viewers of Isidingo are usually introduced to the soap by family members or friends or by browsing through the channels in a particular timeslot. The motivation for viewership at this early stage is primarily social influence and the convenience of the timeslot. Occasional viewership develops when the viewer becomes slightly more familiar with the soap opera. It is clear from the first hermeneutic that the motivation for viewership during this stage is mostly an interest in specific storylines. The last stage during which a viewer becomes loyal to the soap is characterised by regular, uninterrupted viewership. During this stage, viewership is primarily motivated by an interest in characters, but supported by the timeslot, social aspect as well as an interest in storylines.

3. The academic researcher's understanding of the second hermeneutic

The market researcher's reading of the second hermeneutic mainly contributed a re-understanding of the flow of the interpretive processes portrayed in the two conceptual models of the first hermeneutic. By juxtaposing the two processes, she began to understand how the aspects contributing to the experience of the lived reality, fit into the viewer's evolution from Isidingo novice to loyal viewer.

The second hermeneutic presents the interpretation of the lived reality in four distinct sections: openness to the genre of soap operas, storyline involvement, character involvement, and subsequent loyalty to Isidingo. A conceptual model of the lived reality is presented in Figure 7.4 below and discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 7.4. The second hermeneutic: conceptual model of the lived reality.

The genre becomes available to the viewer through the facilitating roles of the timeslot and the social aspect of viewership, but also through the lifestyle, values and interests of the specific viewer. Lifestyle, values and interests determine the meaning a viewer attaches to the genre. For male viewers it may be a subtle submission to the viewing preference of the female members of the household, although it could also be the other way around. For children, it represents an opportunity to be with the adult caretakers in their homes. For mothers it may offer an opportunity for the family to spend time together. Depending on the routines and viewing preferences of the family members, the timeslot lends itself to soap opera viewing. The social aspect of viewership relates to the notion that

soap operas are sometimes watched by more than one family member and also includes the function of discussing the soap with friends and colleagues.

All of these – an interest in soap operas, the availability of the timeslot, as well as possible social influences – contribute to an openness to the genre. The viewer then makes a selection between a few soap operas that are on air in the same timeslot. This choice is based on the attractiveness of the setting of the soap, as well as the types of storylines. The first and second hermeneutic concurs that a new viewer is, at first, enticed to begin watching a soap opera on a regular basis because of an involvement in storylines. The involvement in storylines depends on the type of storylines, the realism of the storylines, as well as an anticipation that the viewer develops in seeing the resolution of the plots. Storyline involvement is supported by the timeslot and social influences, and as the viewer's knowledge and interest in the soap increases, he/she might become involved with the characters.

The second hermeneutic argues that a viewer's knowledge of the different characters, the degree to which the viewer is able to relate to the character representations, as well as the realism of the characters, contribute to the viewer's ability to become involved with characters. Character involvement translates to regular viewership and salient loyalty to the soap opera, as the interest in seeing a storyline get resolved develops into an interest in the fate of different characters.

Becoming loyal to the soap opera has several consequences. The viewer is more likely to form pseudo-social relationships with characters, have an emotional reaction to the characters, and an opportunity for education is created. Education is facilitated through storylines that address social issues and familiar problems that viewers are faced with in real life. Pseudo-social relationships with – and emotional reactions to – characters in turn, has a positive impact on viewer involvement with characters.

Part 2: The application of literature to the first and second hermeneutic

Attempting to interpret any part of the lived reality on its own would mean removing it from the circle of interpretation and its relation to other parts of the whole, and thus essentially stripping it of its meaning (Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997). While some media theories discussed in Chapter 2 deal with only one aspect of the lived reality, others attempt to describe the lived reality by including all of the factors that play a role. Buselle's and Bilandzic's (2008) narrative comprehension and engagement model seems to be the model of audience interpretation that comes closest to this ideal.

Busselle's and Bilandzic's (2008) work represents the most contemporary theory that includes all elements recognised by the body of knowledge (media theory) to date. For this study to add to the academic body of knowledge, it will have to acknowledge and either contribute or invalidate their model for the South African context. For this reason, their model is used as a general structure for this part of the chapter.

4. Introduction – bringing literature and the interpretation of the lived reality together

The model incorporates the viewer's use of real-world knowledge and genre, the viewer's interpretation of characters, storyline and setting, as well as the concepts of realism, transportation and enjoyment, and proposes an integrated understanding of the lived reality. Figure 7.5 indicates how some of the theories discussed in Chapter 2 fit into the Buselle and Bilandzic (2008) model.

Figure 7.5. Fit between theories and Buselle's and Bilandzic's (2008) model of narrative comprehension and engagement.

All the models, concepts and authors mentioned in the following paragraphs have been discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The purpose of this section is to illustrate how the concepts in the different theories fit together, rather than to repeat a discussion on their meaning. Concepts will therefore be used with only a brief reminder of what they refer to. For further information on these theories, please refer to Chapter 2.

Figure 7.5 shows that Livingstone's (1998) discussion on narrative interpretation that includes selective remembering of the narrative structure and characters involved in storylines, is useful in understanding how the text influences the creation of the situation model (the primary mental model which acts as the mechanism through which the rest of the story is interpreted) and its underlying story world and character models. Her analysis of character representations in Dallas, EastEnders and Coronation Street (Livingstone, 1998) combined with Hoorn and Konijn's (2003, 2005) encoding phase, further explains the character models that viewers form. The notion suggested by Buselle and Bilandzic (2008) that real world knowledge and genre schemas are used to fill in gaps that are present in the story, reiterates Livingstone's (1998) argument for the resourceful viewer and importance of genre. Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) diversification of the genre also informs the role of genre schemas in the formation of the situation model.

The deictic shift (experientially placing oneself inside the story) and the unawareness of self and the natural world, show parallels with Cohen (2001) and Green et al. (2004), while the flow sensation (the experience when making the deictic shift) and identification (seeing yourself as one of the characters) are supported by Cohen (2001) and Green et al. (2004) respectively. Hoorn and Konijn's (2003, 2005) compare phase (in which the story is judged on similarity, relevance and valence) resonates with Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) real-time realism evaluation (where the viewer compares mental models with pre-existing information and judges the story in terms of its relevance and realism), as well as with Nabi and Krcmar's (2004) cognitive enjoyment (in which the viewer comes to conscious conclusions about the story). The outcomes phase in Figure 7.5 above (where the result and effect of viewing is summarised) also corresponds with Hoorn and Konijn's (2003, 2005) respond phase (where the balance between involvement and distance results in high or low appreciation) and the behavioural enjoyment (intent to watch again) of Nabi and Krcmar (2004). Enjoyment as a whole, which fits into the outcomes phase above, is discussed at length by Green et al. (2004) and Nabi and Krcmar (2004).

Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) model emerges as the one model that encapsulates most of the facets discussed by other authors. For this reason, it was used as a general structure within which to apply the literature to the findings in the first and second hermeneutic.

5. Comprehension

Comprehension is the first phase in Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) three phase model. During the comprehension phase, the viewer cognitively engages with the text to form three mental models, namely character models, story world models and the situation model. To form these, the viewer interprets the text within the context of knowledge obtained from the real world (for example knowledge of how people would react in the situations that the characters find themselves in) and genre schemas. Each of these will now be discussed within the context of the first and second hermeneutic.

5.1. Genre schemas

Genre schemas are a collection of knowledge that the viewer has of the genre conventions of the specific programming genre they are watching. Soap operas as a genre, have certain conventions that inform the possibilities within the narrative. Viewers' knowledge of these allows them to predict what might happen and what is unlikely to happen. Isidingo's allegiance to the characteristics of the genre will now be discussed and it will then be illustrated how Isidingo diverges from the genre to create a unique South African sub-genre.

5.1.1.   Isidingo's allegiance to the characteristics of the genre.

Isidingo is true to most of the conventions that are unique to the soap genre. Although it started as a fictional drama, at the time of the research, it was a continuous serial transmitted daily. It has a new

episode every evening at 18:30, with two repeat slots during the course of the next day and a full omnibus (a collection of all the episodes of the week) over the weekend. All in all, five unique episodes are broadcast every week. The first genre convention that Isidingo is aligned with is therefore its characteristic as daily serial. Secondly, Isidingo has no distinct hero or heroin with which viewers are invited to form a relationship. Isidingo is rather a collection of a community of characters. Thirdly, Isidingo's storylines are a mix of longer running and shorter storylines, which interweave and are resolved with new intrigues being introduced regularly. The fourth way in which Isidingo aligns with the genre conventions of soap opera is the fact that it has no definite end. At the time of writing, Isidingo had aired more than 2600 episodes (N.C. Chauke, personal communication, July, 30, 2009) and no end had been announced.

A fifth convention which Isidingo is true to is the socially significant themes inherent to its storylines. Isidingo addresses socially significant themes, such as HIV/AIDS, interracial relationships, homosexuality, corruption, gender, the role of the community and tradition. Sixth, contrasting views on these issues are represented by characters that debate and struggle with the issues. Interracial relationships are addressed, for instance, through conflict between Zeb – representing the conservative, traditional view, and Letti – who represents the progressive, modern view. Lastly, Isidingo is a dialogue-heavy production. The narrative is communicated and resolved through the dialogues of the characters.

One convention that Isidingo is not true to is the centrality of the female world. Like Dallas, Isidingo moves away from this convention of the genre by not having female characters and their domestic concerns as its central focus. With a cast of strong male and female characters, and a proportionate number of male characters that are central to the main intrigues, the soap is not true to the genre convention of the centrality of feminine concerns.

The character portrayals in Isidingo also represent three tenets of femininity: matriarchal femininity, of which Agnes is the prime example (female characters who are mature, warm and central to the soap community), counter-stereotypical femininity portrayed by Cherel (female characters who resemble the strong, immoral male characters) and patriarchal femininity, of which Maggie and Nandipha are examples (female characters who are submissive, passive or irrational).

The character Harriet is worth mentioning. The encoding placed in the text for Harriet is that she is very loyal to Barker and is slightly scared of him (www.isidingo.co.za). In contrast to the powerless encoding (meaning placed in the text by the writers), viewers express an anticipation that she will betray Barker with a secret that she knows from his past, which is clearly a position of power (Sub-theme 2.3).

5.1.2. Isidingo's genre sub-type.

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) identified sub-types within the soap genre, which are: the community soap, the dynastic soap and the dyadic soap. Isidingo does not fit clearly into any one of the genre sub-types, but it is closest to a dynastic soap. Table 7.1 below summarises the three genre sub-types identified by Liebes and Livingstone and provides a South African example for each. Liebes and Livingstone identified the three sub-genres by analysing the kinship structures (romantic and family ties between characters) for a number of European soap operas. The academic researcher replicated their analysis and evaluated the kinship structures of Isidingo to determine which sub-type of genre it represents (this analysis is presented and discussed towards the end of this section). Due to the limitations of the scope of the current study, the researcher did not conduct a similar analysis for each of the local soap operas mentioned in Table 7.1, but rather made an estimate of their genre sub-type based on her general background knowledge of the kinship structures in the soap operas. (Please refer to Chapter 4 for a discussion on the researcher's background knowledge; to Chapter 7 for a discussion on how this background knowledge influenced her interpretation and the end of Chapter 7 for suggestions on how further research should analyse the kinship structures of all local soap operas through Liebes and Livingstone's methodology to corroborate the emergence of a unique South African genre sub-type.)

Table 7.1 *Genre sub-types in South Africa*

Genre sub-type	Definition	South African example
Dynastic soap	One powerful family.	Isidingo and Egoli
Community soap	A number of equal, multi-generational families.	7de Laan and Isidingo
Dyadic soap	A destabilised network of uni-generational, interchanging couples.	Rhythm City and Isidingo

Dynastic soaps have the most traditional patriarchal structures of power and gender. There are two examples of dynastic soaps in Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) work: the godfather example of the Greek and Italian soap operas and the honourable patriarch example of the Swedish soap opera. Isidingo has one of each of these two types of patriarchs: Barker Haines is the godfather patriarch, while Zeb Matabane is the honourable patriarch.

The dramatic tension in the honourable patriarch dynastic soap operas evolves in the negotiation of power with the most crucial question being if the father will be able to impose his will on the rest of the family (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998). This typifies Zeb's interactions with his family in Isidingo. He is in constant conflict with his family – trying to impose his will on his children and standing in contrast to his wife Agnes, who has empathy with her children. His son Parsons married Nandipha, an HIV-positive woman, despite his strong disapproval, while his daughter Letti's interracial relationship with Joe goes against his will. All the conflict this character is involved in is about him imposing his will on the family.

In the godfather example, the patriarch is less honourable and is often excused for immoral behaviour because of the society he lives in that requires devious actions to survive, or he is admired for being successful. The godfather family has enough power to manipulate people and things around them (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998). Barker Haines is clearly the godfather patriarch, as he is typified as the powerful, immoral tycoon. He has numerous business interests which he navigates with, more often than not, depraved business dealings. His position, wealth and power afford him the ability to manipulate a variety of characters around him, most notably his daughter Lee. He is notorious for being unbreakable and admired, yet hated by characters and viewers alike.

Isidingo departs from the conventions of the genre by introducing elements of another sub-genre. Although the strong patriarchs identify the soap as dynastic, it also has clear elements of a dyadic soap: Isidingo has a large number of single characters. Figure 7.6 is an analysis of the romantic and family ties in Isidingo, based on the methodology of Liebes and Livingstone (1998). Due to space limitations and to provide a focused view, only characters that were relevant to the story at the time of the market research were included in the diagram. Apart from the Matabane family, no complete families are present. The soap is rather built on a community of unattached characters, most of whom are single. Romantic and business storylines get equal representation.

Figure 7.6. Romantic and family ties in Isidingo at the time of the market research.
<u>Note:</u> *Cherel was raped by her father, after which she became pregnant with Tanya. The relationship between Cherel and her father is therefore not classified as a past romantic liaison.*

Isidingo is, however, not a pure mix of the dynastic and dyadic soaps in Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) definition, as the single characters in Isidingo are not uni-generational (compare the older

characters, such as Georgie and Harriet with the younger characters Paul and Lolly), and do not truly move around in romantic relationships. It also stands in contrast to Liebes and Livingstone's dyadic soaps, since Isidingo includes social issues.

It is also not a clear community soap that romanticises working class life (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998), as many of Isidingo's characters are working as professionals. Although most of these characters have ties with the original mining community Horizon Deep, within the new ON!TV environment, most characters could be seen as middle class.

The soap also has a middle-class community feel with Maggie's commune, while the relationships in the commune, as well as at ON!TV could qualify it as being dyadic. Other locally produced soap operas on South African television fit more easily into these categories. Egoli is a dynastic soap, with the prominent Edwards family as the focus. 7de Laan is clearly a community soap, with its mix of young and old acquaintances on "The Laan". Backstage is a dyadic soap, with its mix of young characters that continuously renegotiate their relationships.

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) argue that both America and Europe sustain versions of the dynastic model because the patriarchal and primordial themes which structure social relations in these soap operas draw on common and fundamental themes in western culture. South Africa, however, is a multi-cultural society in which the western and African value systems are a source of conflict between certain characters.

From reading the Isidingo narrative of the month immediately prior to the collection of the first hermeneutic, it almost seems as if Isidingo is three soaps in one . There is the Matabanes, the Bullers (the boarding house) and the Corporate world of ON!TV. Each of these is only loosely connected with the others. Nandipha is a member of the Matabane family who works at ON!TV, together with some of the residents of the boarding house. The Matabanes are also only informally connected to the Bullers, with them sharing the local bar and some friendship ties between Agnes and Maggie. The soap therefore represents both the dynastic (the Matabanes and the Haines), the dyadic (the Bullers) and the community soap (the Bullers).

It is the researcher's conclusion that Isidingo is a unique soap within the genre that combines elements from each of the sub-genres. It has the patriarchs of the dynastic soaps, the single characters of the dyadic soaps, and the equal community of the community soaps. These elements combine in a soap opera that viewers judge (in the first hermeneutic) as consistent with their experience of South African society.

5.2. Real-world knowledge – the resourceful viewer

During Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) comprehend phase, the viewer interprets the text by using two sets of resources (Livingstone, 1998). The section above deals with the first set, which is the

knowledge the viewer has of the genre. The second set of resources that the viewer uses to interpret the text is real-world knowledge, which will now be discussed.

The storyline in a soap opera is mostly communicated through dialogue between characters (Creswell, 2001; Livingstone, 1998) that represent opposing views on an issue. Characters are communicated through a series of fragmented pieces of information that the viewer strings together to interpret the character. For this interpretation, the viewer uses the two sets of resources mentioned above.

The first set of resources used is knowledge built up from real-life experience. An example of how real-life skills are used in the interpretation of soap opera characters, is the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error is a social cognitive theory that suggests that an individual would interpret the behaviour of another individual as dispositional (i.e. telling you something about his/her character) while explaining his/her own behaviour (or the behaviour of a character that they know well) as situational (i.e. telling you something about the situation in which the behaviour took place) (Livingstone, 1998). Rajesh is a well known character who is betrayed by Barker. As he is a well known character, the viewer tries to understand what happened between Barker and Rajesh that motivated Barker to set him up. If Rajesh was a new character introduced in this storyline, the fact that Barker set him up would tell us something about his character. The inverse happens with Joe, who is a relatively unknown character. His reaction to Zeb's antagonising behaviour tells the viewer something about Joe's character. Viewers decide which type of character Joe portrays based on the fact that they saw him survive all Zeb's challenges and treat Letti with respect.

The first and second hermeneutic also illustrate how social knowledge is a relevant resource in interpreting Isidingo. It has been argued in both of the first two hermeneutics that loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters (Sub-theme 2.2 in the first and second hermeneutics). Viewers spend time with the Isidingo characters every day, more than is spent with many other people in their lives. As viewers come to know the characters, their continued viewership is positively influenced by the prospect of seeing the characters again. Viewers build a relationship with characters that resemble real-life relationships. As will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, Isidingo viewers' relationships with the soap characters resemble para-social relationships, as described by Cohen (2001).

The second set of resources used in interpreting new information is the accumulated knowledge of what certain characters have done in the past and can be expected to do in the future. When a viewer starts viewing a soap opera for the first time, he/she can be expected to struggle to understand all the storylines, because so much relies on his/her knowledge of the characters. This piece of literature is supported by Sub-theme 2.1 in the first and second hermeneutic: loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters. Knowing a character allows the viewer to quickly assume which standpoint a character is likely to take on an issue (traditional vs. modern; self-

serving vs. altruistic, etc.), allows the viewer to side with one of the arguments and anticipate what is likely to happen, who is likely to have power and who not. When Zeb and Agnes are having an argument, the viewer could assume from past arguments that they are fighting about their children, that Zeb is trying to assert a traditional view, while Agnes has an understanding of the children's side of the story, and that Zeb is likely to win the argument.

Theme 5 in the first and second hermeneutics – the specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality – also confirms the relevance of the viewer's social and soap knowledge. To judge the external realism of the soap, the viewer has to apply real-world knowledge to what is known about the soap (is what I see on the soap consistent with the conventions of social life?[9]). To judge the internal realism of a soap, the viewer applies knowledge of what has happened in the soap before, to what is happening now (is what I am seeing now, consistent with what has happened in the past?).

Comparing people's social knowledge to that of the text will reveal what kind of expectations the viewer may develop. It allows the writer to predict whether the story will be congruent or incongruent with the viewer's social and story knowledge. Cherel and Barker are, for instance, described by viewers as unpredictable characters. If the writer can predict how the viewer would expect them to act from within their social or soap knowledge, it is relatively simple to create surprise or intrigue.

5.3. Text

Isidingo's text will now be discussed. This section begins with a summary of the narrative as retold by the viewers and is discussed with reference to the meaning that viewers make of the narrative and the narrative elements that contribute more to loyalty than others.

5.3.1. Narrative Summary.

The discussion of Isidingo's narrative begins with a comparison of the narrative as provided by the writers, with the narrative as retold by viewers in the first hermeneutic. Chapters 5 and 6 include a summary of the story fragments viewers found salient. In this section the academic researcher compares these two accounts, searching for instances of selective interpretation in the first and second hermeneutic as an indication of what viewers find more and less salient in the lived reality of Isidingo viewership.

Livingstone (1998) introduced two types of selective interpretation in the recallection of storylines. The first type is where viewers leave out the middle of the stories and only retell the beginning and the

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[9] It is relevant to note that soap operas that are not related to reality at all, will have a low external realism and that viewers will not be able to use real-life social knowledge to interpret the soap opera. This does not mean, however, that the viewer will not be able to enjoy the soap. As discussed in Chapter 2, transportation and salient enjoyment is not dependant on external realism. Transportation (and subsequent enjoyment) is, however, dependant on internal realism. Viewers of a soap opera with a high internal realism and low external realism will rely more on soap world knowledge than social knowledge to interpret the soap opera (Green, et al. 2004).

end. The second type of selective interpretation is where viewers leave out certain characters when retelling a storyline, whilst including others.

The comparison between the plots as provided by the writers (www.isidingo.co.za) and as recalled by the participants is presented graphically in figures. I discuss each of the significant plots that took place in the month prior to the market research with a graphical representation of the characters included in the plots (Figures 7.7 to 7.13). In each instance, the figure on the left represents the story as provided in the writers' summary and the diagram on the right, the narrative as recalled by the viewers during the focus groups. Lines represent interaction and communication between characters. Where a character's name is excluded in the second figure, viewers do not include the character in their retelling of the plot. Where a line is excluded, viewers do not include the interaction between the respective characters in their retelling of the plot.

The narrative structure discussed in Chapter 2 includes the following five phases: introduction (setting and orientation), disruption of equilibrium (norms of social order are challenged), guilt (the social problem is personified, responsibility and blame allocated), restitution (the equilibrium is resolved), redemption (the moral implications of the restitution is assimilated into the social domain). For each plot line, the researcher discusses which of these phases are included and excluded in viewers' retelling of the narrative.

Figure 7.7. The love intrigues of Zeb and Agnes.

The first plot (Figure 7.7) is that of the love intrigues between Zeb and Agnes. Zeb and Agnes have been married for many years. Zeb had an affair with Refiloe and had a child with her. Agnes had a potential suitor called Pule. Pule was introduced to Agnes because of Zeb's interference in their daughter's love life. He wanted to orchestrate a meeting between Letti and Pule and because of unforeseen circumstances, Letti was unable to attend the arranged meeting. Agnes was in the meeting place (the Rec) at that time. Pule noticed Agnes and started to pursue her by inviting her to various events and giving her gifts. One evening at another arranged meeting, Pule asked Zeb about Agnes, not knowing that they are married. Zeb misunderstood and gave Pule Maggie's number. The characters recalled by the viewers resemble the intended storyline relatively closely, the only omissions being the misunderstanding that brought Maggie into the storyline and the fact that Zeb

interacted with Pule and unknowingly provided the opportunity for the relationship. When discussing this plotline, viewers tend to side with either Zeb or Agnes, and regardless of which character they have empathy for, mention that Zeb did not notice Agnes's makeover. When retelling the story, viewers include: the context and orientation (Zeb and Agnes is married and Zeb has had an affair) and the disruption of equilibrium (Pule showed interest in Agnes and she got a makeover). Viewers do not include the guilt phase (in which Zeb's misunderstanding is identified and Agnes puts a stop to Pule's advances) or restitution phases (Zeb and Agnes rekindle their love, remembering the reasons why they got married in the first place) that are included in the actual narrative.

Figure 7.8. Letti and Joe's relationship.

The second plot (Figure 7.8) is the intrigue surrounding Joe and Letti's relationship. Letti and Joe (a white man) started their relationship towards the end of the year. Over Christmas time, while Zeb and Agnes were out of town, Letti introduced Joe to her brother and sister-in-law, Parsons and Nandipha. Through a series of events Letti introduces her new boyfriend to her parents. Most of the tension deals with how Zeb will react to her boyfriend. Agnes, Parsons and Nandipha are present in all these interactions and play a central role in mediating the situation: Parsons coaches Joe on how to react to their father. He also prepares Zeb by asking him about racism and telling him that Letti's new boyfriend is a Pirates (Orlando Pirates, a local soccer team) fan. Nandipha supports Letti and encourages her to tell her parents about Joe. Agnes tries to appease Zeb's anger after meeting Joe by pointing out that Letti never lied about his race. Towards the end of the plot, Zeb tries to introduce a new romantic interest to Letti, i.e. Pule.

This storyline was by far the most prevalent in viewers' recollection of interesting storylines. All retold the story by including Joe, Lettie, and Zeb as the central players. Some mentioned the mediating role of Agnes in a general sense (always supporting her children when Zeb is angry with them). Pule – although he was central to the love intrigues of Zeb and Agnes - is not mentioned as part of this plot, neither are Parsons nor Nandipha, although they are present in all the interactions where Zeb antagonises Joe. Before redemption can be reached in the story (where the moral implications of the restitution is assimilated into the social domain), Zeb creates more disruption to the equilibrium by trying to introduce Letti to Pule.

When retelling the story, viewers sketch the context and orientation (Zeb is very traditional, he is always interfering in his children's lives), the disruption of the equilibrium (Letti introduces her white boyfriend) and the guilt phase (the chicken incident in which Joe proves that he can stand up for himself). At the time of the market research, this storyline had not yet reached the restitution phase in which the equilibrium is restored (either Zeb makes peace with the relationship or Letti and Joe break up). Although viewers cannot retell an existing restitution, they offer opinions on possible endings. Those viewers who empathise with Zeb would prefer that the guilt phase (Zeb torturing Joe until either of them throws in the towel) continues. Those who empathise with Letti would like to see restitution in her either settling further in the relationship with Joe, or breaking up and reuniting with an old boyfriend Vusi.

Figure 7.9. The Lee, Rajesh and Erin love triangle.

An important love triangle is represented in the next plot (Figure 7.9). Rajesh and Lee used to be a couple until Barker framed Rajesh with photographs of a prostitute. Neither of them knew that Barker was the one responsible for the ruse. Rajesh and Lee still work closely together and have a good working relationship. Rajesh is in a relationship with Erin, who moves back in with Rajesh over New Year's Day. Erin has a drinking problem that her friend Paul tries to help her with.

Viewers were very aware of Lee and Rajesh's relationship history and the fact that Barker manipulated them into ending their relationship. None of the groups in the current sample mentioned Erin however. Most interest in this storyline was aimed at seeing Barker be exposed and Lee realising the true nature of her father. Viewers provide the context and orientation (Rajesh and Lee was in a relationship) and the disruption of the equilibrium (Barker set Rajesh up. Barker betrays his daughter). Viewers want to see the guilt phase unroll and have Barker brought to justice so that Lee can see him for who he really is.

Figure 7.10. Conflict between Frank and Siyanda in the office.

In the office environment, a plot plays out where Siyanda – Barker's new confidant – and ON!TV's new CFO joins forces against Frank (Figure 7.10). Frank gets suspicious of Siyanda and Barker's relationship and asks Georgie to investigate Siyanda. Barker later does the same and asks Georgie to investigate Frank. Siyanda and Frank are in constant conflict and as fellow executives, Lee and Rajesh are called in to attempt to resolve these conflict situations. Harriet, Barker's trusted secretary, knows of his deal with Siyanda and holds the potential to expose them. Other characters are also drawn into the plot to illustrate the conflict between the two enemies. Frank disapproves of Erin, while Siyanda supports her. Frank cancels a programme on which Nandipha and Paul is working, while Siyanda reinstates it.

This specific plot was largely ignored by viewers in their recollection of intriguing storylines. The only interactions mentioned in a general sense were that Harriet could be antagonistic towards Barker in the future and that Frank is a worthy adversary to Barker.

Figure 7.11 The investigation into Barker's involvement in framing Rajesh.

Frank's investigation into Barker's involvement in the Rajesh set-up is another important storyline (Figure 7.11). Cherel approaches Frank and offers him information that Barker was responsible for setting up Rajesh. In return, she demands a position as producer at ON!TV. Frank agrees and asks Lolly and Vernon to conduct an investigation into the link between Barker and Mad Dog, who was directly responsible. The trail leads them to Angelique, the prostitute who was coerced into taking part

in the set up. Barker realises that something is wrong and approaches both Mad Dog and Georgie to help him uncover what Cherel and Frank are up to. Georgie takes Cherel's side and repeatedly warns her about Barker's interest in their plot. Angelique agrees to testify against Mad Dog. When Mad Dog comes out of hiding to visit Barker at his home, Lee calls the police and Mad Dog is arrested. Lee confronts her father and breaks the news to Rajesh, who funded the investigation but never knew that Barker was suspected.

Viewers retell this storyline only featuring Barker, Rajesh and Lee. And the retelling only includes the context (Lee and Rajesh was a couple), the disruption of equilibrium (Barker framed Rajesh with a prostitute) and restitution (Barker is guilty). The restitution is included because the viewer knows with Frank and Cherel that Barker is guilty. The redemption (Lee sees her father's real nature for the first time) is not always included in the retelling, but most express the wish that it would happen in a general sense. The guilt phase, which involves the most characters, takes the most time and sets out the process in which restitution is reached, is left out.

Figure 7.12. The aftermath of Tanya's suicide.

The next plot involves Cherel's daughter Tanya (Figure 7.12). Tanya is married to Leon du Plessis. She had a past relationship with Len. Tanya commits suicide, but immediately prior to this, Len asks her to elope with him. Tanya makes contact with her mother prior to her death. After the suicide, Du Plessis confronts both Barker and Cherel, both of whom blame the other. Maggie takes Du Plessis under her wing and takes him into the Bullers for a short while until he decides to leave The Deep. Maggie has a farewell party and asks Len to be there. Len approaches Du Plessis and asks for his forgiveness on what transpired between him and Tanya before she died. He also contacts Cherel and tells her what happened. When retelling this story, viewers only mention Tanya, Du Plessis and Cherel and Barker who blame each other. They do not mention Len's involvement or Maggie's role in the process after the death. Viewers neglect to include the full context and orientation (by not including the fact that Len and Tanya had a relationship), include the disruption of equilibrium (that Tanya commits suicide and that Du Plessis is crushed), include parts of the guilt phase (that Barker and Cherel blame each other), but exclude others (the farewell party where Du Plessis tells everyone what he really thinks of them) and exclude the restitution and redemption in which Len apologises to Du Plessis.

Figure 7.13. Stella introduces Maggie to Robert Turner.

One storyline in the Bullers' boarding house can be mentioned (Figure 7.13). Stella introduces Maggie to the new underground mine manager Robert Turner and Maggie is instantly attracted to him. He needs a place to stay for the next month. Maggie organises a dinner party for Robert to see the boarding house and meet the other residents. Stella finds out that she is not invited and Maggie invites her out of guilt. The dinner is a disaster because of Stella's behaviour. Later Stella apologises to Maggie who accepts her apology. Other storylines which introduces disequilibrium to the Bullers are every time a resident moves out and Maggie has an open room to fill. Despite anecdotal mentions that Maggie should get a romantic interest, no storylines within the Bullers setting are retold by viewers as being significant.

5.3.2. The exclusion of some phases in the narrative structure.

In a text with a large community of characters of relatively equal importance such as a soap opera, the guilt phase of the narrative structure is very important. It is necessary for the community to negotiate and find the character who is to blame for the disruption to equilibrium, because there are no pure protagonists and antagonists (Livingstone, 1998). The guilt phase in Isidingo plots is where the most substance of the story lies. Between the dramatic disruption and resolutions of equilibrium lies a vast playing field of smaller obstacles and resolutions. Yet, the viewers do not include these details in their summation of stories in a research context.

In her analysis of the retellings of Coronation Street plots by regular viewers, Livingstone (1998) found the same tendency. Viewers underplay the middle stages of the narrative, or summarise it as uninteresting "and I can't remember how, but they proved he was guilty". Viewers favour the disruption and restitution phases since these phases have the most dramatic events, and have the most implications for future storylines. While watching how a storyline evolves, it is the promise of a disruption or resolution that entices the viewer to come back to the soap again. As the following quote from a viewer in the current study illustrates, the anticipation of a resolution is a strong motivator to watch:

> I tell you, you end up living for 18h30 and the following days to see what happened.
> (Group 2, line 69)

5.3.3. Exclusion of some characters in viewers' retellings.

In each of the retellings discussed above, viewers exclude some characters that were part of the story. In the Letti and Joe story that affects the whole of the Matabane family, viewers reduce it to conflict between the couple and Zeb alone. Characters such as Vernon and Erin are completely absent from viewers' retellings of other storylines. When viewers leave out some characters in their retelling of a soap narrative, they undermine one of its genre conventions, namely interconnected, equal characters. It seems that although peripheral characters are often important to the story (such as Lolly in the investigation), they are not central to the viewers' experience of it. Since the largest implications that will result from the resolution of the storyline affect Barker, Rajesh and Lee in the investigation story, viewers focus on these characters in their interpretation thereof. Despite the genre's reliance on a plethora of equal characters, Isidingo viewers do prioritise certain characters over others, and their interpretation of storylines are coloured by the relationship they have with these characters.

5.3.4. Semiotic choice points.

Semiotic choice points are when two or more narrative possibilities exist in a certain moment in a text. Something happens on screen and by using interpretive resources of in-soap and real-life knowledge, the viewer is aware of diverging possible outcomes. The viewer's realisation of these choice points creates tension (Livingstone, 1998).

There are numerous examples where Isidingo uses such semiotic choice points to create tension. Siyanda goes into Frank's office to probe what Frank and Cherel are investigating. She is discovered in the office and accounts for her presence by saying that she is dropping off paper work. While she was in the office, two narrative possibilities existed, she would either succeed in finding proof against Frank and Cherel, or she would be caught.

Another instance where this technique was used was in the process through which Letti prepares to introduce Joe to her father. The two narrative possibilities are that Zeb will like Joe and accept his daughter's interracial relationship, or that he will reject Joe and disapprove strongly.

In Pule's courtship of Agnes another use of semiotic choice points is visible. Agnes will either remain true to her high moral values, put her family first and not return his affection, or she will pursue an extra marital relationship and get back at Zeb for being unfaithful to her. In each of these instances, the viewer's knowledge of the two possible outcomes is what creates tension.

This is also confirmed in the outcomes that viewers long for in the storylines. By wishing that Agnes goes one route rather than the other, the viewer acknowledges that there is more than one possible narrative outcome. A preference for either of the two storylines is based on a viewer's allegiance to a specific character's goals (I wish Harriet would betray Barker for her own gain), or based on the

repercussions that the behaviour will have on other characters and stories (I would love to see how Zeb reacts if his wife has an affair).

This technique is successfully employed in Isidingo and contributes to its appeal to viewers. As the viewer matures into a loyal viewer, he/she accumulates more knowledge about the characters and their histories. These result in a rich reserve of implications that viewers can consider for each semiotic choice point, increasing the tension in and pleasure of watching.

5.3.5. The privileged viewer.

Another way in which tension is introduced in soap operas is the selective provision of information to the viewer. The viewer often receives key information before the characters do. While information in other genres is often withheld at the end of an episode, information is provided in cliffhanger moments in soap operas, and the tension is related not to what will happen, but rather in what will happen when the others find out what I already know.

Tension in Isidingo works in much the same way. Sub-theme 3.1 in the first hermeneutic reveals how viewers speculate about what will happen when certain characters find out what they already know. For instance, when will Zeb realise that Agnes has had a make-over; what will happen when he realises that she has a potential suitor; when will Lee see her father for what they (the viewers) see him and what will happen when she does; what will happen when Cherel and Barker find out that Georgie is using both of them.

5.3.6. Levels of meaning.

Narratives have implications that reach beyond the immediate characters involved. Each incident has different levels of meaning that include consequences on an individual, social and ideological level (Livingstone, 1998).

This is relevant to Isidingo especially with the soap's inclusion of social issues. When Nandipha was diagnosed as being HIV positive, this had varied implications for the soap. On an individual level she undergoes changes in her lifestyle. She changes her job and starts a relationship with Parsons. On a social level it causes conflict in the Matabane family, where Zeb disapproves of his son's choice of a life partner. It also results in conflict between Agnes and Zeb when Agnes takes her son's side. On an ideological level, the storyline introduces the implications of HIV on infected people's personal lives, as well as how it affects the people around them. It also addresses how HIV-positive people are treated by others.

Changes on a denotative level to one character have implications on a connotative level for the whole soap. When Agnes changes her appearance by having a make-over (denotative change) it introduces a new meaning of sexuality and availability (connotative level). Since all characters are connected, it also reshuffles the other characters on a social level. Agnes's change in appearance reemphasises

the lack of romance in her marriage, and Zeb is condemned for not noticing the change. Pule's interest in Agnes challenges Zeb to see his wife with renewed attraction. On an ideological level Agnes' change in appearance following Pule's interest in her, defies her inherent moral priorities in which she is first and foremost a mother and wife who places her family first. The possibility of pursuing a relationship is introduced and, as a whole, the story addresses relationships, faithfulness and sexuality.

5.4. Situation model.

The situation model is the mechanism within which the viewer assembles fragmented pieces of information into an interpretive whole (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). It is the dynamic location of viewer interpretation and consists of the story-world model and the character models which will now be discussed.

5.4.1. Story-world model.

The story-world model is a relatively fixed model that represents the physical and temporal setting of the soap and the story-world logic that governs the soap opera. The story-world model starts with the viewer's use of the real world as heuristic, which is then adapted, if necessary, as the story unfolds (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

Isidingo is produced in real time and its temporal location is therefore contemporary South Africa (Theme 5). Physically, the soap was originally set in a small mining town *Horizon Deep* east of Johannesburg. With the introduction of ON!TV, many of the Isidingo scenes have moved into Johannesburg itself. The whole soap has, however, not moved out of *Horizon Deep,* as many characters still have physical and relationship ties to it.

Based on this temporal and physical setting, the story-world logic of Isidingo is therefore equal to contemporary South African life in a city and its surrounds. Overall, the soap is seen by viewers as having a very high external realism and can therefore be expected to successfully sustain transportation, which is a necessary condition for enjoyment. It is also relevant for viewers to use their real-world knowledge as heuristic in this world, as the story-world logic and the narrative rules are very close to that of the real world.

The set of the soap opera is also part of the story world. If it is not realistic and detailed, it could be expected to be less efficient in creating the necessary conditions for transportation to occur. Green et al. (2004) found that stories that included detail on the physical surroundings of the stories had more success in facilitating transportation, and that readers were more likely to identify with the character. They conclude that detail about the setting of a story makes viewers or readers feel closer to the narrative, and make them feel more knowledgeable about the narrative and the characters.

5.4.2. Character models.

The character models are conclusions viewers form of characters, based on their interpretations of fragments of the character's behaviour over time. Hoorn and Konijn (2003, 2005) and Livingstone (1998) provide valuable models for understanding viewer interpretations of characters. Following is an evaluation of Isidingo's characters within each of these models.

5.4.2.1. How viewer portrayals of characters are formed.

When a soap opera viewer encounters a new character, he/she is presented with fragmented pieces of information about the character. The viewer then uses social knowledge to infer traits for the character from disjointed incidents. The viewer interprets the new information within the context of past interpretations made of the soap and its characters, as well as of people in real life.

This is why it is easier for some viewers to relate to characters that they have a wealth of knowledge about. A character such as Letti, who has been part of the soap for a long time, has been represented by a larger volume of fragmented incidents from which viewers can infer traits. It is therefore also easier for viewers to relate to realistic characters, because what they infer about the character (based on bits and pieces of information) is easily assimilated into existing real-life schemas of what people are like.

5.4.2.2. Viewer portrayals of Isidingo characters based on Livingstone's (1998) typology.

Viewers interpret characters based on their personal social knowledge and their knowledge of the soap, and their expectations of future events are based on their knowledge of the characters involved (Livingstone, 1998). Livingstone found that characters are mostly judged according to three dimensions, namely morality, potency (power) and gender, and that characters representing contrasting poles of these dimensions are more likely to interact.

Table 7.2 is a summary of Isidingo characters in terms of these dimensions. The researcher inferred these judgements from the character descriptions provided in the first and second hermeneutic. Therefore only characters that formed part of viewer's descriptions and therefore lived reality, were included.

Table 7.2 Viewer *portrayals of Isidingo characters based on Livingstone (1998)*

	Morality	**Power**	**Gender**
Barker	Immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Cherel	Immoral	Powerful	Androgynous
Agnes	Moral	Powerful in her own world. Powerless in relation to her husband.	Matriarchal. Mother, but strong and determined.

Letti	Moral	Powerful	Feminine, but not submissive. Challenges.
Parsons	Moral	Powerless	Matriarchal
Nandipha	Moral	Powerless	Patriarchal
Zeb	Moral and immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Georgie	Moral and immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Lee	Moral	Powerless in relation to Barker only. Powerful in other relationships.	Androgynous
Rajesh	Moral	Powerless	Patriarchal
Joe	Moral	Negotiating power.	Patriarchal
Maggie	Moral	Powerless	Patriarchal
Harriet	Unsure	Powerless, but has potential power.	Patriarchal
Frank	Moral and immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Vusi	Moral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Len	Immoral and moral	Powerful	Androgynous

So some extent, gender relations in Isidingo have traditional patriarchal, strong male characters that are concerned with the business world and business dealings, and submissive female characters that are more concerned with family and relationships. Mostly, however, Isidingo offers counter-stereotypical female characters that conquer the business world and challenge their male counterparts. These counter stereotypical female characters include Cherel, who is Barker's most pervasive rival, Lee, who resembles her father's strength in the business world although she is submissive to him in their personal relationship, Letti, who strongly challenges her very patriarchal father, and Harriet, who although a powerless secretary, is devoutly loyal to Barker and she holds the potential power to bring him to justice because of the information she holds. Agnes is also powerful in a matriarchal way. She builds a business from the ground up, resulting in the financial success of the family.

Morality and power are not strongly correlated in Isidingo. While all the immoral characters are powerful, there are sufficient powerful, moral characters to balance the power between good and bad.

Characters of opposing poles are more likely to interact (Livingstone, 1998). This is true for Isidingo to a large extent. For example, conservative Zeb and modern Letti and Parsons interact regularly, while Frank, who is an experienced business man, has many storylines that involve Lolly, who is

inexperienced in business. Frank and Barker often interact and they oppose each other in terms of morality, while being equal in power. Lastly, Lee and Barker (father and daughter) share many storylines and they are opposed on both morality and power (Lee is powerless and moral and Barker is powerful and immoral).

There are, however, exclusions to the rule. Cherel and Barker are similar and represent the same pole on each of the three dimensions (both are immoral, powerful and masculine), but are in constant conflict. Their interaction is based almost exclusively on mutual revenge.

The most important contribution of this analysis, based on Livingstone's typology, is that it allows a view of how Isidingo deals with gender and power. How power relates to gender structures is of historical significance to the genre. The most pervasive feminist criticism of the genre over the years has been that women are portrayed as powerless, and only concerned with the domestic and relationship issues (Marx, 2008)[10]. Isidingo makes a clear divergence from this historical genre convention by combining traditional femininity with atypical pseudo-masculine femininity. Nandipha and Maggie are the only two feminine characters that are powerless. The other purely feminine characters, such as Letti, Harriet and Agnes all have either existing or potential power. The soap also includes Cherel and Lee, both of whom have been able to conquer the male dominated business world. The second hermeneutic identifies this trait of Isidingo as a key part of the soap's appeal and success.

5.4.2.3. Analysis of Isidingo characters based on the process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters of Hoorn and Konijn (2003) and Konijn and Hoorn (2005).

In order to gain an even better understanding of the character portrayals that viewers construct of the Isidingo characters, the academic researcher analysed the Isidingo characters based on Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters. The unique contribution of Hoorn and Konijn's process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters is that they acknowledge the contribution of both positive and negative elements in the achievement of an optimal level of appreciation of a character.

Their process consists of three phases: encode, compare and respond. During the encoding phase, viewers create character representations based on the dimensions aesthetics (beauty), ethics (morality) and epistemics (realism). During the comparison phase, they conclude on the relevance of the character, their own similarity with the character and the character's outcome valence (what should happen to the character). Each of these dimensions contributes a degree of either attraction (involvement) or resistance (distance) which, if both reach an optimum point, translates to appreciation. Generally the positive poles contribute to involvement and the negative poles to

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[10] For an in-depth discussion on gender in South African soap operas, see Marx (2008).

distance, but Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) unique contribution is that they acknowledge the positive of negative traits and the negative effect of positive traits.

The researcher conducted an analysis of the Isidingo characters that viewers find salient, based on this model, in an attempt to determine which character traits – whether positive or negative – contribute to appreciation. Due to the limitations of the research design, it was not possible for the viewers to explicitly rate characters on these dimensions. The researcher therefore operationalised each of the dimensions in a way that is relevant to the current study:

- Aesthetics is a judgement of the physical appearance of a character. Where possible, the researcher used spontaneous appreciation of the physical appearance of characters by viewers as an indication of aesthetics. Where this is not available, she made her own subjective judgements on the aesthetics of the character from photographs on the Isidingo website (Figure 7.14). Where this is the case, the indication is presented in italics.

Figure 7.14. Photographs of the characters of Isidingo to allow a subjective judgement of their aesthetics (www.isidingo.co.za).

- Ethics is a judgement of the morality of a character. The researcher used spontaneous mentions by viewers of a character's morality as an indication of its ethics. Where this is not available, she made her own subjective judgements on the ethics of the character from the

official character summaries obtained from the Isidingo website. Where this is the case, the indication is presented in italics.

- Epistemics is a realism measure. The researcher used spontaneous mentions in the first hermeneutic of a character's realism as an indication of this measure.

- Relevance is the potential impact, whether positive or negative, a character may have on an individual's goals. It is operationalised within the constraints of the current methodology by means of three measures: whether viewers spontaneously indicated that the character has an impact on other characters' goals, its placement on the horizontal access (connected to other characters) in the character segmentation in chapter 6 (Figure 6.2) and lastly, whether the character is perceived as teaching valuable lessons that are applicable to the real world, which is part of Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) original understanding of the concept.

- Valence refers to whether viewers want the character to fail or succeed. The researcher judged valence subjectively as being either positive or negative from the future storylines that are indicated for the character by the viewers in the first and second hermeneutics.

- Similarity is the extent to which the viewer feels that the character is comparable to them in terms of character traits, physical appearance, age, role, etc. The researcher used any evidence from the first and second hermeneutic where specific viewer groups judge a character as comparable to themselves, as an indication of similarity.

- Engagement is the degree to which viewers feel attracted or deterred by the character. This is essentially the the emotional distance they feel to the character. In the current methodology, the researcher used the viewer relationship column in Table 3, Chapter 5 as an indication of emotional distance.

- Appreciation is the extent to which viewers find characters interesting or boring. The researcher judges it in this analysis with three measures: the number of groups that identified the character as essential in the first hermeneutic, its placement in the four quadrants (Figure 6.3, Chapter 6) in the second hermeneutic, and whether the character was included or left out of the retelling exercise in the current chapter.

In all cases, where text is in italics in Table 7.3, no direct indication of this dimension was found in the first or second hermeneutic and the value is based on the researcher's own judgement from her overall interpretation of the first and second hermeneutic.

Table 7.3 *Character analysis based on Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters*

Name	Encode			Compare			Respond	Appreciation
	Ethics	**Aesthetics**	**Epistemics**	**Similarity**	**Relevance**	**Valence**	**Engagement**	
Name	Good or bad	Beautiful or ugly	Real or unreal	Similar or dissimilar	Relevant or irrelevant	Positive or negative	Involvement or distance	Priority
Barker	Bad (D)	Beautiful (I)	Unreal (D)	Dissimilar Aspiration (D)	Relevant (I)	Negative positive (D, I)	Involvement and distance	10 groups
Cherel	Bad (D)	Beautiful (I)	Unreal (D)	Dissimilar Aspiration (D)	Relevant (I)	Negative positive (D, I)	Involvement and distance	10 groups
Agnes	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Relevant (I)	Positive (I)	Pure involvement	8 groups
Georgie	Good and bad (D,I)	Ugly (D)	Real (I)	Dissimilar (D)	Relevant (I)	Positive (I)	Involvement and distance	7 groups
Lee	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Irrelevant (I)	Positive negative (D, I)	Biased to involvement	6 groups
Letti	Good and bad (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Relevant (I)	Positive (I) negative (D)	Biased to involvement	6 groups
Maggie	Good (I)	Ugly (D)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Irrelevant (D)	Positive (I)	Biased to involvement	5 groups
Nandipha	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Relevant (I)	Positive negative (I, D)	Biased to involvement	5 groups
Zeb	Good and Bad (D,I)	Ugly (D)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Relevant (I)	Negative (D)	Involvement and distance	5 groups
Rajesh	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	Irrelevant (D)	Positive (I)	Biased to involvement	3 groups
Frank	Good and bad (D,I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Dissimilar (D)	Irrelevant (D)	Positive (I)	Involvement and distance	0 groups

Joe	Good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Negative (D)	Biased to involvement	0 groups
Parsons	Good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Positive (I)	Biased to involvement	0 groups
Harriet	Good and potentially bad (I,D)	*Ugly (D)*	*Unreal (D)*	*Dissimilar (D)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Negative (D)	Biased to distance	0 groups
Vusi	Good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Positive (I)	Biased to involvement	0 groups
Len	Bad (D) and good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Unreal (D)*	*Dissimilar (D)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	-	Biased to distance	0 groups

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5.4.2.4. An integrated view of character portrayals based on Livingstone (1998), Hoorn and Konijn (2003) and Konijn and Hoorn (2005).

There is only one character in Isidingo, namely Agnes, who is rated exclusively on the positive poles of each of the dimensions. She only evokes involvement for the viewer. There are also seven other characters that are skewed to involvement. The two most appreciated characters, namely Barker and Cherel, are characters that evoke both positive and negative poles of the dimensions and therefore represent a combination of involvement and distance. One other character, namely Georgie, is also a combination of distance and involvement. For these three characters (Cherel, Barker and Georgie), Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) theory, that most appreciated characters are complex and represent a combination between distance and involvement, holds true. It does, however, not explain the popularity of the characters like Agnes, Lee or Letti.

While both Hoorn and Konijn's and Livingstone's models of character analysis provide valuable insight into viewer's portrayals of characters, neither encapsulates all dimensions. Livingstone's model does not allocate the contribution of any of the dimensions to potential viewer interest in the soap. While Hoorn and Konijn's model does not include the notion of power or gender, both are important elements of the Isidingo story world. Both include morality, but a combination of the two models would be ideal.

In Table 7.4, the researcher tried to use Livingstone's dimension of gender and power as added traits in the encoding phase of Hoorn and Konijn. She defined the poles of the scales to be powerful and powerless, and traditional gender and non-traditional gender. In keeping with Hoorn and Konijn's belief that the positive pole of the scales usually increases involvement, while the negative pole increases distance, she assumed that potency contributes to involvement and powerlessness to distance, while a traditional gender position contributes to involvement and non-traditional gender to distance.

Table 7.4 *Livingstone's (1998) dimensions of power and gender as additional dimensions in the involvement and distance analysis*

	Revised: Encode		Revised: Respond	
	Potency	Gender	Engagement	Appreciation
	Powerful or powerless	*Traditional or non-traditional*	*Involvement or distance*	*Priority*
Barker	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	10 groups
Cherel	Powerful (I)	Non-traditional (D)	Involvement and distance.	10 groups
Agnes	Powerful in her own world (I), powerless in relation to her husband	Traditional (I)	Strong bias to involvement.	8 groups

	(D).			
Georgie	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	7 groups
Lee	Powerless (D) and powerful (I)	Non-traditional (D)	Involvement and distance.	6 groups
Letti	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Pure involvement.	6 groups
Maggie	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	5 groups
Nandipha	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	5 groups
Zeb	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	5 groups
Rajesh	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	3 groups
Frank	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	0 groups
Harriet	Powerless, but has potential power (I,D).	Traditional (I)	Biased to distance.	0 groups
Joe	Negotiating power (I,D).	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	0 groups
Len	Powerful (I)	Non-traditional (I)	Biased to distance.	0 groups
Parsons	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	0 groups
Vusi	Powerful(I)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	0 groups

Combining the dimensions *gender* and *power* to the encoding phase of Hoorn and Konijn allows a fuller picture to emerge for each character. It now offers a better explanation on the popularity of Lee, as she is also now a combination of distance and involvement. It also introduces an – albeit small – degree of distance for Agnes. A few characters will now be discussed in detail.

5.4.2.4.1.   Barker and Cherel.

Barker and Cherel are immoral characters. Viewers have seen both of them involved in murder, corruption and countless plots against each other and other rivals. They are both physically attractive characters. Barker dresses well and Cherel is described as classy and fashionable. They both have a high relevance, as they are connected to a large number of other characters and have the potential to impact the lives of most of the characters through their financial investments, influence and inside information. Viewers also believe they can learn from them. Cherel teaches the viewer how to persevere, while viewers believe they can learn from Barker not to be a bad father. Each of them has

both a positive and negative valence. Viewers want to see Barker get punished for what he has done, but they believe he will prevail and survive whichever ill fate comes his way. They also want to see Cherel at least get punished for the murder of Duncan, but they wish her happiness in her personal life. Both of them are essentially love-to-hate characters. Both are admired by viewers for their ability to survive any obstacle and their constant ability to surprise viewers, but it is this same ability (to elude the law for countless murders and wrongful acts) that makes them unrealistic.

Another interesting element about Barker and Cherel is that they are archrivals while they used to be a couple. When prompted on whether they could ever rekindle their love, viewers are divided. The possibility of romantic reconciliation is another way in which involvement and distance in combined in one character set.

They are both powerful (contributing more involvement) and Barker has a traditional gender positioning, while Cherel's atypical gender position adds distance to her character. All of this translates into a very high appreciation of the duo. All groups unanimously identify them as priority characters, neither of them is excluded from storylines in which they appear in the retelling exercises and both were placed in the upper right-hand corner of the character segmentation by the market researcher. This high appeal implies that they are assets in terms of securing repeat viewership and loyalty from viewers.

5.4.2.4.2. Nandipha.

Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters asserts that viewers should feel a degree of discomfort and comfort with a character to have a high appreciation of the character. This theory explains why viewers made suggestions that Nandipha should become ill eventhough they generally report liking her. Nandipha is a good, beautiful, realistic character and because these are all positive poles of the dimensions on which Hoorn and Konijn report that viewers judge a character, she elicits too much involvement and too little distance. Despite the fact that she is powerless, her a-symptomatic, HIV status is not challenging enough to result in high appreciation. For her character, distance could be obtained in a negative outcome valence which will balance the high degree of involvement felt, and consequently achieve an overall higher character appreciation.

6. Engagement

The second phase in Busselle and Bilandsic's (2008) model is called engagement. When moving from the first phase (comprehension) to the second phase (engagement) the viewer judges the realism of the story, and if this realism is optimal, the viewer is able to be transported into the story (and experiences flow sensations). After being transported, the viewer engages with characters in one (or more) of four distinct ways. The flow sensations viewers experience when watching Isidingo and the ways that viewers engage with Isidingo's characters will now be discussed.

6.1. Flow sensations in Isidingo

One of Busselle and Bilandsic's (2008) most important contributions is an explanation of realism judgements in narrative experiences. They believe that the first realism judgement takes place between the comprehension and engagement stage. Viewers compare their mental models with new information that the soap offers. If this information is consistent with existing mental models, the viewer is able to experience a deictic shift. If not, transportation is hindered until the viewer adjusts the mental model (whether it is part of the story-world logic or character models). If the viewer's interpretation is cleared of perceived inconsistencies, transportation can occur.

Escapism or deictic shift is essential for identification to take place since the viewer has to experience the soap from within, i.e. as if he/he is character him/herself. Transportation is also important overall in creating enjoyable viewing. Transportation is exclusive to narrative genres. These narrative genres can be fictional or factual, as long as they offer an alternative world for the viewer to be transported into. Green et al. (2004) found a correlation between transportation and enjoyment, and subsequent recommendation of the programme to others.

The first hermeneutic provides strong evidence that one of the motivations for soap viewership is what viewers call *escapism*. Escapism is explained by Isidingo viewers as becoming engrossed in the story, and for the duration of the narrative, forgetting one's day-to-day concerns. This process is associated with a pleasant feeling of being physically and mentally relaxed. As the following quote from a viewer reiterates: "I like switching off and watch some soapies. It is just like sitting there and becoming a vegetable and watching other people's drama" (group 2, line 29).

The viewer remains conscious of the TV set and the notion that it is fiction and that he/she can never truly abandon the real life for the TV world. But for a brief time while watching the story, viewers get engrossed in the story and the conscious realisation of the television moves to the background.

Transportation is inhibited by any element that reminds the viewer of the external reality and which emphasises an awareness of the self. One such element may be when the viewer is directly addressed or when the viewing experience is interrupted by a telephone call. Every Isidingo viewer is interrupted several times during an episode with a commercial break. One difference between the loyal and occasional Isidingo viewers who contributed to the first hermeneutic is that the occasional viewer migrates to a different channel during the commercial break, taking a few minutes to watch a competing soap opera. Future research should explore the possibility that loyal viewers experience a higher degree of transportation into Isidingo because a second soap is not watched concurrently.

6.2. Relationships with characters

Busselle and Bilandsic's (2008) model indicates that viewers identify with characters if they successfully make a deictic shift and are transported into the narrative. Although citing Cohen's

(2001) work, they do not distinguish between different possible types of engagement viewers may feel towards the characters.

Although the first and second hermeneutic clearly acknowledged that viewers engage with characters (Theme 2), it also does not explicitly distinguish between different types of involvement. With the exception of pseudo-social relationships, it uses different terms to describe the nature of the relation that the viewer has with the character interchangeably. When reviewing an early draft of Chapter 6, one of the researcher's academic supervisors questioned, for example, if there was a difference between *involvement* and *identification* with characters since the researcher used these two terms interchangeably.

Cohen (2001, 2004) identified four types of engagement viewers may have with characters: identification, imitation, parasocial interaction and affinity. In preparation for the current chapter, the researcher revisited the first hermeneutic in search of evidence for Cohen's four types of engagement with characters. Each of the types of engagement has distinct characteristics and enabling conditions. In the absence of an opportunity to ask viewers to self identify these types of engagement, the researcher searched for these characteristics and enabling conditions as evidence of the types of engagement, and from this established whether Cohen's (2001) typology is relevant to the lived reality of Isidingo viewership.

6.2.1. Identification.

Identification is a process through which a viewer assumes the perspective of a character and feels *with,* rather than *for* a character. For identification to be present, a viewer should share the perspective of the character (understand the character), share the feelings of the character (experiencing the same emotions as the character), share the motives of the character (wishing the character would succeed), and report feeling less self aware and experiencing the narrative as if being the character (Cohen, 2001). Identification is enhanced by regularity and length of exposure to the character, realism, affinity and similarity with the character, and is more likely for narrative genres overall.

There is evidence in the first and second hermeneutic that suggests that viewers identify with characters. In the second hermeneutic, the market researcher explains that viewers "live vicariously" through soap characters. To live vicariously through a character necessitates that the viewer empathizes with the character, shares the motives of the character and experiences the same emotions as the character.

6.2.2. Imitation.

Imitation is the process through which a viewer sees behaviour or values portrayed by a character and tries to emulate it in his/her own life. In contrast to identification, which only lasts as long as the narrative experience, imitation reaches beyond the duration of the narrative into real life. It is

encouraged by affinity and similarity, as well as the admiration of other characters. Characters that are praised and admired by other characters, characters with whom the viewer develops an affinity and characters that the viewer perceives as similar to him/her are more likely to invite imitation.

A few characters are singled out for their ability to teach viewers certain values. Since this is linked to specific characters, imitation of Isidingo characters relate to its educational value. Viewers believe, for instance, that Nandipha and Parsons show the viewer how to cope with HIV infection and how to act towards people living with HIV/AIDS. The also feel that Cherel teaches one how to be resilient. Overall, however, there is no compelling evidence that Isidingo viewers imitate characters' behaviour in real life. Since imitation implies a degree of learning, this type of engagement with a character could possibly only be regarded as an outcome of the engagement with - and interpretation of - a narrative.

6.2.3.   Para-social interaction.

As discussed in Chapter 2, para-social interaction occurs when viewers imagine interacting with characters as if they are real. It differs from the process of identification in that the viewer retains an awareness of the self. The viewer remains conscious of his/her own identity and behaviourally interacts with the characters by, for example, verbally addressing the character. The viewer also thinks about the character like he/she would about a real person, e.g. weighing up whether the person could be a friend. Para-social interaction is more prevalent in non-narrative genres where the media figure directly addresses the viewer. It is also positively influenced by television dependency, long exposure to a character and exposure to the character in different contexts, such as television, talk shows and soap opera magazines. Lastly, it is enabled by realism and authenticity in the characters (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Eyal & Rubin 2003; Giles, 2002; Green et al., 2004).

Of the four types of relationships with characters there is most evidence in the first and second hermeneutic of para-social interaction taking place between Isidingo viewers and characters. From the first hermeneutic it is clear that viewers imagine interacting with characters, they discuss characters with fellow viewers as if discussing real people, if unable to watch the soap, they miss characters as if missing a friend or family member (Cohen, 2004), they refer to characters as "people" and when a character dies, they experience feelings of sadness and loss. In the second hermeneutic, the market researcher cites research by Dunbar (2003) to explain how soap characters can replace real social relationships and argues that Isidingo viewers form pseudo-social relationships with characters.

Parasocial relationships with characters are more important in viewing motivation than the programme content itself (Giles, 2002). There is clear evidence from the first and second hermeneutic that parasocial relationships are a viewing motivation for Isidingo viewers.

6.2.4.   Affinity/ liking/ similarity.

The last type of engagement with a character is the value judgement – affinity, liking or similarity. In this type of relationship with the character, the viewer remains conscious of him/herself and judges the character as appealing. Affinity is based on character traits, such as appearance, behaviour and emotional reaction, the celebrity status of the actor playing the part and textual factors that include how other characters interpret the character. Viewers are also more likely to choose a character that is on air at the time of the research as a favourite character (rather than characters that used to be on the programme and have no current storylines). Lastly, viewers will more likely choose narrative characters (rather than factual characters) as their favourites (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002).

The second hermeneutic introduces the theme that viewers form relationships with characters that are similar to themselves in some way. This includes race, age, gender, values, life stage and goals. The characters with which each segment has stronger relationships were identified based on attributes that viewers share.

The researcher believes this type of engagement should be sub-divided into similarity and affinity/ liking. In Isidingo a viewer may feel similar to a specific character based on a variety of characteristics and like the character as well (e.g. middle-aged female viewers who are also mothers, liking Agnes). However, the inverse could also be true where a viewer may not be similar to a character, but still like him/her (in Isidingo young female viewers might like Barker or Georgie, for instance). Hoorn and Konijn's theory also separates the two concepts. A distinction will therefore be made between similarity and affinity/ liking in the academic researcher's new model (see Chapter 8).

7.   Outcomes

The last phase in Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) model is called outcomes. The outcomes phase includes the effects the viewing experience has on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of viewers, viewers' reflective realism judgement of the programme and the enjoyment viewers experience while watching the programme. Each of these aspects will now be discussed within the context of the findings from the first and second hermeneutic.

7.1. Knowledge, attitude and behavioural effects

A number of studies (Ex, Janssens & Korzilius, 2002; Haferkamp, 1999; O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Wyer & Adaval, 2004) have identified the impact of watching soap operas on the interpretation of new information. Information becomes readily available in memory as a result of regular viewing, and subsequently influences the interpretation of new information. This effect can be positive in the case of Isidingo's large representation of social issues shaping how viewers think about these issues.

The ritualised viewing of one specific soap as opposed to occasional viewing of different soaps has a more pronounced effect on the relational schemas of soap viewers. This also points to the importance of considering the temporal location of the soap as the competing soaps in the same timeslot could lure viewers away. Indications from the first hermeneutic (Theme 9) are that occasional viewers are more likely to channel hop during advertisements and less likely to watch every episode of Isidingo with undivided attention. They were more concerned with following storylines and less concerned with watching every minute of every episode. This stands in contrast to loyal viewers who make an effort to watch every episode to the full – mostly at the same time every day (i.e. a ritualistic viewing of a specific soap opera). Any effects the viewing of Isidingo may have can therefore be expected to be more pronounced for regular viewers.

There are a few beliefs about characters that were ommited from the occasional viewers' accounts but that were present in the accounts of regular viewers. The researcher does not believe the fact that these beliefs were omitted from occasional viewers' accounts indicate that their interpretation of the characters necessarily differs from that of loyal viewers. It is more likely that this relates to the availability heuristic (Shrum, 1996), which states that viewers, who are exposed to stimuli on a regular basis will have it more readily available in memory. As a result of exposure to the soap on a regular basis, the information about characters in Isidingo becomes more readily available to regular viewers (compared to the availability of the same information to occasional viewers). It is therefore more likely that regular viewers' interpretation of new information will be influenced by the information they see on a regular basis in Isidingo.

7.2. Reflective realism

Early in Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) model – between comprehension and engagement – an online realism judgement takes place (this is online because it happens as the viewer watches the soap), which has an important impact on the possibility of transportation. The second realism judgement in Busselle and Bilandzic's model takes place after the conclusion of the narrative experience and is called reflective realism.

7.2.1. Contrasting loyal and occasional viewers.

Regular viewers are sensitive to realism cues that occasional viewers do not mention. They report disliking unrealistic storylines, disliking when an actor is replaced, and appreciate Isidingo as a soap with storylines that are resolved quickly. They also prefer shorter storylines over long storylines, although they appreciate the need for the latter. This is not counter intuitive to the understanding that regular viewers are able to follow the resolution of shorter storylines, while occasional viewers may only be able to follow longer storylines because of their sporadic viewing. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), a theme is prioritised based on the occurrence of the theme and also by the reaction when the theme is violated. Both regular and occasional viewers report that they like realistic storylines. This theme is, however, more of a priority for regular viewers than occasional viewers, since the former also reacts negatively to the violation of the theme.

7.2.2. Local vs. international soaps.

Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) differentiation between internal and external realism sheds light on the hermeneutic turn identified at the end of Chapter 5. The researcher noticed in viewers' accounts of the realism in soap operas that they criticise international soaps for being unrealistic, whilst praising Isidingo for being a much more realistic soap, eventhough they still have international soaps in their soap viewing repertoire. Realism seems to be an important contributing factor to the appeal of Isidingo, yet they still watch seemingly unrealistic international soaps.

It is clear from Buselle and Bilandzic's (2008) definition of the two types of realism that Isidingo has a high degree of external realism. When viewers explain the realism of Isidingo, they include mentions of the characters being identifiable as people in real life (Sub-theme 5.1), that Isidingo's storylines are things that can happen in real life (Sub-theme 5.2) and that Isidingo simulates reality (Theme 5) by, for example, being in time with real life (when there's a big soccer match in real life, the characters also refer to it).

Viewers clearly do not believe that international soaps have a high degree of external realism (i.e. not realistic judged according to the rule of reality in real life). Their characters and storylines are believed to be unrealistic, and the timeline in the soap does not correspond to the timeline of real life (Sub-theme 4.1). It is, however, possible that viewers are able to make such conclusions about international soaps because unrealistic themes are consistently reoccurring in these soaps, and that it gives them an acceptable level of internal realism (i.e. realistic when judged on the rules of reality of the soap). Both internal and external realism is part of the viewer's interpretation of the soap. It seems therefore that internal realism is the only type of realism necessary for transportation to occur.

The absence of a theme's opposite can also indicate the existence of a theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). No viewers reported interpreting Isidingo as having low internal realism. This, combined with the fact that Isidingo viewers experience transportation (a natural consequence of internal realism), suggests that Isidingo has a sufficient degree of internal realism together with its external realism.

7.3. Enjoyment and loyalty

Green et al. (2004) believe that transportation theory provides insight into how media enjoyment is experienced through the absorption into a media world, and how enjoyment is the result of the consequences of such absorption. Enjoyment is defined as a subjective evaluation of a viewing experience as amusing and interesting, and is based on the benefits viewers gain from transportation.

Firstly, the viewer experiences enjoyment by escaping the self. When transported into a narrative world the viewer is able to temporarily leave real-life concerns and worries behind. Self-focused

attention, especially when there are discrepancies between the real and ideal self, can result in a negative emotional effect. Transportation can provide relief from such an affect by allowing the viewer to focus on the media stimulus rather than the self. There is evidence in the first hermeneutic that viewers do, in fact, experience such a relief from everyday concerns when watching soap operas and that they look forward to watching a daily soap opera for this particular reason. Enjoyment through the escaping of the self is relevant to the positive viewer experience of watching Isidingo.

Another enjoyment benefit of transportation is that it allows a viewer to experiment with possible alternatives for the self. The repertoire of selves (the different ways in which the individual can possibly understand or see him/herself) available to the individual comes from personal experiences in social contexts. Within a narrative world the viewer can experiment with different occupations and lifestyles without any risk. Self expansion is associated with positive affect and therefore this benefit of transportation translates into enjoyment. There are anecdotal mentions of this benefit in the first hermeneutic.

> Cherel is a great woman. She is a crook, but she's good. She is strong, she can fight
> her own battles. I like a woman like that. I would like to be like that.
> (Group 1, line 72)

Self expansion can also include a viewer gaining knowledge and learning from the narrative experience, as well as gaining resources that can be applied in life. As the above discussion on the educational value of Isidingo illustrates, self expansion by means of learning is relevant to Isidingo.

Another benefit is the enjoyment through connections with characters. Transportation is a necessary requirement for both identification and para-social interaction to occur. Identification results in enjoyment because it allows the viewer to understand his/her own life through the situations in which the characters find themselves. On re-entering the real world, the viewer is transformed through his/her association with the character.

Para-social interaction occurs because the viewer experiences a false sense of intimacy with the character, as he/she has privileged access to the character's thoughts, motives and feelings. Achieving para-social interaction leaves the viewer with a sense of enjoyment because it delivers on the fundamental human need of companionship and belonging to a mediated social group. Viewers report experiencing both identification and para-social relationships with Isidingo characters.

The importance of these and other connections with characters in viewers' enjoyment of television is apparent in disposition theory. Disposition theory states that viewers react emotionally to the morality of characters. Viewers like and empathise with good characters and feel antagonistic towards bad characters (Green et al., 2004). This aspect of enjoyment does not ring true for Isidingo. Isidingo viewers report high levels of enjoyment of what they call *hate characters* that are all of immoral fibre.

Disposition theory does not explain the enjoyment viewers experience from the most popular characters in Isidingo at the time of the research. Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) theory is more explanatory in this regard, seeing that it explains how viewers could have positive relationships with bad characters.

8. Additional issues relevant to Isidingo

8.1. Soap time

The temporal location of soap operas within the household routine is an important part of the lived reality which warrants attention in any discussion of soap opera viewership. The time at which a soap opera is aired, has an influence on the family members who potentially have access to the soap and the degree of attention that can be afforded to the soap. Pitout (1998) found that the time in which the soap opera is broadcast is regarded by loyal viewers as a daily ritual that may not be interrupted by visitors, telephone calls or family members. Warth (1994) demonstrates that watching a complete episode of a soap opera with undivided attention, is a luxury that housewives plan for or pay for with harder work before or after the episode.

The new episode of Isidingo broadcast at 18h30 every weekday evening, creates a lead-in audience for the 19:00 news. In contrast to American day-time soap operas, it airs in a time that most family members are home and most household chores are completed – although household chores do sometimes compete with soap viewership. It represents a very structured time in the household, which is planned to the minute by the woman of the house (Theme 6, second hermeneutic). Husbands and children often watch the soap together with the female viewer in the home (Theme 7, first hermeneutic). For many soap time is regarded as a time for physical and mental relaxation (Theme 6, first hermeneutic).

Occasional viewers tend to channel hop during the soap, indicating that they access competing soaps during the Isidingo timeslot and the possibility exists that they can become intrigued by storylines in competing soaps. This is another reason why it is important to understand the temporal location of a soap opera. Loyal viewers report that they do not channel hop while Isidingo airs. Although they do watch other soap operas during other timeslots, it appears that their viewing of Isidingo is relatively attentive.

8.2. Discussing Isidingo with other viewers

There is a social aspect to watching soap operas that has a significant effect on the meaning viewers allocate to them. Soaps are watched with other people in the same household and discussed with fellow viewers either after the episode or the following day at work. Through this process, viewers supplement each other's knowledge gaps on happenings in the soap, experiment with different viewpoints on social issues and are able to discuss abstract social issues in a tangible context (Giles, 2002; Hobson, 1994; Livingstone, 1998; Riegel, 1996; Tager, 1997).

Isidingo viewers discuss the soap with fellow viewers. Viewers debate on the motives and actions of characters, as well as the validity thereof. Although this is more true for regular viewers than occasional viewers, there are some occasional viewers who also report discussing the soap with other viewers. Discussing the soap with other viewers is therefore not a distinguishing trait of regular viewers. For Isidingo at least, discussing the soap with other viewers is a consequence of viewership for both loyal and occasional viewers. This trend, combined with the large prevalence of social issues in Isidingo, puts Isidingo in a unique position to shape public opinion.

Talking about soaps allows viewers the opportunity to test out viewpoints on social norms (Riegel, 1996). If the social norms portrayed in a soap contain many positive messages, personified in characters with which viewers can identify, as is the case in Isidingo, the researcher believes soap operas can have a positive effect on public opinion and that the effect can be expected to stretch beyond loyal viewers.

9. Loyalty

None of the media theories used in this study makes the link to loyalty. Although some go as far as concluding what contribution certain dynamics make to enjoyment, none demonstrate clearly how any of it translates to loyalty. The current study includes loyal and occasional viewers. For this reason, it is possible to identify the differences in loyal and occasional viewers' interpretation of the lived reality and arrive at some understanding on the processes that culminate in loyalty. The lived experience of the loyal and occasional viewer will now be compared.

One technique in which tension is introduced into a soap (as discussed above) is by semiotic choice points. A semiotic choice point is a moment in a narrative where there is more than one possible narrative outcome at any given time in a text. Knowing that there is more than one narrative outcome (Zeb can either accept Letti's boyfriend or reject him aggressively) creates tension for the viewer, and the resolution of this tension is enjoyable.

The possibility of more than one narrative outcome is based on soap-world knowledge and real-world knowledge. In a soap with such high external realism as Isidingo, real-world knowledge is exceptionally relevant and gaps in a viewer's soap-world knowledge could possibly be supplemented by real-world knowledge.

Occasional viewers would share all the real-world knowledge that loyal viewers have to apply to their interpretation of Isidingo. They would, however, have less knowledge of the soap, and the total number of narrative possibilities available at semiotic choice points might be less for an occasional viewer. Since enjoyment is derived from the anticipation and resolution of the choice points, the occasional viewer might therefore experience less enjoyment.

Green et al. (2004) identified a causal relationship between transportation and narrative enjoyment. One difference between loyal and occasional viewers is that occasional viewers change channels during advertising breaks and watch a few minutes of another soap before going back to Isidingo. It is possible that the degree of transportation that occasional viewers experience may be affected by them accessing another narrative.

The formation of para-social relationships with characters is positively influenced by the length of exposure to the character, as well as the frequency of exposure (Cohen, 2001). Although many occasional viewers have also been following Isidingo for a long time, they did not at the time of the research have a regular exposure to the characters, seeing that they did not watch every episode. It is possible that loyal viewers experience higher degrees of para-social interaction because of the regular exposure to characters.

10. Drawing the map

In this chapter the researcher used the literature review to explicate the first and second hermeneutic in order to arrive at a fuller understanding than the interpretations of the viewers' lived reality and the market researcher's interpretations alone would have produced. Before presenting her model of the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and loyalty to a soap opera in the next chapter, the researcher makes a final comparison between the themes identified in the first and second hermeneutic and the literature. She also indicates how her own conclusions built on the earlier interpretations, and lastly, provides a summary of two main processes she believes are integral to the research question.

10.1. Building on the earlier interpretation in the hermeneutic spiral - revisiting the themes of the first and second hermeneutic and the literature

Table 7.5 is a comparison of the themes in the first hermeneutic with the literature review and the researcher's own conclusions from the third hermeneutic. Where relevant, the themes in table 5 are incorporated into the models that will be discussed in the next section.

Table 7.5 Comparing the three hermeneutics

Chapter 5 The soap opera viewer	Chapter 6 Market Researcher	Chapter 2 Literature	Chapter 7 Conclusion
Themes from the first hermeneutic	Themes re-phrased in the second hermeneutic	Literature that explicates the theme	Final themes – Consolidation in the third hermeneutic
Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Nabi and Krcmar (2004).	**Conclusion 1:** The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience

viewing behaviour.			is regular viewing behaviour.
Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters.	Renamed to: **Theme 2:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as <u>involvement</u> with characters.	Cohen (2001); Hoorn and Konijn (2003); Konijn and Hoorn (2005); Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 2:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an appreciation of characters.
-	Additional sub-theme: Representation as agent of identification.	Cohen (2001).	**Conclusion 2.1:** Viewers interpret characters using two sets of resources, namely soap knowledge and real-world knowledge.
Sub-theme: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Livingstone (1998).	
Sub-theme: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming para-social relationships with characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Cohen (2001).	**Conclusion 2.2:** Viewers form a complex schema of who the character is and this schema underlies the expectation viewers have of the character's future behaviour and interactions with other characters.
Sub-theme: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters, and viewers relate to these two types of characters differently.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer in terms of an <u>emotional reaction</u> to the character.	Cohen (2001); Hoorn and Konijn (2003); Konijn and Hoorn (2005); Livingstone, (1998); Nabi and Krcmar (2004).	**Conclusion 2.3:** Viewers relate to characters in a variety of ways, each of which makes a unique contribution to the overall appeal of and loyalty to a soap opera.

Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 3:** Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.
Sub-theme: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?	Not present in the second hermeneutic.	Tulloch (2000).	**Conclusion 3.1:** Viewer's interpretations of storylines are influenced by their relationship with characters.
Sub-theme: Anticipation of what will happen next.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Livingstone (1998).	
Sub-theme: Types of storylines preferred.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme:** Types of storylines that contribute more to loyalty.	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 3.2:** Isidingo is partly true to genre conventions in the types of storylines portrayed.
Theme 4: A preference for all things real.	Renamed to: **Theme 4:** The importance of fantasy and realism	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 4:** Realism is an important determinant of viewers' judgement of characters.
Sub-theme: International soaps are more unrealistic than local soaps.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 4.1:** There are different types of realism. Isidingo's strength is external realism combined with internal realism.
Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	
Sub-theme: Isidingo's characters are real.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme:** Most of Isidingo's characters are real.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 4.2:** External realism is not a necessary determinant of loyalty to all soap operas.
Sub-theme: Isidingo's storylines are real.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	

Sub-theme: Isidingo is educational.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Ex, Janssens and Korzilius (2002); O'Guinn and Shrum (1997); Wyer and Adaval (2004).	**Conclusion 5:** The effect of loyal viewership of Isidingo is education or learning. **Conclusion 5.1:** Isidingo has the potential of shaping public opinion on key social issues.
Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas play.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Tager (1997); Warth (1994).	**Conclusion 6:** The temporal location of the soap opera within the household routine is a determining factor to loyalty.
Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Giles (2002); Hobson (1994); Kreutzner and Warth (1994); Riegel (1996); Tager (1997); Tulloch (2000).	**Conclusion 7:** Social influence is an important psychological process that instigates and sustains soap opera viewership.
Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour.	Renamed to: **Theme 8:** The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly character involvement.	Cohen (2001).	**Conclusion 8:** Character involvement is positively influenced by a regular exposure to the characters.
-	Additional Theme: **Theme 9:** The importance of the setting of the soap.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 9:** The spatial setting of a soap forms part of its situation model.
-	Additional Theme: **Theme 10:** The	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 10:** Isidingo viewers

	appeal of the soap genre in general.		have an appeal for the genre in general. **Conclusion 10.1:** Soap opera viewers are familiar with soap opera genre conventions and these influence their expectations of characters and storylines.
Theme 11: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Green et al. (2004).	**Conclusion 11:** Transportation is a necessary determinant of loyalty.

10.2. Two important processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences

Two distinct processes emerge that culminate in positive viewing experiences: The process through which viewers come to enjoy narrative progressions in the soap opera and the process through which viewers experience enjoyment as the result of engagement with soap opera characters.

Viewers use two sets of resources when interpreting a soap opera – real-world knowledge and soap-world knowledge. Both of the processes that will now be discussed are based on the assumption (pictured in Figure 7.15) that as a viewer is transformed from novice to occasional viewer to loyal viewer, his/her soap-world knowledge increases, with important implications for the viewer's enjoyment.

Figure 7.15. The transition from novice to loyal viewer

The first process that has important enjoyment benefits, is the process through which viewers experience enjoyment from interpreting the narrative. This model is an application of Livingstone's (1998) theory to the first and second hermeneutic. Figure 7.16 depicts how viewers derive enjoyment from interpreting the narrative.

Figure 7.16. Enjoyment from interpreting the narrative.

A viewer develops an interpretive framework by means of the two sets of interpretive resources, namely real-world knowledge and soap-world knowledge. From this collective whole, a viewer has certain expectations of what could potentially happen at each semiotic choice point in the narrative. The semiotic choice point is a moment in the narrative at which new information is revealed and the viewer, interpreting this new information from within the interpretive framework, generates a range of potential outcomes at that point. These expectations might include anything from the specific characters that could be expected to be involved, to the potential outcome. The extent of the viewer's narrative insight - interpretive framework - or his/her narrative insight, determines the number of possible outcomes and implications he/she will be aware of. If the range is large, the viewer experiences a higher degree of tension prior to the outcome being made known. Enjoyment is experienced when this variable level of tension is resolved. The narrative insight (extent of narrative

possibility the viewer is aware of) is directly correlated to the possible enjoyment he/she may experience from the narrative experience.

The second process through which the viewer experiences enjoyment from watching a soap opera, is through engagement with characters. This model is an integration of Busselle and Bilandzic (2008), Cohen (2001), Green et al. (2004), Hoorn and Konijn (2003), Konijn and Hoorn (2005), and Livingstone (1998), as well as the first and second hermeneutic and is depicted in figure 7.17 below.

Figure 7.17. Enjoyment through engagement with characters

Prior to engagement with a character, the viewer forms mental models of the characters through an interpretation of fragmented pieces of information. Viewers deduct character traits from characters' behaviour in different contexts and gain access to their motives and values through discussions that characters have with others. During the encoding phase these traits are assembled into coherent mental models that consist of several dimensions, each of which has either a positive or negative pole. The dimensions include gender, power, aesthetics and morality. During the judgement phase, viewers measure the degree of similarity between themselves and the characters and conclude on a level of appreciation for the character (where combinations of both positive and negative traits usually – but not exclusively – culminate in a high appreciation of respective characters). During this phase, viewers also judge the realism of characters. Realism positively influences the viewer's ability to experience transportation, identification and para-social interactions and increases the likelihood that a viewer may judge the character as similar to themselves.

Viewers experience transportation and if a character is judged as similar to the viewer, he or she may identify with the character. Identification with a character leads to the enjoyable consequences of escaping self-focus and exploring alternative identities. With prolonged exposure this also leads to imitation where identification is extending outside of the soap opera into the real world. Although imitation could not be established in this study, imitation – if with a positive character that exhibits positive traits or life skills, the viewer experiences learning and could potentially benefit from the viewing experience in real life. The possibility of identification is increased by prolonged exposure to the soap opera as well as through frequent exposure to the character.

When a viewer does not identify with a character but still holds a high appreciation for the character, the viewer potentially develops a para-social relationship with the character. The enjoyable benefit of para-social interaction is that the viewer gains a sense of belonging to a group. Since para-social interaction resembles real-life interaction, a positive outcome of this type of engagement is a reduction in prejudice and subsequent learning. Para-social interaction is also positively influenced by prolonged and frequent exposure to the character. Interestingly, para-social interaction is also a motivation for viewing and therefore increases the likelihood of continued viewership.

11. Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher presented her understanding of the first and second hermeneutic and applied learnings from the literature review and theoretical framework to it. It was found that positive viewing experiences are a combination of enjoyment derived from interpreting the narrative and enjoyment derived from interpretation of the characters. The role of realism, transportation, soap time and social influences were also identified. In the next chapter she will present her final integration of the first and second hermeneutic with the literature review by presenting a new model of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty to a soap opera. After presenting the new model, the chapter concludes with a reflection on the research process.

Chapter 8: The third hermeneutic – a new model

1. Introduction

Chapter 8 is the culmination of the interpretive journey. Like Chapter 7, it takes place on the outer edge of the hermeneutic spiral and therefore represents the last steps of the third hermeneutic.

As Figure 8.1 illustrates, the chapter is structured around two parts. The first part is the result of the total enquiry in the psychological processes that culminate in pleasant viewing experiences and viewer loyalty. In this section, the researcher summarises her understanding, set out in the preceding sections of the chapter, in a new model from which to understand soap opera viewership. The model is presented with reference to the quality of mental models that viewers form of the soap opera, the enjoyment viewers experience from viewing and lastly, loyalty to the soap opera.

Figure 8.1. Graphical representation of the contents of chapter 8.

The second part of this chapter is a reflection on the study. Firstly, the academic and market research processes are contrasted on various methodological and conceptual dimensions. Then a discussion on the contributions and limitations of the study inform suggestions for future research before the chapter concludes by revisiting the research questions.

Part 1: Drawing the map

A new model of the interpretation, enjoyment and loyalty of watching a soap opera is presented in this section. After a short overview and introduction to the model, the quality of the mental models, enjoyment and loyalty are discussed. The third hermeneutic is then concluded by positioning the model within the hermeneutic phenomenological framework.

2. A new model

Figure 8.2 is a new model of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty to a soap opera. The model illustrates how the interpretation of characters and narratives respectively contribute to positive viewing experiences. The enjoyment derived from interpreting characters and narratives are dependant on the quality of the mental models the viewers have of each of these aspects. The quality of mental models is dependant on the quality and quantity of viewership, which is a function of loyal viewing behaviour. Each of these aspects will be discussed in detail in the section that follows.

Figure 8.2. A new model: the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera.

2.1. Quality of the mental models

A viewer forms mental models that represent the soap opera by interpreting fragments of information obtained from watching the soap opera. The richness of these mental models is primarily dependant on two factors, namely the frequency and longevity of viewership. Longevity of viewership influences the total number of episodes watched (and therefore the total number of narrative incidents exposed to), while frequency of viewership determines the recency and relevance of the narrative incidents the viewer is exposed to. The larger the number of narrative encounters and the more recent these encounters, the richer the mental models will be. Recency is important to ensure that a viewer's mental model of both the characters and story-world logic is current to the narrative incidents at the

time of viewership. A history of watching a large number of episodes with an interruption in viewership (although more valuable than no history of viewership) is less valuable than a recent history of viewership, because of its applicability to current happenings. The quantity of episodes watched is an important determinant of quality, as it implies that a viewer will have had more unique, fragmented incidents to interpret. An impression formed of a character based on his/her behaviour in one incident will be less comprehensive (i.e. will encapsulate less of his/her total character) than an impression formed based on his/her behaviour in several incidents.

The richness of mental models is also determined by several other factors. It is firstly determined by the relevance of the real-world knowledge of the viewer to the interpretation of the narrative. The relevance of real-world knowledge to the interpretation of the soap opera is dependant on its realism. If a soap opera has a high degree of external realism (for example, congruence between the way people behave in the soap opera and the way real people do), any resources the viewer has for interpreting the real world is directly applicable to the viewer's interpretation of the soap opera. This can then counteract the lack of frequency and recency in exposure to the narrative to some extent.

Another factor that influences the richness of the mental models formed is the quality of the viewing experience. If the viewing of an episode is not complete (if the viewer does not watch the entire episode as is the case with occasional viewers who migrate to competing soap operas during the same timeslot), the viewer is not exposed to all the incidents in the episode and does not exhaust the interpretive potential of the viewing experience. The quality of the viewing experience is also influenced by the degree to which transportation is able to take place. If transportation is interrupted by factors external (if the telephone rings, for example) or internal (perhaps a lack of internal realism that triggers viewer reflection and makes him/her aware of the self and the soap opera), the episode is watched primarily from a deictic position outside of the soap rather than within, which subsequently hinders the engagement with characters.

The richness of mental models is lastly influenced by the viewer's access to other sources of interpretation of the soap opera. The primary source of information from which to form mental models is viewership itself but this can be supplemented by, most notably, discussions with other viewers. Other sources could also include soap opera magazines or on-line viewer forums where other viewers discuss the soap opera (which the viewer can choose to participate in or read as an outsider).

2.2. Enjoyment

Rich mental models result in enjoyment for the viewer through two avenues: the progression of the narrative and engagement with characters. Every incident in a soap opera represents a semiotic choice point with different possible outcomes. A viewer who has a rich mental model for the soap opera, recognises a large array of narrative possibilities (a cognitive dimension to enjoyment). The range and the extent of the implications that the viewer is aware of, determines the tension he/she will experience in anticipation of a resolution of the semiotic choice point (an affective dimension of

enjoyment). If the range and extent of the narrative possibilities the viewer is aware of is vast, he/she will experience a high degree of tension and subsequent enjoyment from the resolution of the narrative incident. This enjoyment will, in turn, make a contribution to the viewer's intrinsic motivation to watch another episode (a behavioural reaction to enjoyment).

Rich mental models also determine the potential quality of the engagement the viewer could have with characters. When a viewer first watches a soap opera, he/she meets the characters in a way comparable to meeting people in real life. At this early stage of the engagement, the viewer relies on stereotypes to interpret any new characters and is limited to whatever small amount of information has been presented by the limited number of narrative encounters (the cognitive dimension of enjoyment). On this small amount of information, the viewer is less able to judge and engage with the character than a viewer who has been exposed to a large number of narrative incidents. If the viewer is unable to judge the appeal and similarity of a character, he/she will not be able to identify with a character or form para-social relationships with characters, which in turn, negatively affects enjoyment. The viewer derives specific gratifications from either identifying with a character or having para-social interaction with a character (affective dimension of enjoyment), which makes a contribution to the intrinsic motivation to continue watching on a regular basis (behavioural dimension of enjoyment).

Viewers selectively recall only the elements of a storyline that relates to the characters they have a high appreciation for. The nature of the viewer's engagement with characters therefore also influences the range of narrative possibilities the viewer is aware of at semiotic choice points.

Realism is also an important determinant of the quality of engagement with characters. Realism positively influences transportation, which is a necessary condition for engaging with characters and also influences engagement with characters directly, as it is easier for a viewer to identify with or have para-social interactions with realistic characters.

2.3. Loyalty
The enjoyment derived from engaging with characters and the enjoyment derived from the anticipation of the resolution of storylines combine into an internal motivation to watch another episode. This internal motivation is supplemented by social influence that encourages a viewer to watch an episode together with significant others. It is also positively influenced by the convenience of the timeslot in which the soap opera airs. Watching more episodes (i.e. becoming a more regular viewer) repeats this process and results in richer mental models, more enjoyment and an increased internal motivation to watch.

If a soap opera has a high degree of external realism (as in Isidingo) an occasional viewer, who has a smaller total number of episodes viewed and a less recent exposure to the soap opera, may be able to follow and anticipate much of what transpires because his/her real-world knowledge (his/her bias)

is applicable to the interpretation of the soap opera. The occasional viewer will, however, be limited to the real world as heuristic and will not be privy to idiosyncratic character and narrative histories, which will limit the range of narrative possibilities available at semiotic choice points and his/her subsequent enjoyment from anticipating narrative resolutions. Without frequent and lengthy exposure (and a fusion of horizons in which the occasional viewer's bias and knowledge on the soap opera is broadened), the occasional viewer will also not be able to sustain identification with any particular character or para-social relationships with a range of characters, which limits his/her enjoyment gained from engagement with characters. If the total enjoyment derived from the viewing experience is low, the inherent motivation to continue to watch will consequently be low. This lack of inherent motivation may, however, be supplemented by other factors that constitute the total facticity (the inseperability of our own being with that of others) and historicity (the temporal location of the viewing experience and the interpretations that preceded it), such as the timeslot in which the soap opera is on air or social pressure from spouses for the occasional viewer to watch. As the frequency and longevity of the occasional viewer's exposure to the soap increases over time, so does the richness of the mental models formed and the possible enjoyment that can be derived from viewing. In this cyclical manner, a lived reality of loyal viewership is formed.

Part 2: Reflection

The following section is a reflection on various aspects of the research. Researcher reflection is necessary for the reader to judge the quality of the research (Rolfe, 2006). This reflection should not only include a detailed account of methodological decisions, but should also include self-critique and self-appraisal (Rolfe). This whole section contains a reflection on methodological decisions. Self-critique and self-appraisal is dealt with in the section on researcher bias.

A detailed account of the methodology used in this research was provided in Chapter 4. In this last section of Chapter 8, the researcher reflects on how the study juxtaposed academic and market research; the contributions of the study, as well as the limitations of the study. Suggestions for future research are made based on this reflection and the chapter concludes by revisiting the research questions.

3.   Reflection on the research process by juxtaposing academic and market research

This academic study was a secondary analysis of market research data. For this reason, the study provides a natural comparison of two very different applications of qualitative research. The following is a comparison of these approaches based on the nature of their respective aims, analysis, interpretation, research outputs, time frames, the positioning of the research participant, language and researcher bias.

This reflection illustrates the researcher's sensitivity for the differences and convergences between these two approaches. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter it also contributes insights on how market research can gain a lot by applying principles of academic research.

3.1. Research aims

The first difference between academic and market research, as illustrated in this study, is the nature of the research aims and subsequent research questions. The overall research aim of the market research study was to conduct an evaluation of the soap opera Isidingo. Research questions[11] salient from this research aim included an evaluation of various aspects of the soap opera, including amongst others, the characters and storylines. The questions included in the discussion guide were general in nature. It covered a variety of topics regarding viewing behaviour, beliefs about soap operas, soap operas competing with Isidingo, Isidingo's characters and storylines, and production issues, as well as specific narrative directions the producers wanted to test with viewers. The nature of the discussion guide is typical of a market research study in which a large amount of content is addressed in a short time available. It is also focused on the strategic direction expressed in the market research brief and its major concern is the solution of a specific business objective.

The research aim and the salient research questions of the academic study are vastly different. These aims and questions are defined in Chapter 1 and the research questions are revisited at the conclusion of the current chapter. They are formulated to make a contribution to three fields of science, namely: media psychology, media studies and research methodology. Where the aim and research questions of the market research study are pragmatic in nature and focused on addressing a specific business problem, the aim and research questions of the academic study are epistemic and focused on scientific knowledge (Mouton, 2001). The academic study took place after the market research study was completed and was dependant on the data that had already been collected to address the practical business problem. The implication is that the academic researcher had no control over the nature of the data collected in the market research study. A divergence between the research aims and questions of the market research and academic research underlie certain limitations which are identified elsewhere in this chapter.

3.2. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation are two distinct functions in the research process. Data analysis is the process through which data is fragmented into manageable pieces and the relationships between the pieces are examined. During analysis the researcher breaks up the data into manageable meaning units and looks for relationships between the meaning units that constitute themes. During the process of interpretation, the researcher creates a theory that explains the relationships identified between themes during the analysis (Gummesson, 2005; Mouton, 2001).

As will be illustrated in the sections to follow, the processes of analysis and interpretation in academic research differ substantially from those in market research. This is not to say that the market research analysis and interpretation process is inferior to the academic method (Catterall, 1998). It rather

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[11] The specific research questions of the market research study are not mentioned in order to protect the SABC's proprietary information. Please refer to the discussion on ethical concerns at the end of Chapter 4.

illustrates how each is a function of the unique research aim and timelines within its context (refer elsewhere in this chapter for a discussion on how aims and timelines differ between these two approaches.)

3.2.1. Data analysis.

Data analysis in the market research process begins while the data is being collected. The focus group or interview is observed by a market researcher who begins to define themes as the focus group progresses. This collection of themes is then influence the nature of the analysis process. Analysis is often more of a search for detail to underlie the themes that are identified during the initial interpretation. After the completion of the data collection, the focus groups are recorded and transcribed. The market researcher, using the initial themes identified while the focus groups were being conducted, reviews the transcripts in search for additional information on the overall themes. All tactical issues (such as which programmes were watched or image descriptions of characters) are then collated into summaries that are used in the report documentation.

The process of data analysis used in the academic context is described in detail in Chapter 4 and captured in Chapters 5 and 6. It involved a rigorous analysis process in which the researcher read the first and second hermeneutics (preserved in transcripts of the focus groups and the market research presentation respectively), paraphrased the data to make all implicit meanings explicit, and identified meaning units and themes through a systematic process of qualitative analysis. These themes were then interpreted in context of a thorough literature study and the researcher's background knowledge.

3.2.2. Interpretation.

When focus groups are conducted in the market research process, one market researcher facilitates the focus group and another follows the group from behind a one-way mirror. The market researcher in the viewing room is a senior market research executive who is tasked with immediate meaning making. Rather than making verbatim notes, she interprets the discussion of the group and makes interpretive notes, identifying and elaborating on themes. These interpretive notes form the backbone of the analysis process and provide a framework within which further analysis is conducted. Once all the detail has been collated (during analysis of the transcripts), the full collection of data is reviewed before final interpretations are made that informs the research conclusions and recommendations that will be presented to the client. During this final process of interpretation, data about the topic is interpreted from the researchers' conceptual background and not necessarily on academic literature reviewed about the topic.

Interpretation in the academic study was an extended process through which the researcher moved between the first and second hermeneutics and literature review to arrive at the third hermeneutic as presented in the previous chapter. Sufficient time to develop, contemplate on and revise themes was available (a number of months compared to days or weeks in market research) and the result was the new model of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty to a soap opera as

presented in this chapter. Interpretation is made from within the context of a thorough review of the most pertinent literature, within a sensitivity to the chosen interpretive framework and by use of the researcher's background knowledge.

3.2.3. Illustrating the difference between interpretation in the academic and market research contexts.

The following example from the findings illustrates how the interpretive processes of the two approaches differ. As part of the second hermeneutic, the market researcher explains that because viewers are so emotionally involved with characters, they find it difficult to conduct an objective character evaluation. The market researcher warns the production team before presenting her feedback on the characters that they should keep the viewer's inability to distance him/herself from the emotional experience of the characters in mind, and realise that it is part and parcel of the appeal of the soap. Negative feedback should therefore not be understood as necessitating intervention, but rather as an indication of the emotions that are evoked by the character. The academic researcher agrees with this recommendation, but the following will illustrate how the motivation for the recommendation from the academic process differs from that of the market research process.

The market researcher makes the recommendation based on a long history of conducting similar research studies. Over the years she has noticed that when writers follow the advice of viewers in these instances, the viewers often lose interest. She therefore warns writers and production houses not to regard viewer's comments as actionable recommendations, but rather as an indication of the emotional tension they experience in relation to the characters (which is what increases the appeal of the characters). The academic researcher would make the same recommendation, but the recommendation would, in contrast, be motivated by the theory of Hoorn and Konijn (2003) and Konijn and Hoorn (2005) (that a character is most appealing when an optimum level of involvement and distance is achieved) and by a practical application of the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Relating to characters is part of the automatic processes through which viewers interpret the lived reality of soap opera viewership. Asking viewers to relate to characters in an objective way or removing their emotional experience of the character from their interpretation of the soap is – according to the market researcher - impossible. The academic researcher agrees that viewers would find it exceptionally difficult to remove their own experience from their interpretation of the soap opera. The academic researcher's conclusion would be based on the application of Heidegger's theory to the problem. Heidegger asserts that people live in the ready-to-hand mode of engagement in which interpretation is automatic and unconscious. It requires great effort to think about the world actively and engage with it in the unready-to-hand mode of engagement. For a viewer to remove his/her emotional experience of the character from his/her interpretation of the soap, would require that the viewer assumes the unready-to-hand mode of engagement which is rare, strenuous and not reflective

of their lived reality (in which the emotional experience of the character is inherent to their experience of the soap).

The academic researcher agrees with the market researcher that the suggestions viewers have on characters are more indicative of their emotional reactions to the characters than representing interventions that should be made by the production team. If all suggestions are followed – such as sending Barker to jail, having Zeb treat Agnes better and seeing Lee stand up to her father – it would remove all tension and discomfort that the viewer feels. Removing all tension would reduce the enjoyment experienced from interpreting the characters and their storylines.

Hoorn and Konijn's theory that fictional characters should evoke a healthy degree of both distance and involvement provides a theoretical motivation for this conclusion. As explained in Chapter 7, in the analysis of the character world, complex characters that have a balance between distance and involvement are more engaging than one-dimensional characters that are only good or bad. Hoorn and Konijn argue that complex characters that are not perceived as either purely positive or negative during the encoding stage, challenge the viewer more and result in higher appreciation. Beauty, goodness and realism have optimum levels where the ideal combination of distance and involvement equates to appreciation. The conclusion from the academic and market research contexts converged in this instance, although it was based on different interpretive processes.

3.3. Research output

The final product of the market research study was a PowerPoint presentation that focused on answering the commissioning client's research question and addressing the business problem in a concise, yet comprehensive way. Typically, the findings are presented to the commissioning editor and his/her team, the research department and the production house responsible for the programme. The presentation includes a brief introduction to the business problem that initiated the research, followed by an introduction to the methodology used in the study. This introduction to the methodology used in the study includes brief notes on the research approach, the method used to collect data, the defined universe and the sample structure. The bulk of the presentation is structured around the research findings, which build to a coherent conclusion. The research presentation is concluded with specific recommendations, according to which changes should be made to the programme to achieve the desired business objectives.

Although a literature review of sources, such as industry journals and peer forums[12] is conducted during the conceptual planning of the research, it is not reported on in great detail during the research presentation. It will rather be used to substantiate a specific finding that the market researcher deems significant to the overall objective or as a general guide within which the findings are structured. The

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[12] These would include publications and electronic peer discussion forums of organisations, such as the QRCA (the American Qualitative Research Consultants Association) and AQR (a similar body based in the United Kingdom).

presentation is often accompanied by a written report. Market research data often contain proprietary information and will not always be submitted to a journal or international conference for publication.

This differs vastly from the output in an academic research process which entails a detailed outlay of the literature review, the theoretical framework, the methodology, the data and the integration thereof written in academic language. The literature and theory are fundamental to the process of interpretation. As discussed in Chapter 3, the theory provides a theoretical framework within which the researcher engages and interprets the data. As illustrated in Chapters 2 and 7, the literature review in academic research allows the researcher to regard the data in a different way, attempting to fit the new findings into existing models or redefining models to accommodate new insights. Academic research will also often be published in academic journals and presented at conferences.

3.4. Positioning of the research participant

The research participant in a market research study is positioned as the end user or client for whom the programme should be tailored. The research is framed as an attempt to cater the programme to the viewer's needs and revisions to the end product is almost a guaranteed outcome.

The research participant in the current academic study represents an interpretive window into the lived reality. The purpose is to understand the lived reality of viewership and to make a contribution to media psychology. Academic research does not hold the promise of an immediate augmentation of the on-screen product the viewer is exposed to.

3.5. Timeframe

The timeframe of academic and market research studies are also dissimilar. Depending on the size of the sample, the duration of a market research study should be no longer than four to eight weeks. Findings should be shared with the client as soon as possible after the conclusion of the fieldwork, since it ages promptly. Feedback on the storylines of a soap opera from the research, for example, is redundant if the storyline is allowed to evolve and conclude before the research findings are shared. It would still contribute an overall understanding that includes principles applicable to future endeavours, but the immediate practical application thereof diminishes.

An academic study is less time conscious than market research, as the fruit of the labour are principles and understandings that contribute to a larger body of scientific knowledge. It is not always immediately applied practically. An important time consideration salient from this, however, is that the literature review should be updated continuously in the academic study to ensure that the latest theoretical understanding of the lived reality is consolidated with the research findings. More than two years elapsed from the time that the academic researcher conducted the initial literature review and the conclusion of the current document. The academic researcher continuously updated the literature review to ensure that new additions to the scientific body of knowledge – such as Busselle's and

Bilandsic's (2008); Debesay et al.'s (2008); Marx's (2008) and Phillips's (2008) work – were included in the final interpretation.

3.6. Language use

Another apparent divergence is the language used in each context. Language used in the market research report include business phrases such as "strategic", "operational" and "tactical", and include many phrases and expressions that are inappropriate in a formal academic writing context. The statements quoted below illustrate how many phrases typically used in market research were reformulated for inclusion in the academic study.

In an early draft a sentence was phrased as follows: *"Papa G, Georgie, Barker, Cherel and Zeb were amongst those sorely missed for their personalities, their idiosyncrasies, their scheming and conniving."* This was later rephrased to: *"Feelings of loss reported by the viewers were focused on characters. Specific characters mentioned included Papa G, Barker, Cherel and Zeb for their personalities, idiosyncrasies and underhanded deals."*

The two approaches do, however, converge in their preference for qualitative language. Both the market researcher and the academic research would, for instance, favour the phrase "research participant" over "respondent", as it implies an inherent co-operation between researcher and researched in arriving at an understanding.

To remain consistent with the interpretive framework of the study, the academic researcher would also attempt to use language that remains within hermeneutic phenomenology. This would, for instance, include using phrases such as: "re-interpretation", "lived reality" and "historicity of meaning."

3.7. Researcher bias

Positivist approaches attempt to exclude researcher bias from the interpretation of research data (Laverty, 2003). Researcher bias is, however, used as an integral part of the interpretation process in both the qualitative market research study and the academic study.

In the market research study, the market researcher relied heavily on her experience from past studies on soap operas and television in general. The nature of the market researcher's bias was discussed in Chapter 6, and the prominence of it in the interpretation process was illustrated in the section above dealing with analysis and interpretation.

The academic study, in its allegiance to the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway, also acknowledged and actively used the researcher's background knowledge. The academic researcher's bias was described in detail in Chapter 4. It includes a history of personal soap opera viewership, incidents in her academic career and readings of various articles in print and electronic media. Table

8.1 summarises how each of the aspects of the researcher's bias relates to some aspect of the conclusions made in Chapter 7.

Table 8.1 *How researcher bias informed the interpretations made in the third hermeneutic*

Chapter 7 Conclusion	The influence of researcher bias in the interpretation of the data
Final themes – consolidation in the third hermeneutic	*How the researcher bias summarised in Chapter 4 relates to the conclusions*
Conclusion 1: The outcome of viewer's interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour.	-
Conclusion 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an appreciation of characters. **Conclusion 2.1:** Viewers interpret characters using two sets of resources, namely soap knowledge and real-world knowledge. **Conclusion 2.2:** Viewers form a complex schema of who the character is and this schema underlies the expectation viewers have of the character's future behaviour and interactions with other characters. **Conclusion 2.3:** Viewers relate to characters in a variety of ways, each of which makes a unique contribution to the overall appeal of and loyalty to a soap opera.	• Viewer response to the death of Ashley Callie, the actress who played Lee Haines in Isidingo. • Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research.
Conclusion 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines. **Conclusion 3.1:** Viewers' interpretations of storylines are influenced by their relationship with characters. **Conclusion 3.2:** Isidingo is partly true to genre conventions in the types of storylines portrayed.	• Researcher's early memories of her mother teaching her about plot lines and how the resolution of conflict makes the reader want to read the complete the story. • Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research

Conclusion 4: Realism is an important determinant of viewer's judgement of characters. **Conclusion 4.1:** There are different types of realism. Isidingo's strength is external realism combined with internal realism. **Conclusion 4.2:** External realism is not a necessary determinant of loyalty to all soap operas.	• Early memories of watching Santa Barbara and Egoli. • Early memories of her mother teaching her of the importance of using realistic costumes, sets and props in theatre.
Conclusion 5: The effect of loyal viewership of Isidingo is education or learning. **Conclusion 5.1:** Isidingo has the potential of shaping public opinion on key social issues.	• Interview with Michelle Botes in Sarie. • Story about the female character going to university on a soap opera in India.
Conclusion 6: The temporal location of the soap opera within the household routine is a determining factor to loyalty.	• April fools joke about Isidingo moving to the afternoon to save electricity.
Conclusion 7: Social influence is an important psychological process that instigates and sustains soap opera viewership.	• Watching Santa Barbara and Egoli with mother.
Conclusion 8: Character involvement is positively influenced by regular exposure to the characters.	-
Conclusion 9: The spatial setting of a soap forms part of its situation model.	-
Conclusion 10: Isidingo viewers have an appeal for the genre in general. **Conclusion 10.1:** Soap opera viewers are familiar with soap opera genre conventions and these influence their expectations of characters and storylines.	• Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research.
Conclusion 11: Transportation is a necessary determinant of loyalty.	• Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research.

3.8. Conclusion

Table 8.2 compares the academic and market research processes. It summarises the similarities and differences between the two research approaches on the dimensions discussed above.

Table 8.2 *Comparing market research with the current academic research*

	Market research study	The current academic study
Data source	Primary data	Secondary data
Interpretive position	Core and inner parts of the hermeneutic spiral.	Outer part of the hermeneutic spiral.
Main objective and output	Addressing a specific business objective.	A contribution to the scientific body of knowledge.
Interpretation	Immediate and concurrent to the data being collected. Substantiated by additional analysis after fieldwork.	Rigorous, based on a detailed research pathway that adheres to strict hermeneutic phenomenological principles.
Timeframe	6-8 weeks	Two years
Positioning of the research participant	As the end-user or client.	Interpretive window into the nature of the lived reality.
Language use	Formal, using business terminology (market research 'speak'). Qualitative	Formal and academic. Qualitative Hermeneutic phenomenological
Researcher bias	Specifically utilised	Specifically utilised

4. Contributions of the study

This study makes a contribution to media studies, to the specialist field of media psychology, as well as to the subject of research methodology. As will be discussed in the following section, both media studies and media psychology benefit from interdisciplinary convergence. Although the study's main contribution is to psychology, implications for media studies also emerge as a natural by-product at this interdisciplinary junction.

Any comments made in this section and elsewhere that relate to the body of knowledge potentially benefiting from the current and further research, should not be understood as an attempt to arrive at an objective conclusion. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that any researcher brings with him/her a fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background, which influences any interpretations made in the research (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). The contributions to the body of knowledge should be understood as an elaboration of this fore-grounding.

4.1. Contribution to the specialist field of media psychology

Media psychology is a relatively young scientific field (Fischoff, 2005) and much of the work in it has been done by communication and media specialists (Giles, 2003). It exists in a conceptual intersection between media studies and psychology, and criticism from outside of this intersection comes from both sides. Communication scholars are concerned that psychologists disregard the

complexity of the media and its importance outside of its psychological significance, while psychologists are concerned that media specialists use processing concepts (perception, interpretation, memory) incorrectly (Reeves & Anderson, 1991).

The psychology community clearly recognises the value of research that brings media and psychology together in an attempt to enrich the understanding of both. Division 46 of the American Psychological Association (the Division for Media Psychology):

> Seeks to promote research into the impact of media on human behaviour; to facilitate interaction between psychology and media representatives; to enrich the teaching, training, and practice of media psychology; and to prepare psychologists to interpret psychological research to the lay public and to other professionals (http://www.apa.org/divisions/div46/ para.1).

The question on whether psychology enriches the study of media is less pertinent to the current study. It is, however, of interest to the current study that the study of media enriches psychology. The study of media enriches psychology in much the same way as the study of the psychology of reading has influenced general theories of cognition. Understanding the interaction of people with media allows the study of cognition, attention and perception - all important psychological concepts - in the context of real-life, complex and dynamic contexts (Giles, 2003; Reeves & Anderson, 1991).

This study showed that the psychological processes through which loyalty to a soap opera develops are psychological. Social psychological processes of influence introduce the viewer to the soap opera and sustain viewership before the viewer develops an inherent motivation to watch the soap opera. Cognitive psychological processes take place through which the viewer selectively attends to the most relevant and interesting information about characters and storylines, and by using background information, interprets them with specific affective implications. This interpretation process is also grounded in the psychological processes of memory, as it shows how viewers favour memories of past story elements that are emotionally charged in their interpretation of new incidents. The study also showed how the appeal of a soap opera lies mostly in how characters are perceived and interpreted by viewers in a way that is similar to how they interpret people in real life, and social psychological skills (combined with soap-world knowledge) become important viewer resources.

As will be discussed in 6.2.1 below, most research in this field is from cognitive theory. The contribution of the current study is the addition of a hermeneutic phenomenological path.

4.2. Contribution to the field of media studies

The study also makes a contribution to media studies and in particular to an understanding of the soap opera genre. It identifies Isidingo as a soap opera that is unique within the genre. Although adhering to many genre conventions, Isidingo contributes important possibilities for the diversification

of the genre internationally. The study also begins to address loyalty as an outcome of enjoyment of a soap opera.

4.3. Contribution to research methodology

The current study provided a practical application of a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. It made a distinction between Heideggerian and Husserlian phenomenology and argued for the former approach for understanding loyal soap opera viewership. The study illustrated the successful use of - rather than strict exclusion of - researcher bias in interpreting data. It also successfully opened the hermeneutic circle of interpretation into a spiral, in which the later stages of interpretation build on those preceding it. The lived reality of soap opera is situated in an individual, historical, physical and social context. The hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway is able to incorporate these contexts into the research design.

As a secondary analysis of commercial market research data, the study also provides a methodological guide in leveraging commercial data for a contribution to academic knowledge. It begins to address the gap between academic research and practical application in industry as it identifies areas of convergence and divergence between the two fields. Most notably, applying the HP principles for research (set out at the end of Chapter 3) to qualitative market research methodologies would provide a practical means of allowing market research to benefit from the robustness of academic research (Catterall, 1998).

Market research methodologies that rely primarily on data collection techniques that require research participants to talk about their lived realities, are often criticised for not being able to produce valid findings. Validity in this case can be defined as the extent to which research findings represent the lived reality. It is argued that research participants' memories of their experiences as conveyed in a focus group or interview environment, is often different from their actual experiences (Abrams, 2000).

Triangulation of narrative and ethnographic methodologies is one way of addressing this apparent contradiction in research findings. Another is to assert that human beings necessarily function within a Heidegger undifferentiated mode of being, in which rational explanations for actions would require the individual to make conscious decisions on every detail of his/her life, which is not possible. All actions are bound to the context and culture in which they take place and all accounts given in research have an internal logic of their own. This study is a practical illustration of how social research could benefit from such an application of an abstract theoretical framework.

5. Limitations of the study

In this section a distinction is made between the methodological and conceptual limitations of the study. Both the conceptual and methodological limitations could be addressed in future research (see section 6).

5.1. Methodological limitations

Methodological limitations relate to the manner in which the research was conducted. Although the limitations mentioned here could not have been addressed in this research, due to the specific circumstances of the study, they could be addressed in future studies that follow a different methodological route.

5.1.1. Analysing the soap opera in a manner that is inconsistent with its genre conventions.

The analysis of Isidingo in Chapter 7 was limited to the storylines and characters immediately relevant to the soap prior to the collection of the first hermeneutic. Although this allowed the researcher to conduct a time delimited analysis, it goes against the conventions of the soap genre that has no definitive end. It also limited the soap's inherently complex multiplicity of characters to only a relatively small cast. Ideally, any analysis of a soap opera should acknowledge the role that the extended character ensemble and lack of narrative conclusion has on viewers' experience of the genre.

5.1.2. Not allowing for the reinterpretation of lived experiences.

The credibility or truth value of research within the hermeneutic phenomenological framework refers to how close the interpretation conforms to what the participants are trying to say. One way of increasing the truth value of research is to allow research participants to review interpretations made in the second and third hermeneutic (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Due to the research design of a secondary analysis of existing market research data, the original participants were unknown to the academic researcher and were not available to reinterpret interpretations made in the second and third hermeneutics. Ideally, hermeneutic phenomenological research pathways should incorporate a step in which individuals closest to the lived reality, are able to reinterpret their own lived experiences, based on the interpretations of researchers. Apart from being a methodological tool to enhance the overall quality of the research findings, the absence of such a step (allowing research participants to comment on researcher interpretations) also has conceptual implications (see section 5.2).

5.1.3. Lack of generalisability.

Lastly, it could be argued that another limitation of the study is that its sample is not representative of the South African soap opera viewing population and that the findings are therefore not generalisable (Marshall, 1996). This was, however, a qualitative study and generalisability is not the focus in qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). Sampling in qualitative research is more focused on including participants who are good at interpreting the experience that relates to the research question (in this case soap opera viewership). This would not necessarily be the case in a representative sample, because the experience (soap opera viewership) cannot be assumed to be normally distributed in the population (Marshall, 1996). An attempt to arrive at a representative sample and therefore to generate generalisable results would also be in conflict with the chosen interpretive framework.

5.2. Conceptual limitations

Conceptual limitations are limitations that relate to the theoretical value of the findings of the research. They flow from the methodological limitations and could therefore not have been addressed in the current study. They can, however, inform future studies (see section 6).

5.2.1. The inability of the literature study to inform the nature of the primary data collected.

Chapter 1 includes a detailed description of the order in which the research phases unfolded. As explained in Chapter 1, the academic literature study (contained in Chapter 2) was conducted at the beginning of the academic research process. By the time the academic research process had commenced, however, the market research data had already been collected, interpreted and presented to the client. This implies that the theories encountered in the literature study could have no impact on the nature of the questions asked to soap opera viewers in the first hermeneutic or the nature of the interpretations made by the market researcher in the second hermeneutic.

Research suggestions emanating from this study are therefore of relevance to future studies, as it will ensure that the insights gained from the literature review (combined with the other insights of this study) be explored in primary research. Formulating research questions based on the suggestions made from this study will ensure that the interpretations made in the third hermeneutic are reinterpreted by soap opera viewers who are closest to the lived reality, overall making a more comprehensive contribution to the body of scientific knowledge. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that any researcher brings with him/her a fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background which influences any interpretations made in the research (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). In the following, the current suggestion will elaborate this fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background knowledge by ensuring that any new research to stem from this study will be grounded in literature.

5.2.2. Differences between the lived reality of Isidingo viewership in 2005 and the lived reality of Isidingo viewership in 2009.

The first and second hermeneutics on which this study is based were collected in 2005. Although the third hermeneutic is contemporary, seeing that it includes the most recent literature, it is still interpreting a snapshot of the lived reality that is three years old.

The Isidingo on air at the time of writing, has key differences with the Isidingo on air in 2005. Most notably, three of the strong female characters are no longer part of the soap. The character Cherel is no longer present, as the actress Michelle Botes has taken a role in the soap Binnelanders. The character Lee Haines is no longer part of the soap because of the tragic death of actress Ashley Callie in a car accident in 2008, and most recently, the character Letti has been written out of the story.

The study still makes a worthwhile contribution to the field of media psychology and will be valuable to the production company (Endemol) and broadcaster (SABC) by setting down general principles of Isidingo viewership. Suggestions for future research should, however, include that the current model be applied to the soap on a regular basis.

6. Suggestions for future research

Suggestions for future research can also be made on a methodological and conceptual level. Methodological suggestions would increase the quality of future studies that follow a similar methodology and interpretive framework. Conceptual suggestions relate to the findings of the research and would benefit the overall understanding of the lived reality.

6.1. Methodological suggestions for future research

The first set of suggestions for future research is methodological. The methodological suggestions for future research relate to the manner in which a soap opera is analysed, allowing research participants to revisit interpretations made and the positioning of the research within an interpretive framework.

6.1.1. Analysing the soap opera in a manner that is consistent with its genre conventions.

As discussed above, the first methodological constraint of the study is that the analysis of Isidingo was limited to the characters and storylines in the soap immediately prior to the collection of the first hermeneutic. A suggestion for future research to address this limitation is a study in which viewers that have an extensive knowledge of the soap are asked to interpret the soap as a whole, rather than focusing on only the immediate storylines and characters. Since the current study was limited to a snapshot of the soap opera for the sake of economy, a study that looks at the characters and storylines of the soap over time would be valuable.

6.1.2. Allowing the reinterpretation of lived experiences.

The second methodological limitation discussed above, is the inability of the research process of the current study to allow research participants to reinterpret their lived reality based on the interpretations made by researchers. This will always be a limitation of studies that are the secondary analysis of existing data. An important suggestion for future research flows from this limitation: hermeneutic phenomenological research pathways (that are not secondary analyses of existing data) should include a step in the research process in which those closest to the lived reality under study be allowed to reinterpret their interpretations. In future studies that follow a secondary analysis like the current study, this limitation can be addressed partially by allowing the market researcher (or first academic researcher if it is a secondary analysis of academic research) to review the interpretation of the second hermeneutic, as well as the third hermeneutic.

6.1.3. Increasing generalisability.

Future researchers may be tempted to verify the model for the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera in a quantitative study with a representative sample. Verifying the model in a quantitative study would not be consistent with the interpretive framework within which this study was conducted as hermeneutic phenomenology – an interprevitist approach - is not concerned with reaching an objective (statistically verified) conclusion. It is rather concerned with lived realities and would argue that even a model produced through quantitative means would be subject to reinterpretation by subsequent researchers and soap opera viewers. Any future research should therefore remain within the hermeneutic phenomenological worldview.

6.2. Conceptual suggestions for future research

Various suggestions for future research can be made on a conceptual level. Conceptual suggestions can inform the research aims and research questions of future studies on Isidingo, soap operas, television or the new media environment.

6.2.1. Contradiction between social cognitive theory and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Although the theoretical and methodological frameworks for this study are hermeneutic phenomenological, much of the interpretation and discussion is based on concepts from social psychology which is orientated towards social cognitive theory (mental models, using real-world knowledge to interpret new characters etc.) (Livingstone, 1998). This contradiction is a function of the prevailing literature on media psychology and the nature of the interpretations made in the first and second hermeneutic, which was outside of the academic researcher's control (for reasons discussed above).

The market research study was not based on cognitive theory by design, however, the responses of participants in the market research study resemble notions that Livingstone relates to social cognitive theory. Whether this is a function of the way in which questions were phrased in the market research or viewers' actual interpretation of their lived reality, is unclear. A suggestion is to develop an interviewing technique that will allow viewers in future studies of a similar nature to talk about their lived reality in an interpretive way, that would be consistent with a hermeneutic phenomenological framework.

6.2.2. Understanding viewer involvement with characters.

Much of what has been written in the three hermeneutics and the literature review is concerned with how viewers become involved with characters. Viewers can be involved with characters in different ways (Cohen, 2001) and distinct character traits influence how viewers relate to characters (Hoorn & Konijn, (2003); Konijn & Hoorn, 2005).

As discussed in Chapter 7, the first and second hermeneutic provided evidence that viewers relate to Isidingo characters in the following ways: 1) through identification, 2) by forming para-social relationships with them, 3) feeling similar to the character, and 4) liking the character. Imitation was the one type of involvement with characters identified by Cohen (2001) that neither the first nor second hermeneutic provided evidence of. Although the viewers who participated in this study identified many characters as being educational in Isidingo, no concrete evidence exists in the first or second hermeneutic that viewers imitate Isidingo characters. To provide a clear theoretical link between the potential impact of South African soap operas in addressing social issues, a study that identifies instances where viewers imitate positive behaviour of a soap opera character in real life would be of great value.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 7, Hoorn and Konijn argue that characters are judged by viewers in terms of their beauty, goodness and realism, and that viewers experience degrees of distance or involvement with a character based on these dimensions. They believe that for a viewer to really appreciate a character, optimum levels of both distance and involvement need to be present. In operationalising Hoorn and Konijn's dimensions for the South African soap opera, it is necessary to establish the relationships between involvement, distance and appreciation. Although this study provides a qualitative indication that their original theory is relevant to the current lived reality, the body of knowledge would benefit from a study in which viewers are asked to subjectively evaluate characters on dimensions that could contribute either distance or involvement and its subsequent impact on character appreciation.

6.2.3.   Understanding the importance of realism.

Green et al. (2004) make a distinction between internal and external realism, and argue that internal realism is important for transportation into a narrative. The researcher deducted from the evidence in the earlier hermeneutics that Isidingo has a sufficient degree of internal realism. This interpretation was based on the fact that viewers report experiencing transportation (which is only possible if there is internal realism) and that fact that no viewers noticed an absence of internal realism. A suggestion for future research is to confirm whether viewers believe Isidingo has a high degree of internal realism.

When a programme has a high degree of external realism, occasional viewers will find it easier to follow than they would a programme with low external realism. This is because they will be able to apply real-world knowledge to their interpretation of the programme (Green et al. 2004; Livingstone, 1998). In this study Isidingo was found to have a high degree of external realism and occasional viewers were able to understand the stories and people in it with relative ease. A suggestion for future research would be to explore the external realism of other soap operas and to compare the ability of occasional viewers of these soaps to follow the soaps with the same ease that occasional viewers follow Isidingo.

6.2.4.   The emergence of a unique South African sub-genre.

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) analysed the kinship structures in various European soap operas and identified three sub-genres to the soap opera. A similar analysis of Isidingo (in Chapter 7) revealed the emergence of a unique South African sub-genre that falls outside of Liebes and Livingstone's original groups. A suggestion for further research is to analyse the kinship structures in all local soap operas with Liebes and Livingstone's methodology, to corroborate the emergence of a unique South African genre sub-type and add to the model on kinship structures.

6.2.5.   Further applications of the model of psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera.

As stated earlier, Isidingo is a soap opera with a high degree of external realism. A suggestion for future research is that the model developed in this study of the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera, be tested and possibly revised to apply to soap operas in one of the other sub-genres (a dynastic soap with a low degree of external realism, for example) as well as other narrative, fictional genres, such as series, sitcoms and movies.

The current model is only applicable to narrative genres because it requires a viewer to form relationships with characters and to be transported into a narrative. Although viewers can form relationships with media figures in non-narrative genres (it is for instance easier for a viewer to engage para-socially with a media figure, such as a talk show host or newscaster who addresses the audience directly), viewers are not likely to be transported into non-narrative genres, seeing that transportation requires an alternative narrative world (Cohen, 2001; Green et al. 2004). A suggestion for future research is to explore the possibilities of understanding viewer loyalty to non-narrative genres through an amended version of the model of psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty.

A last suggestion for further research is to test the application of the model of the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to the new media environment. Developments in media, such as view-on-demand content, PVRs, DVB-H technology (live television on a cellphone or other mobile devices) and, most importantly, the internet, hold vast implications for the lived reality of viewership. It also has implications for the repositioning of traditional views on how audiences should be understood and studied (Livingstone, 1999). The model of psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty should be adapted to the unique characteristics of the new media environment.

7. Revisiting the research questions

To conclude this thesis, the three research questions posed in Chapter 1 will now be revisited. The content that addresses each question has been addressed at length elsewhere in this chapter and in

Chapter 7. This section serves only as summary and confirmation that the research questions have been attended to.

The first research question enquired whether it is possible to identify psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to soap operas. A detailed model of these psychological processes is discussed at length at the beginning of this chapter. The first research question is therefore answered affirmatively.

The second research question relates to the possibility that a unique sub-genre of soap opera can be identified for South Africa. An analysis of the kinship structure of Isidingo in Chapter 7 revealed that the soap opera is unique to the genre, suggesting that a distinctive sub-type to the genre does exist. A suggestion for further research is made, however, to conduct a similar analysis of all South African soap operas to confirm the emergence of a South African sub-genre.

The last research question is concerned with the possibility that market research can be explicated for academic gain. In a reflection on the research process earlier in this chapter the similarities and differences between academic and market research were contrasted. A conclusion can be made that it is possible to explicate market research for academic gain and that market research could benefit from applying selected principles from the academic research process.

8. Closing the hermeneutic spiral

In this chapter, a model that illustrates how psychological processes culminate in positive viewing experiences and viewer loyalty to the soap opera was presented. The researcher then finally reflected on the research process and specifically the convergence and divergence between academic and market research and set out the limitations and contributions of the study with salient recommendations for further research. This concludes the research pathway and in the words of Debesay et al. (2008, p.65): "This closes the circle of understanding, if only for now."

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SOLI DEO GLORIA

---

[1] Written last - Zachariah 4: 6-9.

Dedicated to the girl who got grounded for a semester in 1964.

ABSTRACT

The research was based on a secondary analysis of a qualitative market research study conducted for the SABC on the soap opera Isidingo. The data used in the study includes 10 focus groups, five diaries of loyal soap opera viewers who were asked not to watch Isidingo for a week and keep a record of their experience, a focus group conducted with these viewers after the completion of the deprivation exercise, the market researcher's field notes, the market research report and the academic researcher's own reflective diary. The analysis was conducted within a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework. A model for the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera is presented. The model illustrates how viewers use soap world knowledge and real world knowledge to interpret the characters and storylines of soap operas and that the degree of enjoyment the viewer experiences from viewing, is dependant on the quality of the mental models formed of these respective components. The role that transportation, realism, social influences and timeslot play in the engagement process is also defined. The study illustrates a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway for qualitative research and demonstrates how market research can be explicated for academic gain.

Key terms: soap opera, media psychology, lived reality, hermeneutic phenomenology, qualitative research, secondary analysis, market research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

To production companies, broadcasters, and channel and network owners, media psychology is only of value if it can increase the likelihood that viewers will continue to watch their programmes. If media psychology can illustrate a clear pathway to repeated viewership, it can act as an indicator of consumption and potential profit. Psychology has an important contribution to make in this instance. The understanding of soap opera viewership as a psychological process could enlighten us on why viewers continue to watch certain programmes. This study plots the psychological processes which contribute to pleasant viewing experiences and loyal viewership to a soap opera in the South African context.

As figure 1.1 illustrates, this chapter introduces the study by discussing the lived reality under study, the research topic and its significance, the research question, the research aim and research questions, the theoretical approach, the methodology, and the structure of the content.

Figure 1.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 1.

In the sections that follow each component of Figure 1 will be discussed.

2. The lived reality under study

An introduction to this study necessitates a discussion of primarily two dimensions, namely a discussion of soap opera viewership in general, and a preamble to the soap opera pertinent to this study, i.e. Isidingo. Together these two dimensions represent the lived reality under study.

2.1. Soap opera viewership

Figure 1.2 is a graphic representation of the lived reality that the study will aim to understand. A soap opera is communicated through structural elements within a social, physical and individual environment. Viewers experience this environment and through interpretation, which is embedded in past experiences, arrive at a contextual meaning that influences their behaviour. The process through which this meaning develops, is the primary unit of analysis within the study.

Figure 1.2. The lived reality the research will investigate.

In 2006 a market research company, *Qualitative Intelligence*, conducted a market research study on Isidingo. The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from this study. The study will re-visit the interpretations made by participants about a soap opera, as well as the interpretations of participants' interpretations by the original researcher. Through a hermeneutic circle of interpretation, this study will attempt to understand the psychological processes inherent to positive viewing experiences and repeated viewership.

The justification for selecting the soap opera as opposed to another genre for the lived reality under study lies in the genre's ability to sustain loyal viewership for long periods of time. Since its inception, the genre's ability to sustain loyal viewership has baffled critics (Pitout, 1998). South African soap

opera productions are proof of the longevity of the genre's viewership, with the soap operas Egoli, Generations and 7de Laan boasting respectively seventeen, sixteen and nine years on air at the time of writing this document.

Logic suggests that if you discover the secret of the soap opera, you will have unlocked a much larger wealth of knowledge applicable to movies, series, books and stories. All texts that aim to entertain can learn from the soap opera, seeing that soap operas manage to sustain loyal viewership over longer periods of time than any other genre.

2.2. Isidingo as the selected soap opera

Isidingo is a soap opera on South African television, broadcast on SABC3 at 18H30 every week night. It is set in and around Johannesburg in contemporary time. When first introduced to South African audiences, the soap's main setting was Horizon Deep, a mining community just outside of Johannesburg. The mining business has since been replaced with the television station ON!TV as the main setting, but many characters still have ties to *The Deep*, as it is affectionately referred to. True to the genre, Isidingo has a proliferation of characters; however selected characters are more prominent. These include:

- The immoral tycoon, Barker Haines and his moral daughter, Lee Haines, who has been able to follow in her father's footsteps as a successful business woman.
- Barker's archrival, Cherel de Villiers.
- The Matabane family with stubborn father Zeb, mother Agnes, sister Letti and her boyfriend Joe, brother Parsons and his HIV-positive wife, Nandipha.
- The lovable gangster Georgie Zamdela, also known as Papa G.
- The town gossip Maggie and her friend Stella.
- Employees of ON!TV, including Frank, Rajesh, Lolly, Harriet, Erin and Siyanda, and
- other characters tied to the above characters, including Len, Vernon, Angelique, Mad Dog, Du Plessis, Tanya, Pule and Refiloe.

The reason for using Isidingo as lived reality to study was initially a choice of opportunity. As an employee of a market research company that regularly conducts research for the SABC, the researcher was in the position to obtain permission to use one of these studies for the purpose of this thesis.

The research process that unfolds in the following chapters revealed, however, that Isidingo is unique amongst its peers in portraying contemporary South African society realistically. The high degree of external realism (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004) in a soap opera is an important contributor to its appeal to viewers, which seems to be the case for Isidingo. This seemingly high external realism also differentiates the soap opera from international soap operas available to viewers on local television (including Bold and the Beautiful and Days of our Lives amongst others) to which viewers in this study report to have a very low external realism.

3. The research topic and its significance

In the previous section the reader was introduced to the lived reality under study. This section introduces the study itself, with a discussion on the research topic and the researcher's motivation for choosing it. The research topic is concerned with the process by which soap operas establish a continued interaction with its viewers. The justification for this research topic is primarily the inability of existing research on soap operas to address the issue. Table 1.1 is a summary of the research conducted on soap operas in date order.

Table 1.1 *Journal articles on soap operas used in this study*

Author	Date	Main finding	Main contribution
Livingstone	1989	Meaning is negotiated between the active viewer and the structure of the soap opera text.	The interpretation of soap operas.
Livingstone	1990	The interpretation viewers make of the soap opera text is influenced by the character they identify with, liked or felt sympathy for.	The interpretation of soap opera characters.
Chamove and Mullins	1992	Examined soap operas and found a pronounced prevalence of negative relational content.	The structural elements of a soap opera.
Larson	1996	Significant negative effect on gender role socialisation of adolescents.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Tager	1997	The viewing experiences of urban black viewers of The Bold and the Beautiful.	The interpretation of soap operas.
O'Guinn and Shrum	1997	Viewers have high memory retrieval of information exposed to in soap operas which they use in the construction of reality.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Liebes and Livingstone	1998	European soap operas represent three distinct sub-genres to the soap opera genre.	Definition of the soap opera genre.
Pitout	1998	Structural elements of a South African soap opera facilitate viewer involvement and loyalty.	Structural elements of the soap opera. Definition of the soap opera genre. Understanding viewer involvement and loyalty.
Haferkamp	1999	Found a correlation between TV and soap opera viewing and dysfunctional relationship beliefs.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Creswell	2001	Soap operas useful in therapy to aid	The therapeutic use

		recognition of emotion, prediction of behaviour and understanding social rules.	of soap operas.
Segrin and Nabi	2002	Found a correlation between viewing romantic genre programming and idealistic expectations on marriage.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Frisby	2002	Found that male viewers also watch soap operas.	Audience reach
Ex, Janssens and Korzilius	2002	Ritualised exposure to one soap opera (as opposed to quantity exposure to many) soap operas have an impact on viewer's image of own images of motherhood.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
De Jager	2004	South African children also watch soap operas.	Audience reach
Lockyear	2004	Found that 3 local soap operas do not portray South African society as multicultural, but rather portray an economically viable stereotypical view of society that is consistent with advertisements shown in the same timeslot.	The portrayal of society in local soap operas.
Wyer and Adaval	2004	Information television viewers are exposed to influence new decisions.	The effects of soap opera viewing.
Marx	2008	Found that 4 South African soap operas form a unique female genre and that the soap operas have the potential of challenging hegemonic ideas about gender identities.	The portrayal of gender in local soap operas. The effects of soap opera viewing.

During the initial literature study the researcher was tempted to believe that much of what has been written on the genre has been descriptive of its effects on viewers. However, it was found that literature, dealing with the interpretive soap opera viewer (Livingstone, 1989; 1990; 1998), the diversification of the soap opera genre (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998) and viewer representation of soap opera characters (Livingstone, 1989) does exist.

Many studies (Busselle & Bilandsic, 2008; Cohen 2001; Green et al., 2004; Hoorn & Konijn 2003, 2005) have also attempted to describe the process of engagement with and appeal of other television genres. These theories on viewership proved helpful in guiding the researcher's understanding of how viewers perceive, understand and engage with television characters (Busselle & Bilandsic, 2008; Cohen, 2001; Hoorn & Konijn, 2003, 2005), and how the process of transportation into the narrative contributes to enjoyment (Busselle & Bilandsic, 2008; Cohen, 2001; Green et al., 2004).

Apart from Pitout (1998) few of these studies addressed the question of loyalty or a viewer's tendency to return to the programme episode after episode, and also few have made any explicit attempt at exploring the psychological processes by which programmes are able to sustain a relationship with its viewers. Since the reason behind the soap opera's ability to create unprecedented loyalty remains largely undiscovered in academic literature, this study makes a worthwhile contribution to the body of knowledge on soap operas and media theory in general.

4. Aim of the study

The original aim of the study was to find the psychological link between positive viewing experiences and loyalty to soap operas. Two additional aims emerged as the study progressed: (a) understanding how to use market research for academic purposes and (b) identifying a unique sub-genre of soap opera unique to South African television. Each of these will now be discussed.

4.1. Finding the link to loyalty

As discussed previously, the wealth of literature on soap operas and television in general fails to demonstrate a clear link between positive viewing experiences and continued viewership. The aim of this study is to identify the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and subsequent loyalty.

In order to achieve this primary research aim, the study will address several secondary objectives. Soap operas are communicated on screen through the portrayal of characters and storylines (Livingstone, 1998). It is therefore necessary to understand the process through which viewers interpret soap opera characters, and the process through which they interpret storylines. The researcher anticipated that positive viewing experiences would lead to loyalty in soap operas. A secondary objective salient from this is to understand what contributes to enjoyment of soap opera viewership. The final model should therefore indicate how the interpretation of characters, the interpretation of storylines, enjoyment and loyalty interact.

4.2. Understanding how to use market research for academic purposes

While working on the thesis the researcher often experienced difficulty in making the transition from market research to academic research. She was often reminded by her supervisor to use academic language and think of the study within an academic framework. Through this process one of the research aims became to illustrate how market research can be explicated for academic gain, and to identify the convergence and divergence between these two approaches.

To fully address this aim, one of the objectives was to reflect on the divergence and convergence of the two approaches on the following aspects: the nature of the research objectives, interpretation, research output, positioning of the research participant, timeframe, language used and the role of researcher bias. The end result is a study in which the commercial and academic is juxtaposed in a

workable methodology. This will be discussed in section 7 of this chapter and expanded on in the final chapter.

4.3. Identifying a unique sub-genre

Another aim that emerged through the course of the study was the identification of a unique South African sub-genre of soap opera. Liebes and Livingstone (1998) identified three sub-types to the genre in their analysis of European soap operas (this will be discussed in Chapter 2). Analysing the relationship ties between characters in Isidingo according to Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) methodology revealed how Isidingo represents a unique sub-type to the genre.

5. Research questions

The following research questions will be answered to address the research aims as described above:

- Research question 1: Can psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to soap operas be identified?
- Research question 2: Can market research be explicated for academic purposes?
- Research question 3: Can a unique sub-genre of soap opera be identified for South Africa?

6. Interpretive framework

The study is conducted from a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework. The interpretive framework, hermeneutic phenomenology, was chosen for its ontological emphasis on lived realities, but this (emphasis on lived realities) is only one aspect of the interpretive framework. The following is a brief introduction to additional concepts that are central to hermeneutic phenomenology and the methodology applied in this study:

- Dasein: The interpreting individual (the viewer) is seen as being-in-the-world and not as external and objective to the world.
- Facticity: Understanding is co-constituted and synergised in our interaction with others.
- The hermeneutic circle: Interpretation is always context bound and meaning is negotiated between the parts and the whole.
- Historicity: Any interpretation is necessarily influenced by its temporal location.
- Heideggerian prejudice: All interpretation is influenced by existing knowledge on the subject and the person interpreting the lived reality can not distance him or herself from this knowledge.

These and other concepts in the theoretical approach will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

7. Methodology

The methodology used in the study is set out in detail in Chapter 4, but this section will provide a short summary as introduction. The study is a secondary analysis of a market research study conducted on behalf of the SABC. The market research and academic studies will now be introduced briefly. Thereafter the methodology will be justified and the order of the research phases will be specified.

7.1. The market research study

This market research study, of which the current study will be a secondary analysis, was a comprehensive evaluation of the soap opera Isidingo with the purpose of making strategic recommendations that would have the most desired effect on the retention and growth of an audience for the soap opera.

The data for the market research study was collected mainly through focus groups. It also included a deprivation exercise in which viewers were asked not to watch Isidingo for a period of time and diarise what they missed most, as well as a focus group with the participants who took part in this exercise. The market research company that conducted the study analysed this data and presented the findings to the SABC in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. The verbatim transcripts of the focus groups, the diaries of the participants in the deprivation exercise, and the market research presentation constitute the data set for the academic study.

7.2. The academic study

The academic study was therefore a secondary analysis of two sets of interpretations – those of the soap opera viewer (or the research participants) and that of the market researcher. The market researcher read the transcripts representing the interpretation of the soap opera viewer and using other background knowledge (including her own understanding of the lived reality of soap opera viewership, experience in other audience research, and an understanding of the objective of the SABC) interpreted their interpretations.

As explained above, the study is conducted from within a hermeneutic phenomenological tradition. Using key principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, such as the hermeneutic spiral and foregrounding of knowledge, the academic researcher re-analysed the market research study to arrive at an understanding of the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and loyalty to a soap opera.

7.3. Justification for using this methodology

Because of the nature of this research process, the interpretation of the market researcher in the initial study was built on that of the viewer. The interpretations presented in this thesis are therefore a third interpretation of the lived reality, which is soap opera viewership.

Hunter, Schmidt and Jackson (1982) noted that the need in many areas of psychology is for an effort to interpret the vast amounts of existing information, rather than new empirical data. This study, with its comprehensive literature study and central emphasis on secondary analysis of existing data, wishes to address the above concern in the field of media psychology.

7.4. Defining the order of the research phases

To ensure that the study is carried out within the tradition of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, a set of 19 hermeneutic phenomenological research principles, that guided all interpretive actions, were defined. The hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003) includes the historicity of meaning. According to Heidegger's historicity of meaning, all meaning is shaped by its temporal location. The immediate moment of interpretation is necessarily a product of what preceded it. It is therefore important to stipulate the order in which certain elements were introduced to the research process. Just as all interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenology is bound to context and history, all research phases necessarily influenced the phases that followed it.

The order in which the research process unfolded was as follows:
- Comprehensive market research study on the soap opera Isidingo (primary analysis).
- Preliminary literature review for academic purposes and writing of the thesis proposal.
- Departmental review process: small internal committee (Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria (UP)).
- Departmental review and approval process: research committee (Department of Psychology, UP).
- Faculty review process and approval of ethical application (Research proposal and ethics committee, Faculty of Humanities, UP).
- Faculty approval of the thesis title.
- Preliminary writing of Chapter 1.
- Writing of Chapter 3.
- Writing of Chapter 4.
- Secondary analysis of interpretations made by research participants (i.e. secondary analysis of transcripts).
- Writing of Chapter 5.
- Secondary analysis of interpretations made by first researcher (i.e. secondary analysis of market research reports).
- Writing of Chapter 6.
- Literature review.
- Writing of Chapter 2.
- Integrated interpretation.
- Writing of Chapter 7.
- Writing of Chapter 8.
- Revisions to Chapters 2 to 8 in the order set out the above.
- Revisions to Chapter 1.

8. Structure of content

The thesis consists of 7 chapters of which the introduction (Chapter 1) has been set out above. Chapter 2 is the literature review. The literature review attempts to address all aspects of the lived

reality of soap opera viewership. It begins with an introduction to the soap opera and its genre conventions, as well as an introduction to media theory. An argument for the resourceful viewer introduces the sections on the interpretation of the narrative and the interpretation of characters. This is followed by a discussion of how viewers become engaged in a soap opera. The chapter concludes with a summation of the psychological processes that culminate in loyalty.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the interpretive framework of the study. The chapter commences with a discussion of the history of phenomenology. The differences between Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology are then set out to support an argument for the appropriateness of the former for an understanding of the lived reality. The key components of hermeneutic phenomenology are then discussed with emphasis on their meaning within a qualitative research study. The chapter concludes with the discussion of a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway within which the research is conducted.

Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter. It commences with an introduction to the research context, which includes a discussion of the data sources, the data structure and the academic and market researchers' interpretive influences. A detailed description of the analysis and interpretation process is then provided. This includes the conceptualisation of the analysis process, and an overview of the implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the ethics and the quality of the research.

Chapter 5 is the first data chapter. It contains the interpretations made by the soap opera viewers and therefore represents the first hermeneutic. Following the process of interpretation and analysis introduced in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 begins with a description of the sample and a summary of the interpretations made by viewers (referred to as footprints). In the next section, footprints are grouped together with other footprints that relate to the same aspect of the lived reality and result in ten unique themes. The discussion of these ten themes represents the largest part of the chapter. Before concluding the chapter, the researcher comments on one contradiction or hermeneutic turn that she noticed in the chapter with regards to viewers' tendency to watch both international and local soap operas.

Chapter 6 is the second data chapter, which contains the second hermeneutic or the interpretation of the market researcher. To demonstrate how the second hermeneutic builds on the first, Chapter 6 is structured around the ten themes identified in Chapter 5. Where relevant it elaborates on the themes identified in the first hermeneutic and one additional theme is added.

Chapter 7 is the discussion chapter and represents the interpretation of third hermeneutic. Chapter 7 commences with a discussion of the academic researcher's understanding of the first and second hermeneutics, which is summarised in three conceptual models. After this introduction, the most substantial part of the chapter follows, which is the process through which the academic researcher

interprets the first and second hermeneutic within the framework provided by the literature study. The chapter concludes with a summary of two important processes that underlie the new model of the psychological processes that culminate in loyalty to a soap opera.

Chapter 8 is the last chapter and represents the last stages of the third hermeneutic. A new model of the psychological processes that culminate in loyalty to a soap opera is presented and discussed. The thesis concludes with a reflection on the research process, including a discussion of the similarities and differences between the academic and market research process, the contributions and limitations of the academic study, suggestions for future research and a reflection on the research questions.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter the research question and research aims were presented and a motivation for the significance of the study was provided. The lived reality under study was described and the methodology and interpretive framework within which the study was conducted were introduced.

The rest of thesis can be read in one of two ways. The reader can follow the numerical order of the chapters as they are bound in this volume and read it front to back or the reader may choose to follow the historicity of the thesis by reading the chapters in the order that they were written. Whichever route is chosen, it is the researcher's hope that the reader will be transported into the narrative and experience true enjoyment as he/she embarks on the interpretive journey that spirals through the seven chapters that preceded this one.

Chapter 2: Literature

1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will review the literature and theoretical dispositions to media studies, with a specific emphasis on soap operas. The researcher will illustrate that social psychology and most importantly social cognition offers a useful framework in which to understand the interpretive processes that are involved in loyal viewership of a soap opera, and that clear parallels can be drawn between this approach and the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. As the following quotation reiterates, the literature review – as presented in this chapter – makes an integral contribution to the overall value that can be gleaned from the study.

> The quality of the research findings is contingent upon the scope of the background knowledge that the researcher brings to bear and his or her ability to forge insightful linkages between this background knowledge and the texts at hand. The cultivation of a socio-historical perspective on the research domain coupled with a sensitivity to textual nuances are probably the most critical aspects of hermeneutic interpretation (Thompson, 1997, p. 6).

Figure 2.1 is a graphical schema of the chapter. The literature review is presented in seven parts. The first section is an introduction to the genre of soap operas. It includes a discussion on the characteristics and sub-types of the genre as well as the use of tension in the genre, the peculiarities of the timeslot in which it usually airs, the significance of the fact that viewers talk about soap operas with fellow viewers, the reach of the genre in South Africa, and the effects of soap operas as justification for the importance of understanding the genre. The second section introduces the social cognitive approach to media theory and discusses the relevance of the approach within the context of the interpretive framework. The viewer plays a central role in this approach and for this reason section two is followed by a short discussion on the resources of the viewer. The interpretation of narrative is discussed in section four, where three semiotic concerns which influence the interpretation the viewer makes are identified. These include choice points (narrative moments in which the story can take two or more distinct directions), the impact of genre, and the different levels of meaning that events hold.

Figure 2.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 2.

The fifth section is the most comprehensive and deals with the interpretation of characters. Three views on the interpretation of characters are discussed: the social cognitive theory of Livingstone (1998), Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures, and Hoorn and Konijn's (2003) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters. The section concludes with a discussion on how viewers relate to different character types.

The last two sections of the chapter aim to provide a comprehensive view of the lived reality of loyal soap opera viewership. In section six (Engagement with the narrative) the transportation and enjoyment theory of Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004), and Buselle and Bilndzic's (2008) model of narrative comprehension and engagement are discussed. Lastly the tripartite model of enjoyment of Nabi and Krcmar (2004) is discussed to address positive viewing experiences. In conclusion the chapter gives a discussion of the psychological processes involved in soap opera viewership to illustrate how literature suggests these processes culminate in the motivation to watch soap operas.

It should be noted at this point why the academic researcher uses two terms that are from outside of the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. The first term is social cognitive theory. The researcher discusses social cognitive theory because it is so central to the work of Livingstone (1989, 1990, 1991, 1998, 1999, 2004, 2006) who is one of the most seminal scholars on soap operas. The second term which is used extensively in the current study, although it is from outside of the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology, is narrative. In this particular instance, narrative is used to refer to the plots and characters that make up the story of the soap opera.

2. The soap opera

Over a period of more than 70 years, since as early as the 1930s, soap operas have been the most pervasive genre in media (Borchers, 1994). It originated in the USA with companies such as Palmolive and Proctor and Gamble creating a captive audience for product placements (Lavin, 1995, Pitout, 1998). A genre that started out as the underdog of television has in recent years been repositioned more positively, as thinking about television in general developed (Pitout, 1998; Warth, 1994).

2.1. Characteristics of the genre

The conventions of genre in television research shapes how the reader orients him/herself to the genre, the kinds of hypotheses the reader makes about the genre and the nature and degree to which the reader becomes involved in the genre (Allen, 1992; Livingstone, 2004). The soap opera has unique genre conventions. Firstly, it is a continuous serial drama that is transmitted daily[2]. Secondly, it has no hero or heroine and does not invite identification with one distinct figure, but rather a participatory involvement with a community of characters. Thirdly, it consists of a largely fragmented narrative, which combines multiple stories that are never completely resolved. In this way it contrasts with more masculine action-adventure genres, where the focus is on the beginning and end of the narrative. Soap operas could be described as a continuous middle with no promise of a definite end or resolution (Livingstone, 1998; Pitout, 1998; Warth, 1994). Fourthly, soap operas have several abrupt segmentations between storylines in one episode. The moment viewers become involved in the characters and situations of one storyline, the soap would move to another storyline. This segmentation happens several times during an episode (Pitout). Fifth, an attempt is made to mimic calendar time in the soap opera to calendar time in real life. Dates such as Christmas, Valentines Day or public holidays would be referenced in the soap opera as they occur in real life (Pitout).

As a sixth convention, the soap opera deals with socially significant themes and becomes a forum for the portrayal of cultural and ideological issues, including kinship, relations, reproduction, gender, the role of the community and so forth (Hobson, 1994; Pitout, 1998). Seventh, characters act as representatives of the contrasting poles in these issues and the narrative plays out as these contrasting positions are negotiated, manipulated and transformed. The topic of soap opera is everyday life, portrayed through the lives of characters and it is because of this trait that the viewer is always in a superior position to that of the producer (Hobson; Pitout). Eighth, the soap opera has storyline themes that reoccur, such as romance, divorce, the single mother, and sacrifice. Ninth, the

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[2] Pitout (1998) argues that a distinction has to be made between daytime and primetime soaps on this genre convention. Daytime soap operas are typically broadcast daily, while primetime soaps, such as Dallas were broadcast only once a week. Dallas is included in the genre by various authors (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998; Livingstone, 1998; Riegel, 1996) and Pitout argues that this is due to the nature of Dallas' characters, narrative and dramatic concern, combined with the fact that the American press referred to Dallas as a soap opera. For the purpose of this study, Dallas is included in the definition of a soap opera (Pitout, 1998) and no distinction is made between daytime and primetime soap operas.

genre also has character types that reoccur, such as the young, romantic heroin, the romantic hero, the mother, and the patriarch (Pitout).

Much of the dialogue in soap operas can be compared to gossip (Riegel, 1996) and this brings us to the last convention, soap operas are a dialogue heavy genre. The narrative gains paradigmatic depth (Riegel, 1996) through the dialogues of the characters.

2.2. Sub-types of the genre

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) identified sub-types within the soap genre. They analysed the social relationships of Coronation Street (UK), The Young and the Restless (USA), Dallas (USA), The Brightness (Greece), Redereit (Sweden), Lindenstrasse (Germany) and Onderweg Naar Morgen (Netherlands). They identified three sub-types that relate mostly to the nature of social relationships in different soaps: Dynastic soaps (e.g. Dallas), Community soaps (e.g. Coronation Street) and Dyadic soaps (e.g. The Bold and the Beautiful). Table 2.1 summarises the three genre sub-types. Liebes and Livingstone (1998) discuss the sub-genres in terms of the power structure; social loci (the settings in which stories are played out) and gender relations.

Table 2.1 *Genre sub-types (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998)*

Genre sub-type	Definition	Femininity	Example
Dynastic soap	One powerful family with outsiders connected to them through romantic and business interests.	Concerned with romance; motherhood and career are subordinate.	American prime time soaps, such as Dallas.
Dyadic soap	A destabilised network of uni-generational, interchanging couples.	Concerned with romance; motherhood and career are subordinate.	American day time soaps, such as The Young and the Restless.
Community soap	A number of equal, multi-generational, working or middle class families living together in one neighbourhood.	Concerned with motherhood.	British soaps such as Coronation Street.

Dynastic soaps, such as Dallas focus on one powerful family with characters that are connected to the family through romance, marriage or rivalry. The power structure in dynastic soaps take class distinction for granted. The lifestyle of the affluent is portrayed to prove that the rich and powerful are unhappy. In some dynastic soaps this is contrasted with a working class periphery. The social loci in dynastic soaps are structured around a clear division of labour, where men have both careers and

home lives, and women, despite having careers in some instances, are mostly seen in the home, concerned with motherhood and romance. Where women are portrayed in professional contexts, they are mainly subordinates. Gender relations in dynastic soaps are clearly asymmetric. Men are prioritised over women in having access to power and careers, while the women's only access to real power is their ability to deliver beauty or children to their husbands (Liebes & Livingstone).

Community soaps, such as EastEnders and Coronation Street, consist of a number of equal, separate families that are multi-generational, working or middle class and that are all living in the same neighbourhood and therefore belong to one community. Community soaps also include single parent families and single characters. The power structure in community soaps attempt to overcome the hardships of lack of upward mobility by offering an idealised, nostalgic view of life in a small community. Its main message is that old fashioned values and hard work no longer exist in modern society. The social loci are places where ordinary life takes place. Characters struggle through career and family problems and meet in public spaces, such as coffee shops, banks, grocery stores and Laundromats. Gender relations in community soaps position women as being strong (Liebes & Livingstone).

Dyadic soaps, such as The Bold and the Beautiful and The Young and the Restless, are made up of a number of densely interconnected, mostly uni-generational, interchanging couples with past, present and future romantic ties. Dyadic soaps are destabilised in three ways: characters constantly change places in relationships, experimenting with new intimate partners; the structure of the relationships change as characters experiment with different types of intimacy (across genders and races), and lastly, characters are not part of a stable family and the tension is related to characters trying to find a substitute for family in friendships. Metaphorically characters in dyadic soaps are orphaned. They are usually uni-generational and the power structure benefits the young characters. Any middle age characters that are present have lost their power, although they may participate in the romantic game from time to time. The main objective is personal gratification rather than the continuation of a dynasty (Liebes & Livingstone).

2.3. Talking about soap operas with fellow viewers

Soap operas make their way into the lives of viewers in a way that transcends the 30 minutes of viewing time every day. Soap operas depict everyday life and events, and because it is so familiar and relevant they are discussed among friends as if talking about mutual acquaintances (Giles, 2002; Hobson, 1994; Pitout, 1998, Riegel, 1996).

In her study of black South African women's identification with, and interpretation of The Bold and the Beautiful, Tager (1997) also found that viewers interpreted the soap opera during but also after the episode was broadcast through the discussion of the soap with other viewers. Much of the pleasure of watching the soap was identified as being able to discuss the soap with other people.

The process of talking about soap operas involves telling stories, commenting on the stories, assessing the events that take place in the soap (Hobson, 1994) and predicting what will happen next (Livingstone, 1998). While many soaps reference real life, the discussion also changes to a discussion of the real-life events introduced by the soaps. It is because of this characteristic that soap operas could be regarded as a source of soft news (Kitzinge & Henderson, 2001).

The notion that soap opera viewers talk about soap operas with fellow viewers has positive implications. It allows viewers to further explore the histories of the characters, while giving viewers the opportunity to test viewpoints on social norms, which are difficult to discuss on an abstract level for real-life situations (Riegel, 1996).

It was found that the meaning viewers derive from soap operas are what Tager (1997) calls "collaborative readings" (p.11). Participants in her research watched the soap with family members or friends and relied on fellow viewers to compensate for any knowledge gaps that resulted from missing an episode. Kreutzner and Warth (1994) also illustrate how people are introduced to soap operas through other viewers in the aptly titled chapter: "I was thirteen and my best friend got me hooked: An interview with Karen and Jane" (p.164). Watching soap operas is in no way a passive process and through discussions, such as those described above, the soap opera extends into areas of every day life (Hobson, 1994; Riegel, 1996).

2.4. Tension in the soap opera

Talking about soap operas closely resembles gossip (Riegel, 1996; Tager, 1997; Tulloch, 2000), because the topic of discussion is mainly people (characters) and their lives. Tulloch (2000) argues that the pleasure of engaging in gossip about a soap opera lies in sharing information that only a few people have access to. Soap opera viewers know more about the narrative than the characters. At the end of an episode, after tension has been building for a while, information is often revealed rather than withheld and viewers are left to speculate not about what will happen in the story, but rather what will happen when other characters find out what they already know (Tulloch, 2000).

2.5. Soap time

Due to the regular broadcast of soap operas viewership becomes a ritual for loyal viewers which they prefer not to be interrupted by visitors, the telephone or family members (Pitout, 1998). In her chapter *And that's my time: Soap operas and the temporal organisation of women's everyday lives* (p.216), Warth (1994) shows how soap operas intersect with viewers' day to day lives. Most of the viewers she interviewed had a two hour period of more or less fixed viewership, but they differed in the extent of undivided attention they could afford. Some planned the household routine to allow them to watch undisturbed. Others could not structure their chores according to soap time and constantly struggled between their need for leisure and conflicting obligations. These viewers worked through soap time, either completing tasks during commercial breaks or doing their chores with the soap opera on in the background. For this last group, viewership was limited to the most dramatic incidents in the soaps.

For most, undivided attentive soap viewing was a luxury that had to be planned for, and for some - paid for later with harder work (Warth, 1994). Tager (1997) found that the taxi industry in Johannesburg is scheduled around the afternoon soap operas. It is therefore deemed important that a theory of audience interpretation of soap operas should include reference to the temporal location of the soap opera within viewers' daily routine.

2.6. Reach of the genre in South Africa

Soap operas are traditionally categorised as a female genre but the reach and subsequent impact of the genre should not be limited to the female audience (Frisby, 2002). Frisby explored the role of soap operas for male viewers and found that their viewership was motivated by the fact that it makes them feel good, provides an escape, and aids conversations with the opposite sex.

In a survey conducted by the South African Advertising Research Foundation, De Jager (2004) reports on the preference of children for soap operas. This, combined with an existing adult male audience (Frisby, 2002) is proof of the extended reach of the genre.

2.7. The effects of soap operas as justification for the importance of understanding the genre

Apart from a study done by Hoekstra (2000), soap operas have been found to have a significant effect on viewers' relational schemes and certain aspects of adult identity formation. The effects of visual stimuli, whether encountered in the movie theatre, soap opera or elsewhere on television, have a tremendous impact on us. This impact is not always apparent to the user of the media, but it has nonetheless been identified and has also been the topic of numerous studies. Most of the studies available on soap operas point to the impact soap operas have on viewers' lives (Ex, Janssens & Korzilius, 2002; Larson, 1996; O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Wyer & Adaval, 2004). Clearly soap operas have proximity with everyday life and the social cognition used in everyday life could be relevant to how we interpret soap operas.

For example, Wyer and Adaval (2004) write that concepts and knowledge that become easily accessible in memory as a result of exposure to movies and television, can affect the interpretation of new information and the implications that are drawn from it. Similarly O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) found that loyal soap opera viewers have significantly higher ease of retrieval of concepts in memory from soap operas and subsequently use these by means of heuristics (mental shortcuts) in their construction of reality.

Information that viewers are exposed to during soap opera viewing can influence judgements and decisions viewers make in real life that are similar in content to what was portrayed in the soap opera (Shrum, 1996). Shrum found that extensive soap opera viewing had a significant correlation with the cultivation effect, as well as the availability heuristic. When asked to estimate the real-life occurance of crime and certain occupations, extensive soap opera viewers made higher estimates (cultivation

effect) and needed less time to make these estimates (availability heuristic) than non-soap opera viewers.

As a 'dialogue-intensive' genre, soap operas have even been recognised as a valuable resource in therapy, as they provide rich content from which to recognise emotions, understand the rules of interpersonal relationships and predict characters' actions (Creswell, 2001). This again shows the potential psychological impact of identification with soap operas.

Ex et al. (2002) explored young females' self image and ideal image of motherhood, as well as the extent to which television viewing was related to these images. They found that continuous viewing of specific soap operas (as opposed to overall quantity of viewing) to have a significant effect on young women's images of future motherhood. The study shows that sitcoms and soaps' depiction of motherhood as traditional are related to young females' anticipation of a traditional image of motherhood.

Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981) examined the relationship between exposure to soap operas and perceptions about people and events in real life. They found that exposure to soap operas related to college students' perception of the numbers of professionals (lawyers, doctors, and business people) and problems (divorce, illegitimacy, abortions and crimes) in real life. Another study by Larson (1996) showed that soap opera viewership had an impact on how adolescents view the role and lifestyle of the single mother. Soap opera viewers had an unrealistic and overly positive view of single motherhood.

Segrin and Nabi (2002) found a relationship between viewing of romantic genre programming (e.g. romantic comedy movies and soap operas) and idealistic expectations about marriage. Another study highlighting the negative impact of soap operas, is that of Haferkamp (1999) in which she examined and found a relationship between television and soap opera viewing, and viewer approval of unhealthy relationship beliefs.

This finding can perhaps be explained by a study by Chamove and Mullins (1992): In a preliminary examination of 27 programming hours of 13 soap operas shown on Scottish television, just over 50% of the total number of interactions demonstrated poor communication skills, and these skills were more prevalent on the most popular shows. The unhealthy forms of hostility, power and fear occurred twice as frequently as healthy, assertive patterns of communication.

With a well-documented history of effect on its viewers, the soap opera is a unique and interesting genre that holds significance beyond the 30 minutes of viewing time. The question of effects has largely focused on minimising harm but is gradually beginning to explore the broader issues of meaning and practice (Livingstone, 2004).

3. Media theory

In mass communication theory, audience, together with production and text have been represented over the years in one of three broad theoretical paradigms: encoding and decoding (classic literature approach), uses and gratifications, and models of media effects (Livingstone, 2006). These paradigms represent contrasting views on how the television audience should be conceptualised from the populist view on the one hand, that regards the audience as heterogeneous and discriminating (active), to the elitist views that see the audience as a homogenous, mindless mass on the other hand (Biocca, 1988; Livingstone, 1991, 1998).

While all these writers generally agree that television plays an integral part in our daily lives, they will disagree on all the major dimensions of audience analysis: the audience (as passive or active), the programme (as open to various interpretations or as a set message for all), the process through which television affects the audience (through the viewer's selectivity or an imposition), the nature of the effects (on behaviour or beliefs), the level of effects (individual, social or political), and the methods through which to study audiences and the texts they interact with (ethnography, experiment, text analysis) (Allen, 1992; Biocca, 1988, Livingstone, 1999).

The aspect of this theoretical history that is most pertinent to understand within the interpretive framework of this thesis, is the dichotomy of the active and passive viewer. Table 2.2 contrasts what Biocca (1988) calls the active and passive hemispheres in media theory.

Table 2.2 *The active and passive hemispheres (Biocca, 1988)*

	Passive hemisphere	**Active hemisphere**
Reader	No role for the reader.	Reader is instrumental in a motivational way, i.e. as many meanings as there are users.
Text	Text is central.	No role for the text.
Meaning	Unitary meaning.	Multiple meaning.
Approaches that align with this view	• Classic literary approach. • Effects research (assumes a unitary and influential textual meaning). • Behaviourist (omits the issue of meaning altogether).	• Uses and gratifications approach (presumes that viewer selectively chooses media to fulfil needs). • Reception theory (focuses on the perceptions of the viewer).

Livingstone (1991) suggests that one should avoid such an over simplification and rather acknowledge the structuring role of the text, while allowing for the constructive role of the viewer in negotiating meaning. Livingstone's conviction that social psychology should be used as a tool through which to understand and conceptualise media research, is an integrated, convergent approach of thinking on how viewers interact with television. This thesis aims to generate a psychological

understanding of how viewers interpret and form a relationship with television in general, and soap operas specifically. The work of Livingstone is therefore emphasised, as her approach successfully brings the active and passive hemispheres together.

3.1. Reception theory and Livingstone's application of social cognitive theory

Viewers bring a wealth of resources to the interpretive process. Their contact with a text is positioned against a backdrop of expectations, memories, interests, knowledge and understandings. Because most of the literature on media is written by media scholars who are pre-occupied with the text, the reader, as a resourceful individual, is largely ignored. In a similar way, psychologists, who work within disciplinary boundaries of the individual, ignore the wealth of complex theory about the structuring role of texts. The two disciplines would be much better off learning from each other and taking the best from each other's world (Livingstone, 1998). As Livingstone (1998) argues, "neither approach seems to conceive of both the interpretive resources of the reader and the virtual structure of the text as being schematic, organised and yet incomplete, awaiting the other for the negotiation of meaning" (p. 92).

There is, however, a theoretical approach from each discipline that could be useful in understanding both the structuring role of the text and the interpretive role of the viewer. These approaches (as summarised in Table 2.3) are reception theory and social cognitive theory, from media studies and psychology respectively. Reception theory is a name given to the works in literary studies that explore the central role of the reader in making sense of a text. It sees the meaning of a text (or television programme) as something that is generated through the act of reading (or viewing), rather than something that is objectively inherent to the text (Allen, 1992b). Social cognitive theory is a view of the self and society, which argues that the environment, behavioural patterns and personal factors (such as cognitive, affective and biological events) influence each other bi-directionally. Social cognitive theory therefore sees the viewer or reader as proactive and self-organising in deriving meaning from the world (and media), rather than being simply reactive to environmental happenings, inner forces or meanings conveyed by texts (Bandura, 2001).

Table 2.3 *The parallels between reception theory and social cognition*

	Social cognitive theory	Reception theory
Related fields	Cognitive psychology, social psychology, schema theory, information processing, perception psychology and semiotics.	-
Tradition	Psychology.	Literary theory.
Reciprocal interaction	Interaction between stimulus and individual.	Interaction between text and reader.
Nature of the interaction	Individual has a schema and assimilates or accommodates new information obtained from perceiving a stimulus into	The text provides the framework with carefully selected gaps that the viewer is invited to fill from own experience.

	the schema.	
Summary	Stimulus adjusts (fills in any gaps) in the person's schema (through assimilation or accommodation).	Viewer adjusts (fills in the gaps) in the text (from own experience).

The researcher's tertiary education consisted of a BPsych degree (equivalent to Honours), while her professional career has been focused purely on consumer research with an emphasis on media studies. She has therefore has an appreciation fot the psychological view of the viewer as interpretive agent as well as the literary view which emphases the structuring role of the text in portraying meaning. In this thesis, she wishes to bring these approaches together.

3.2. The appropriateness of Livingstone's approach to the interpretive paradigm

Rogge (1989) states that "in order to do justice to the complexity of human actions in relation to the media, we need a method of hermeneutic interpretation" (p. 172). An approach to media studies in which the social knowledge of the viewer, that is used to construct meanings from text is explained through social psychological concepts, is appropriate within the chosen theoretical framework for this study, i.e. hermeneutic phenomenology (refer to Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion on the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology). Table 2.4 illustrates how the suggested approach is acceptable within a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm.

Social psychological reception theory regards the meaning of any text as subject to the interpretation of the viewer/reader. It does not see the viewer as passively accepting any meaning placed within the text. This is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology's disregard for an objective reality. Social psychological reception theory, like hermeneutic phenomenology, places a central emphasis on interpretation and acknowledges historicity (the notion that interpretation is bound by the background knowledge or the individual cultural background of the viewer), and interdependence (that interpretation is dependant on the social and other contexts of the viewer).

Table 2.4 *The relevance of social psychological reception theory within a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm*

	Social psychological reception theory	**Hermeneutic phenomenology**
Objectivity of reality	Text – be it a book, movie, or other creative work – is not simply passively accepted by the audience.	Reality is not objective.
Interpretation	The reader/viewer interprets the meaning of the text.	Centrality of interpretation.
Bias	Interpretation is based on individual cultural background.	Historicity and interdependence.
Context	Interpretation is based on social and other contexts.	

4. The resourceful viewer

The soap opera viewer will now be discussed. Liebes and Katz (1989) believe that "the status of the viewer has been upgraded regularly during the course of communications research" (p. 204). Hobson (1994) states that "the process of television communication is recognised as not being complete until it is perceived and understood by the viewer" (p. 167). Clearly, the viewer is seen as an integral part of the meaning-making process.

The social psychological view of media studies sees the viewer as equipped for his/her interpretive role, with a wealth of resources. A discussion on the interpretation of characters illustrates these resources. Characters are portrayed in narratives to represent a range of personality traits, all of which need to be inferred by the viewer through a series of interactions with other characters. This inference is important for the construction of the story, seeing that the characters personify different narrative themes. Characters often represent stereotypes about gender, occupation and values in order to facilitate the interpretation process, and legitimise the application of the viewer's social knowledge (Livingstone, 1998).

When a soap opera viewer encounters a new character, he or she is presented with fragmented pieces of information about the character. The viewer then uses social knowledge to infer a personality for the character from fragmented and gradual incidents. The coherence of a character's personality is then not only constructed by the text, but also relies on the viewers' interpretation, which ensures that their interpretation of the character is in accordance with what they know of other people and characters in the soap. It is only within the context of previous interpretations that a viewer is able to construct a coherent model of how to understand any new information.

One strategy that viewers may use is the fundamental attribution error. The term first coined by Lee Ross relates to the natural tendency to explain behaviour of other people as dispositional (i.e. related to what kind of a person it is), while when explaining our own behaviour (and possibly the behaviour of characters we know well) this tendency is reversed and we tend to draw on situational explanations for the behaviour (Livingstone, 1998). This can be illustrated by considering a situation in a soap opera where a character is diagnosed as being HIV positive. If it is a character the viewer knows well, he or she may wonder what happened to the character for this fate to fall on him/her. While if it is a new character that the viewer does not know well, the viewer might consider what this diagnoses tells him or her about the character.

The viewer will draw on two sets of resources to predict what will happen with the character. For both a known and unknown character, the viewer will be able to infer a few things from his/her social cognitive knowledge (i.e. accumulated from real-life experience): the viewer might expect that the character will be alienated by other characters, that the HIV-positive character will undergo emotional distress at being confronted with a life threatening disease and that the story may show the character

learning to live with the diagnoses and overcoming initial difficulties, such as social judgement. Based on programme knowledge and specifically knowledge of the character, if it is a well known character, the viewer may consider the impact it would have on the character's relationships, goals and how other characters will react when they find out.

This explains why it is often difficult for a new viewer to get involved in a soap. Watching one episode is literally being confronted with a large variety of fragmented information (i.e. middle of the story). The new viewer has very little knowledge on which to base a causal framework and the episode will likely remain meaningless unless themes that he or she can interpret from real-life knowledge is presented in the soap. The second level of interpretation illustrated above will only be possible once the viewer develops background knowledge of the characters.

For the writer or producer, comparing people's social knowledge to that of the text could reveal gaps in the storyline, as well as the kind of expectations the viewer may develop to fill these gaps. It would allow the writer to predict if the story would agree or disagree with the viewer's social knowledge, an ability that could be very useful in creating surprise and intrigue.

In conclusion, it is important to regard the viewer as a resourceful, active agent in the interpretation process. Drawing from social psychological concepts, the viewer is equipped with all the strategies used to make sense of people and predicting their behaviour.

5. Interpretation of the narrative

In the section above, it was argued that each viewer has a unique set of resources which he or she uses to interpret the soap opera. In the next two sections two aspects of soap operas which viewers interpret, namely the narrative (the storylines) and the characters, will be discussed.

5.1. The soap opera as open text

Television is interpreted against the background of existing opinions and knowledge about social life and what is known about the genre (Rogge, 1994). Reception theory argues that the meaning of the text cannot be separated from the reader. Eco (1979) relates this to semiotic principles of coding and decoding, and believes that interpretation is socially positioned. He maintains that the variety of codes and sub-codes contained in a message, the socio-cultural circumstances of the reader, and the initiative taken by the reader, combines into a message that is plural and unique to each reader.

However, the reader is not completely independent of the text. Any text presupposes some interpretive competence from the reader, which can either be inherent to the reader or supported by the text through strategies, such as genre, inference, stereotypical coding, and so forth.

A closed text, such as a James Bond narrative, attempts to take the viewer on a predetermined path and carefully elicits appropriate emotions in the right places to ensure that the expectations created in

the text, matches what will be satisfied by its course being played out. Open texts, on the contrary, encourage a variety of different interpretations, depending on the viewpoint of the reader. It also deliberately emphasises different possible interpretations by drawing comparisons between them, and in doing so, creates irony and contrast. Table 2.5 is a comparison between an open and closed text.

Table 2.5 *Comparing open and closed texts*

	Open text	**Closed text**
Plots	Multiple, simultaneous.	Single or at most, dual plots.
Ending	Unending narrative strands.	Clear beginning and ending.
Characters	No hero, a community of characters.	A clear protagonist.
Perspective	Multiple, conflicting perspectives that are contrasted.	Shared perspective.

The soap opera is an open text because of the multiplicity of characters and subsequent viewpoints portrayed. In contrast to an action-adventure drama, such as a James Bond movie, the viewer does not identify with one character and strictly follow the perspective of the character. It rather allows the viewer to identify with any one of several characters who – as will be discussed later in this chapter – each represent a contrasting viewpoint on any number of issues (Livingstone, 1998).

5.2. A framework within which to understand narrative drama

Table 2.6 is a schema to understand storylines and drama that combines the narrative structures of Burke (1970) and Van Dijk (1987). Any story can be understood as playing out in the five main phases set out in Table 2.6. Each phase is explained below.

Table 2.6 *A narrative framework*

Introduction (Adapted from Van Dijk 1987)	Setting and orientation.
Disruption of equilibrium (Burke, 1970)	Norms of social order are challenged.
Guilt (Burke, 1970)	The social problem is personified, responsibility and blame allocated.
Restitution (Burke, 1970)	The equilibrium is resolved.
Redemption (Burke, 1970)	The moral implications of the restitution are assimilated into the social domain.

Van Dijk (1987) contributes the first phase which introduces the problem to the viewer. It includes a preface to the story, providing information about relevance and interest, general information as to the location, time and participants (setting), and the special circumstances which lead to the complication (orientation).

Burke's (1970) classic scheme of dramatic narrative consists of four abstract phases: firstly, the norms of the social order are challenged and a state of intolerable disequilibrium results. Secondly, during the guilt phase, the problem is personified by attributing blame to a character. In restitution, the problem is resolved and the community returns to its state of equilibrium. This is followed by redemption in which the moral consequences of the restitution are assimilated back into the social domain.

Van Dijk (1987) also identifies two components of drama, namely complication and resolution, which Livingstone (1998) believes take place at various times on a micro level throughout the narrative. Each phase as set out above may contain complications and resolutions. Complications are events that are contrary to the goals or expectations of the protagonist and may include any interesting interfering events and actions. Resolutions function together with complications as the core of an event and consist of any actions that are in a direct response to the complication – with or without success. The guilt phase is irrelevant for hero stories in which the protagonist and antagonist are clearly identified, but in a soap opera that represents a plethora of characters, interlinked in relationships and actions where morality is ambiguous, this phase is necessary.

5.3. Viewer interpretations of the narrative drama

Livingstone (1998) examined which of these phases were most salient in viewers' recall of soap narratives, and noticed that viewers are selective in their interpretation. Some viewers, when recalling a narrative, would commence the retelling of the drama with Burke's disruption of equilibrium, for example, "It started with a kiss in the office…" leaving out the courtship that lead to the dramatic event. Other viewers would provide a more detailed retelling, including the context and orientation of the problem. Another divergence that was identified was where some viewers would retell all the complications first, followed by the resolutions, whilst others retold the complications and resolutions in pairs.

Most retellings included reference to the disruption and redemption stages, which usually included the most dramatic events, while the middle or the guilt and restitution phase were often excluded. Some would also recall the course of events inaccurately, telling Livingstone of conversations and interactions between characters that never took place. It is important to notice, however, that although some viewers misremembered, they still stayed within the conventions of the genre. Mis-rememberings would still relate to conversations and character interaction, no viewers mis-remembered genre inappropriate behaviour of characters. It is therefore clear that viewers have an understanding of the genre.

Livingstone noticed another form of selective interpretation where viewers would retell a story leaving out reference to certain characters. As Figure 2.2 illustrates, the narrative strictly communicated through the text included four characters, each being connected to all three other characters in some

way. When retelling the story, many viewers would exclude a less central character, i.e. C in the example below.

Figure 2.2. Selective narrative recall (Livingstone, 1998).

Viewers reduced the complex character interactions to a simple love triangle. By emphasising the role of some characters over others, viewers undercut the conventions of the genre that include intricate webs of interactions between relatively equal characters. This is supported by viewers often neglecting to mention supporting characters who are less prominent in the narrative.

In both these examples, however, it is possible that viewers neglecting to mention peripheral characters or minor events are not indicative of them not being aware of them, but rather of the events and characters being less interesting or salient. An analysis of the elements that are recalled can therefore point to the most salient contributors to viewers' interpretation of the narrative.

5.4. Semiotic concerns as additional frameworks for interpretation of the soap opera

Semiotic concerns are narrative characteristics that create interpretive possibilities. Livingstone (1998) identifies three: genre, choice points and levels of meaning.

5.4.1. Genre.

Genre is an important semiotic concern since it frames what viewers can expect from the narrative. Contrasting genres show how the narrative promise in each of these differs. Knowledge of the genre conventions of a narrative equips the viewer with a context within which to approach it. To revisit the comparison between open and closed text conducted above, consider a soap opera and action detective genre as examples of each in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 *Two contrasting genres*

	Open text	Closed text
Example	**Soap opera** (Livingstone, 1998)	**Action detective** (Fiske, 1992)
Plots	A series of plots.	The hero's quest.
Ending	Unending narrative strands.	Clear beginning and ending.
Characters	A community of characters.	A hero.
Perspective	Conflicting perspectives personified by characters that create tension.	Shared understanding of the hero's perspective
Focus	Dialogue.	Action.
Story	Domestic and romantic.	Action and suspense.

5.4.2. Choice points.

Choice points are the second semiotic concern identified by Livingstone (1998). Narratives are made up of sequential choice points and choice points are where the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structure of a text comes together.

The paradigmatic significance of an incident in a soap opera lies in how the incident compares to what is already known about the character and plot (what the character has done in the past or what has happened in the past). It is the prior knowledge within which the viewer interprets the current events. The syntagmatic significance of an incident is its sequential placement or relation to other incidents (Livingstone, 1998).

Consider a situation in a soap opera where a secretary is stealing paperwork from her boss' private file cabinet. In one scene she is innocently approaching the file cabinet when her boss walks into the office. In the next scene she successfully takes something from the file cabinet without being interrupted. This narrative creates tension through the paradigmatic possibilities at each syntagmatic choice point. Each time the soap cuts to the secretary (syntagmatic moment), only two paradigmatic possibilities exist – either she will be caught red handed, or not. The viewer's awareness of the two paradigmatic choices is what creates tension.

5.4.3. Levels of meaning.

A further semiotic concern is the levels of meaning contained in each incident. Most narrative incidents have implications that transcend the immediate characters involved, with implications on an individual, social and ideological level (Livingstone, 1998).

One example would be when a character changes her appearance. It would impact her immediate romantic relationship if she has one, or it would open up the possibility of one. It would make other characters notice her and it would likely result in them discussing her change in appearance, as well as her motivations for doing so and the possible implications that could be expected of it (in effect offering several viewpoints on the matter for the viewer to choose from). On an ideological level it may

prompt the viewer to consider (in academic terms) discourses of beauty in the patriarchal or matriarchal society they perceive the character to function in.

6. Interpreting characters

Riegel (1996) writes that "when Dallas's J.R. Ewing was shot, it made the evening news worldwide" (p. 7). As the worldwide interest in the Dallas character JR alludes, it has been suggested that the potential media has for influencing its audience, is located primarily in characters, not the storylines (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 1999; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) and that media does not have a linear, cumulative effect, but rather that certain storylines and characters can have a higher impact on viewers than others (Cohen, 1999).

Understanding how viewers relate to characters, in particular which possible reaction results in the highest viewer involvement, is therefore a crucial part of understanding loyalty to soap operas. Three seminal studies form the basis for this discussion of how viewers interpret characters. The first is Livingstone's (1998) social cognitive character representations, the second is Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures, and the third is Hoorn and Konijn's (2003) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters.

The three approaches converge in defining the viewer as being resourceful and active in the interpretation process and acknowledge how the viewer uses social cognitive knowledge and strategies in his or her interpretation of characters. Each approach also makes a unique contribution to the overall understanding of how viewers make sense of characters. Livingstone illustrates the reciprocal relationship between viewer and text in creating meaning. While defining the viewer as resourceful and active, she shows how viewer representations of characters are framed by the text, as well as how they give rise to narrative possibilities. Her definition of the viewer's relationship with the character is the broadest or most generic of the three models introduced. Cohen introduces four distinct types of involvement that the viewer may form with characters. His typology differs from that of Hoorn and Konijn's by including parasocial interaction and identification. Hoorn and Konijn contribute a process through which they believe viewers interpret characters. A valuable concept in their model is that it is able to explain both the positive and negative dimensions that contribute to the appreciation of a character by the viewer.

6.1. Social cognitive theory of Livingstone (1998)

Theoretically characters are believed to mediate or cause most of the effects of soap operas on viewers through identification, role modelling and para-social interaction. Regular viewers become familiar with characters and feel involved and interested in them.

In a reciprocal fashion, the viewer impacts the text as the text impacts the viewer. Livingstone (1998) believes that although both can be studied separately, it is only when studying what happens when the two come together that the lived reality of soap opera viewing is revealed.

Five main conclusions can be drawn from Livingstone's (1998) discussion on viewers' representations of television characters: 1) characters are primarily interpreted based on three dimensions, namely morality, potency and gender, 2) although pertinent across soaps, these dimensions hold different inferential implications in each soap, 3) characters who represent opposite poles of these dimensions are more likely to interact, than characters representing similar poles, 4) viewers interpret character portrayals within the context of their personal social knowledge, as well as being open to suggestions by the text, and 5) viewers' expectations and predictions of future events, as well as their identification of issues that are at stake, are based on their knowledge of the characters involved.

6.1.1. Character representations in three major soap operas – Dallas, Coronation Street and EastEnders.

Using a multi-dimensional scaling technique, Livingstone examined the representation regular viewers of three soap operas Dallas, Coronation Street, and EastEnders have of the characters in these soaps. Viewers were asked to judge the similarities between characters by sorting them according to a number of dimensions. Table 2.8, below is a summary of the dimensions that viewers used to judge characters, with an indication of which dimensions were perceived to be associated with, or opposed to each other.

In all three of these soaps, viewers used three distinct dimensions to sort characters. These are: potency, morality and gender. These dimensions have different meanings in each soap. How the interpretation made about potency, morality and gender differ in each soap, while drawing parallels that could be applied to the genre, will now be discussed.

When interpreting the table, notice that when two traits are not associated with each other, it would imply that they are not necessarily used in a similar way for groups of characters. If a character was judged as moral in Dallas for instance, it would not tell us anything about the character's power. Since morality is associated with warmth, however, all moral characters in Dallas could be expected to be warm.

Table 2.8 *Viewer representation of characters*

	Morality	**Potency**	**Gender**
Dallas	Not associated with *potency*. Associated with *warmth* and *belief in family values*. Opposed to *cold* and *hard*.	Not associated with *morality*. Associated with *active* and *values power*. Mostly male. Always opposed to *passivity* and *pleasure oriented*.	Conventional patriarchal, although some counter stereotypical females present. *Masculinity* associated with *immorality*, *hard*, *dominant* and *values power*.

	Morality	**Potency**	**Gender**
Coronation Street	Always opposed to *potency*. Associated with an *old fashioned outlook on life*, *maturity*, *femininity*, *warmth* and *centrality*.	Always opposed to *morality*. Associated with *roguish*, *modern*, *sexy*, *cold*, *immature*, *masculinity* and not *centrality*.	Non-traditional matriarchal femininity. Clear distinction between male and female characters. Femininity is associated with maturity, morality, warmth and centrality to the community.
EastEnders	Always opposed to *potency*. Associated with *likeability*, *family values*, *warmth*, *centrality* and a *traditional outlook* on *life* and *predictability*.	Always opposed to *morality*, *likeability* and *family values*. Associated with a *modern outlook on life*, *coldness*, *temperament*.	

Morality in Dallas was associated with warmth and belief in family values, and was opposed to cold and hard. There was no association between morality and gender. The soap was therefore seen as having moral male and female characters and if a character in Dallas was portrayed as warm and committed to family values, a viewer might have expected the character to be moral. In Dallas morality was also not associated with potency, implying that there was an equal split in power between the moral and immoral characters and that the conflict between good and bad seemed eternal (Livingstone, 1998).

Dallas had a conventional or patriarchal gender narrative. Female characters were mostly soft, warm, submissive, passive and pleasure oriented, while male characters were more dominant, active, hard and power oriented (although there were a few female characters that were counter typical). The soap was also split between a male and female world, the former being more serious and powerful and the latter being hedonistic and weak, with a few exceptions (Livingstone, 1998).

All female characters in Coronation Street were seen as moral, soft, mature, warm, sociable and central to the story, while male characters were seen as peripheral to the story, immature, roguish, cold and immoral. The same was true for EastEnders, where the likable characters represented the good, traditional side of the soap and were associated with warmth, morality and family values, while the disliked characters were unpredictable and complicated. In contrast with Dallas, Coronation Street and EastEnders were therefore more true to the original conventions of the genre in which the female context is centrally portrayed in the narrative.

6.1.2. Insight into viewers' interpretation of the soaps.

Studying the above character representations provides insight into viewers' interpretation of the soaps. As will now be discussed, viewers' interpretations of characters allow them to make inferences about the meaning of the narrative and the possible outcomes at different points in the story (narrative possibility). It also has an impact on viewers' understanding of the genre conventions of soap opera.

6.1.2.1. Narrative meaning.

The correlations viewers perceive between attributes of characters tell them what to expect of the narrative. In EastEnders, for instance morality, was correlated with family issues, warmth, centrality and being soft. If a moral character was depicted as being in conflict with an immoral character, viewers could realistically have expected the moral character to be defending a family matter and also to lose the argument.

Viewers use their knowledge of characters, for example knowing them to be morally weak, feminine, good, and so forth to complete the narrative. They construct rich, meaningful interpretations from the text through a series of separate incidents related to the character. Using the Gestalt principle of closure, in which we tend to close up or complete objects that are not in fact complete, the viewer will infer motivations for character behaviour and predict possible outcomes for future storylines based on what they know about the characters (Sternberg, 1995). Using cognitive assimilation (where new information fits comfortably into existing knowledge that the viewer has of a topic) or accommodation (where new information requires the viewer to amend his/her existing knowledge), they will elaborate on their understanding of each character, based on the new incidents that come into the story (Sternberg).

6.1.2.2. Narrative possibility.

In the character representation of Dallas general social knowledge may have suggested that morality could be associated with business dealings and immorality with self-indulgent characters, or that power would be associated with only the male or female gender. The fact that these dimensions are not related allows for more narrative possibilities (Livingstone, 1998).

For instance, it allows immoral characters to be more complex - and possibly more true to life - in providing them the opportunity to act in different capacities for different reasons. JR Ewing in Dallas was, for instance, perceived as a cold, immoral, business-oriented character; however, he values family relations and will therefore engage in immoral deals for the benefit of his family.

Male characters in Dallas are either moral and powerful or immoral and powerful, while female characters can represent all four dimensions (moral and powerful, immoral and powerful, moral and powerless, and immoral and powerless). All of this allows for more narrative possibilities.

Character interaction is usually based on characters that represent opposing poles of a theme central to the narrative, and the interaction between two characters is usually based on the theme on which these two characters differ. Characters that are similar are therefore less likely to interact than contrasting characters. The interaction between characters is usually made regular and permanent through work, family relationships, friendships, mutual places of socialising, or other reasons to interact. This is essential because it is only through the acting out of thematic opposing poles – personified by individual characters – that stories become interesting and that themes are explored (Livingstone, 1998). Viewers' knowledge of characters and the representations they create of the characters therefore also allow them to anticipate which characters are likely to interact.

6.1.2.3. The impact of genre conventions on viewer representations.

Character representations also tell us how the soap is perceived in terms of genre conventions. In both EastEnders and Coronation Street, the traditional, value oriented, soft, feminine, and moral characters are the most central to the story and are also the most adored characters. Both these British soaps are therefore interpreted as close to the genre convention of the centrality of the female world.

Dallas moved away from the conventions of the genre by not having female characters and their domestic concerns as its central focus. It was aired in prime time and for this reason had elements of melodrama that would be more competitive in the prime-time slot. Isidingo is also on air in the last early evening slot before the 19:00 news. Parallels can be drawn between Isidingo and Dallas in the inclusion of the male dominated corporate theme in both soaps.

Another implication for the genre conventions visible in viewer representation of the characters, is the interpretation of gender tenets. It is clear from the matriarchal femininity in EastEnders and Coronation Street (where the female characters are not submissive, passive or irrational, but rather mature, warm and central to the soap community) and the counter stereotypical female characters in Dallas (that resemble the strong, immoral male characters), that while the genre might have started out portraying the subordinate female that is worthy of feminist criticism, femininity is no longer portrayed in this way in many soap operas (Livingstone, 1998).

6.1.3. Reflection on Livingstone's (1998) research.

It is crucial to understand that audiences can no longer be seen as passive, homogenous, mindless receivers of messages. However, the opposite extreme where the structuring role of the text is disregarded is also not a viable option. The dichotomy has to be embraced. If we regard the media as imposing all meaning on the viewer, then we disregard the role of the audience. If on the other hand, we regard the audience as the sole source of meaning, the disregard the structuring role of the things

that people interpret. Livingstone believes it is on the interrelationship between the two that the focus should lie. A theory of how people interpret soap operas should show how they make sense of structured texts, as well as how texts limit the interpretations made by viewers. Two seminal studies will now be discussed to explain how viewers make sense of characters.

6.2. Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures

Several scholars (Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Giles, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Hoorn & Konijn, 2003) have argued that is necessary to distinguish between different types of involvement that viewers can have with characters. Table 2.9 contrasts four distinct responses viewers may have to characters. In the section that follows, the conditions for each of the four types of viewer involvement and its implications will be discussed in search of possible relationships with viewer loyalty.

Table 2.9 *Four types of engagement (adapted from Cohen, 2001)*

	Identification	Imitation	Parasocial interaction	Affinity
Alternative terms	Capture	Wishful identification. Long-term identification.	Abbreviated as PSI.	Liking/Similarity/ Affinity, Interest
Nature of process	Emotional and cognitive, alters state of awareness.	Behaviour	Interactional, (para)social.	Attitude
Basis	Understanding and empathy.	Modelling	Attraction	Perceptions of character and self.
Positioning of the viewer	As character.	As learner (self as other).	As self.	As self.
Associated phenomena	Absorption in text, emotional release.	Learning, reinforcement.	Attachment to character and text, keeping company.	Fandom, realism.
Theoretical roots	Psychoanalysis, film studies, social psychology.	Experimental psychology, social learning theory.	Psychology, interpersonal communication.	Social psychology.

6.2.1. Identification.

6.2.1.1. Definition of identification.

The first possible reaction a viewer can have to a character is to identify with it. Identification is defined as a viewer's tendency to become less aware of him/herself as a viewer, but rather imagining being one of the characters in the story, adopting the values and perspectives of the character and in effect feeling with – rather than for – the character (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Cohen (2001) states, "Unlike the more distanced mode of reception – that of spectatorship – identification is a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (p. 245).

6.2.1.2. Characteristics of identification.

When attempting to operationalize identification according to the definition given above, Cohen (2001) identifies four conditions that need to be present in the viewer's account of his or her viewing experience for identification to have occurred. Firstly, the viewer should feel empathy with the character and experience the character's emotions, e.g. feeling embarrassed when the character is embarrassed. Secondly, the viewer should share the perspective of the character. This cognitive aspect could be measured by the viewer reporting that he/she understands the character. Thirdly, the viewer should share the motives or goals of the character and lastly, the viewer should experience a degree of absorption. When experiencing absorption the viewer will forget that he/she was watching television, become less self-aware and go through the experience as if actually being the character (Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Green et al., 2004).

6.2.1.3. Enabling conditions for identification.

Identification is enhanced by a number of factors. Firstly, regular exposure to the character increases the likelihood that identification will take place (Giles, 2002; Green et al., 2002; Cohen 2001). Secondly, longevity of exposure increases the likelihood for identification (Cohen, 2001). Loyal and regular viewers are therefore more likely to identify with characters. Identification is thirdly also more likely to occur in narrative genres (Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002). Any genre in which the viewer is actively addressed – like in a news bulletin or talk show – inhibits the viewer's ability to forget his/her role as viewer. The fourth condition necessary for identification is similarity (Cohen, 1991, 2001; Livingstone, 1998). Similarity can be based on demographic traits, such as age or gender, but also includes similarity in attributes or similarity of situation. Another condition that increases the likelihood of identification, is realism. Realism need not mean that the character replicates behaviour from the viewer's life, but it might also include a portrayal of a stereotype that the viewer holds of a social group being portrayed. One last enabling factor is affinity. Livingstone (1998) found that viewers are more likely to take the perspective (a key characteristic of identification) of characters that are liked over those that are disliked.

6.2.1.4. Effects of identification.

The first theoretical consequence of identification is on the viewer's identity formation. When children identify with a parent or peer, they pay close attention to the person's behaviour and the consequences of that particular behaviour. Cohen (2001) refers to the work of Mead and Ericson to illustrate that identification with others is a fundamental human ability, and that it plays a crucial role in identity formation. For a child to develop an identity he/she must first learn to take on the perspectives of others (compare Mead's work on the difference between individual play and group games where the latter requires an ability to anticipate how others will react to individual actions). Identification is therefore recognised as a necessary part of socialisation (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005) and identity formation (Cohen, 2001).

Persuasion is another consequence of identification. Identification can result in persuasion by making the source of the message, rather than the message itself attractive (Cohen, 2001). That identification is a cause of persuasion, is confirmed in advertising theory where celebrity endorsement is used to allow consumers to identify with the celebrity and imagine consuming the product that the celebrity is consuming. This brings us to the last consequence of identification, namely that it increases the likelihood of imitation or wishful identification (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). Livingstone (1990) also found that viewer relationships with characters and specifically their identification with characters influenced their interpretation of narratives.

Cohen (2001) believes the process through which the viewer loses his or her own identity and assumes the identity of the media character is fleeting and that it can occur in varying intensities throughout the course of a viewing experience. The next type of involvement with a character transcends this fleeting nature of identification with the promise of long-term effects.

### 6.2.2.	Imitation.
6.2.2.1. Definition of imitation.

Imitation, long-term identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) or wishful identification (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) is the next type of involvement that a viewer can have with a character. It is a behavioural concept in which the viewer will learn new behaviour from a character on television and try to emulate the behaviour or values portrayed by the character in real life.

6.2.2.2. Characteristics of imitation.

This concept differs from identification, as it extends beyond the viewing experience (Hoffner & Buchanan 2005). It has parallels with Bandura's social psychological understanding of the concept. Bandura (2001) describes a social matching process through which an observer would change his/her thought patterns, emotional responses, and/or behaviours to match those of another individual. For

various reasons that will now be discussed, the viewer engages in a psychological process in which he/she tries to become like another person (or character).

6.2.2.3. Enabling conditions for imitation.

Similarity between a viewer and a media figure has been found to correlate with the likelihood that viewers would want to imitate (or wishfully identify) with the media figure (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005) (Refer to discussion on similarity below). The type of similarity that correlates with wishful identification, includes same gender (although this is more relevant for male viewers), same race, attitude and background (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

Wishful identification is also influenced by character attributes, such as perceived intelligence, success, and attractiveness of the character (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Because these are character evaluations, affinity, as discussed below, is an important determinant of imitation.
One last enabling condition for imitation is the admiration of other characters. Characters that receive positive feedback from – and are admired by – other characters are more likely to enhance wishful identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

6.2.2.4. Effects of imitation.

Imitation has been shown to impact the extent to which viewers attend to, and identify with characters (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), although these authors also believe that identification affects the likelihood of imitation.

Diverse and convincing consequences have been linked to wishful identification with characters; including changing one's physical appearance, drinking behaviour, adoption of goals, and eating disorders (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). It also includes problem solving behaviour in which viewers report learning how to deal with real-life problems from watching and wishfully identifying with characters (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

6.2.3. Parasocial interaction.
6.2.3.1. Definition of parasocial interaction.

The third type of involvement is the seminal concept – parasocial interaction, coined by Horton and Wohl in the 1950s. Parasocial interaction is a viewer's tendency to imagine interacting with characters on the programme as if they were real people. Contrasted to the individual nature of identification, parasocial interaction assumes at least a degree of distance from the text, as well as a self awareness for the viewer. Where identification would see the viewer experience the story as if *being* the character, a parasocial interaction assumes a relationship *with* the character. Parasocial relationships are rooted in interpersonal communication and are related to how friendships are formed (Cohen, 1991, 2001, 2004; Eyal & Rubin 2003; Giles, 2002).

6.2.3.2. Characteristics of parasocial interaction.

Up to this point, the literature review has produced a number of traits that characterise parasocial relationships. Much of what has been said about parasocial relationships indicates that it is more relevant where the media figure directly addresses the audience – as with newscasters and talk-show hosts (Cohen, 2001, Giles, 2002). Literature does, however, refer to parasocial interactions with narrative, fictional and even animated characters. This section will focus on the latter rather than the former, because of its relevance to the research question.

Parasocial interactions differ from identification firstly due to the fact that viewers remain conscious of themselves as viewers and retain their identity, and secondly, behaviourally interact with a character by, for instance, verbally addressing the character (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Giles 2002; Green et al., 2004). The viewer interacts with the character as if he/she was a person in real life. This includes judging characters in a way that is comparable to judging people in real life, for example, weighing up whether one would be able to become friends with one of the characters (Green et al., 2004).

Many scholars insist that attributes of parasocial interaction resemble real-life interaction. There are, however, convincing arguments for making a distinction between real-life interactions and parasocial interactions. Giles (2002) defines a continuum of social-parasocial interactions, which is contained in Table 2.10. The continuum moves from dyadic, face-to-face interaction on the most social end to what he calls third level parasocial interaction on the opposite end. Social interactions are defined based on the location or proximity of the relationship, the constraints of the relationship and the potential of the relationship.

Table 2.10 *Continuum from social to parasocial interaction (adapted from Giles, 2002)*

Scale	Encounter	Location	Constraints		Potential relationship	
			Formal	**Informal**	**Formal**	**Informal**
Social ....Para-Social	Dyadic	Proximate	Interview	Conversation	Work colleague	Close friend
		Distant	E-mail message	E-mail message	Future associate	Cyber friend
	Small group	Proximate	Working group	Friendship groups	Colleague	Friend
	Large group	Proximate	Board meeting	Party	Future Colleague	Future friend
		Distant	Lecture (re. lecturer)	Lecture (re. fellow student)	Semi-parasocial	Future friend/ colleague
	Encounter with media figure	Proximate	Fan club convention	Chance meeting	Dyadic, but role bound	As normal dyad
		Distant	Phone-in show	"Personal" letter	Dyadic, but role bound	Semi-parasocial
	First-order PSI	Distant	News broadcast	-	Parasocial but chance of contact	-
	Second order PSI	Distant	Soap character	-	Parasocial can only make contact on representative level (i.e. actor)	-
	Third order PSI	Distant	Cartoon character	-	Purely parasocial, no chance of contact	-

It is clear from this continuum that significant differences exist between social and parasocial interactions and it perhaps opens up the question of the authenticity of mediated relationships (relationship which are not face-toface but that take place through a medium such as a computer or television). This has implications for new media in which on-line communication may start resembling real-life interaction to a larger degree, for example, in on-line chat rooms where communication is synchronous (all parties communicating are present at the time that the communication takes place) and reciprocal (two-sided, two directional). It does, however, confirm that interaction in fictional

television remains distinct from social interaction and that the contribution of social cognition only extends to the resources used by the viewer to interpret the (one-sided) communication from the character (Giles, 2002; Livingstone, 1998). Only First Order PSI (i.e. with non-fictional media figures such as news casters) holds the, albeit slim, potential of a future relationship. Second Order PSI (such as with is soap character) is limited to potential relationships on a representative level only, i.e. a viewer could only meet the actor that is portraying the character, while with Third Order PSI (cartoons) a future relationship is impossible.

6.2.3.3. Enabling conditions for parasocial interaction.

Parasocial interaction is enhanced by authenticity and realism (Giles, 2002; Schiappa et al., 2005), prolonged exposure to the character (watching several episodes of the same programme), as well as exposure to the character in different contexts (the actor being a guest on a talk show or being featured in a soap opera magazine (Borchers et al., 1994; Giles, 2002). It is also enhanced by co-viewers of a programme when characters are discussed between viewers as if they were real people (Giles, 2002). Attraction to the character is also correlated with parasocial interaction (Giles, 2002). Television dependency, the amount of time spent watching television, and the perception of television as reality are also correlated with parasocial interaction (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Giles, 2002).

6.2.3.4. Effects of parasocial interaction.

Parasocial interaction has been equated to companionship in real life and the most discussed effect is therefore that viewers achieve a sense of belonging and acceptance. This proves to be comparable to belonging to a real group (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Green et al., 2004; Giles, 2002).

Allport's contact hypothesis states that inter-group contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice. Schiapa et al. (2005) argue that because there are so many congruencies between social interaction and parasocial interaction, the effects of the contact hypotheses are transferable to parasocial interaction, and parasocial contact can therefore reduce prejudice.

Prolonged parasocial interaction results in the viewer feeling that he/she knows the character and understands his/her values and motivations (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). A connection has also been demonstrated between parasocial interaction and persuasion (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), although it is important to note that parasocial interaction does not necessarily imply a desire to imitate (Giles, 2002).

Notice that an effect of prolonged parasocial interactions is that viewers develop an understanding of the character's values and motives (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). Understanding a character's motives is the cognitive condition for identification described by Cohen (2001). The only factor that keeps parasocial interaction from developing into identification is similarity and possibly interest.

Most relevant to the current research objectives is the notion that parasocial relationships with characters are more important in viewing motivation than the programme content itself (Giles, 2002).

6.2.4. Affinity.

6.2.4.1. Definition of affinity.

The last way in which viewers could be involved with characters is by having an affinity to a character (Giles, 2002). This type of involvement is also referred to as liking, similarity (Cohen, 2001) or interest (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). This reaction consists of value judgements based on the perception of a character.

6.2.4.2. Characteristics of affinity.

For a viewer to judge a character (and this reaction is based mainly on an evaluative judgement of the character), he/she has to be aware of him/herself as a viewer and the characters as being separate from him or herself. Having an affinity with a character involves being concerned about what will happen to the character, always taking the character's side, hoping that the character will fulfil his/her goals, and enjoying imagining what the character will do next (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005).

6.2.4.3. Enabling conditions for affinity.

Chory-Assad and Yanen (2005) found that: 1) viewers are more likely to choose a fictional than a non-fictional character as their favourite character, 2) that favourite characters are more likely to be from a drama genre, 3) that favourite characters are usually selected from contemporary programmes (programmes that are on-air at the time of the research) and 4) that male viewers almost exclusively choose a male character as their favourite, while almost half of female viewers also choose male characters as their favourites.

Cohen (1999) identifies three types of factors that impact affinity or choice of a favourite character. They are: 1) character related factors, such as physical appearance, speech characteristics, behaviours, emotional reactions, and non-verbal expressions, 2) star factors which relate to the celebrity status of the actor portraying the role rather than the character portrayed, and 3) textual factors, such as the interpretation of the soap characters based on power, morality and gender (Livingstone, 1998) discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Similarity is also related to an evaluation of the realism of a character (Giles, 2002).

6.2.4.4. Effects of affinity.

Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) found that young male and female viewers reported a higher likelihood of wishful identification (imitation) of characters that were perceived to be successful and intelligent. For female viewers, this extended to characters that were seen as physically attractive and admired by other characters. The effect of affinity is therefore mostly related to increasing the likelihood that imitation will occur.

6.2.5. Realism.

Realism is an important determinant of several of the above reactions. It has been found to increase the likelihood of identification, parasocial relationships, similarity and imitation. It therefore warrants a more detailed look.

In a recent study Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) considered the impact of functionality and perceived realism on narrative comprehension and engagement. They identified three types of 'unrealness': fictionality, external realism (match with external reality), and narrative realism (coherence within the narrative). Fictionality was not found to have a significant hampering effect on viewers' mental processing. Violations of external and narrative realism were, however, problematic in the process of deriving meaning, as they were experienced as inconsistent with existing mental structures constructed to interpret the story. The authors argue that these inconsistencies hold negative implications for viewer engagement, seeing that it impacted on reflective realism (judgement of realism after watching the narrative) and lessened the narrative's persuasive power.

Green et al. (2004) found that enjoyment does not depend on how well a media programme reflects the real world and argues that believable fiction can result in immense viewer enjoyment. They make a distinction between internal and external realism and believe that internal realism is more important in determining enjoyment than external realism.

Fiske (1994) argues that enjoyment derived from regarding the programme as real is dependant on a knowing self delusion. Tager (1997) believes that realism in soap operas facilitate this self delusion as unrealistic features in a soap (such as when an actor is replaced to play a familiar character) hampers the process of involvement in the text. It seems therefore that any theory that attempts to understand the interpretations viewers arrive at regarding soap operas should include a reference to the importance of both external and narrative realism.

6.2.6. Reflection on Cohen's (2001) four types of character involvement.

Cohen's (2001) four types of involvement with mediated figures (characters which viewers interact with through the medium television) offers an understanding of the complexity of involvement with fictional characters. By emphasising individual reactions that viewers can have to various characters it offers substantial, practical evidence of the existence of a heterogeneous audience whom uses information outside of the text (individual real world knowledge) to understand what is portrayed in the narrative.

6.3. The process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters of Hoorn and Konijn (2003)

The model proposed by Hoorn and Konijn (2003) will now be discussed. This model complements Cohen's typology in offering a causal, linear process through which viewers perceive fictional

characters. As is clear from the discussion on the interaction between the types of involvement above, the process of interpreting characters is complex. Hoorn and Konijn's model offers a logical progression that viewers go through in making contact and establishing a relationship with the soap opera, which accounts for contradictions and complexities in how the process unfolds. The reader will hear echoes of identification (similarity and appreciation), wishful identification and affinity in this model. The reason for presenting both Cohen (2001) and Hoorn and Konijn (2003) is because the latter contributes a systematic process, as well as an explanation of how negative character perceptions contribute to viewer appreciation of a character, while the former explains parasocial interaction and identification.

Hoorn and Konijn (2003) suggested that viewers perceive and experience fictional characters in a process that involves three phases. These are: 1) subjective encoding of the text, 2) a comparison with the self, and 3) a response which defines the degree of engagement and appreciation of the text. Figure 2.3 is a visual representation of their model. The dotted lines visible in the figure indicate the partial influence that similarity, relevance and valence has on involvement and distance. The yellow block indicates the additional impact of norms which come to play if individual norms are assessed in comparison with group norms. Each of the phases (encode, compare and respond) will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 2.3. Model of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003, p.259).

6.3.1.   Phase 1: Encoding.

The process begins with the subjective encoding of the text by the viewer based on three characteristics: ethics, aesthetics and epistemics. The authors believe that this phase can be conducted relatively independently from the self. A viewer can judge the character JR as powerful and immoral (encoding) without reference to the self (I am not like him).

Each character is interpreted as good or bad (ethics), beautiful or ugly (aesthetics), and real or unreal (epistemics). Depending on the nature of the character and the situation in which the character is perceived, this makes a contribution of involvement or distance. Generally the positive poles of each of these dimensions contribute to involvement with the character, while the negative poles contribute to distance between the character and the viewer. The unique contribution of this model is, however, that it includes the positive effect of negative judgements.

As explained by Livingstone (1998), JR is interpreted as strong, undefeated, hard, masculine and immoral (within the context of the Dallas world, he is an overly negative character), however, he is believed to value his family (a trait associated with the moral characters in the rest of the Dallas ensemble). JR is therefore both good (values family) and bad (immoral, hurts other characters). His good qualities would contribute towards involvement, while his bad qualities contribute to distance. The trick is that he often does the immoral things he does for the benefit of his family. Fictional characters can therefore result in an overall positive appreciation, because their negative features are evaluated as good, depending on the outcome valence. The opposite could also be true where ethical traits are seen within the context of epistemic. A character that is seen to have too many unrealistic positive traits and too few negative traits can irritate.

When a viewer first meets a new individual judgements are influenced by physical appearance, because of the limited availability of other information. Evidence exists that beautiful people are inherently judged as being good. In fiction, aesthetic beauty contributes to involvement, while ugliness contributes towards distancing as an overall rule; however, beauty can also have a distancing effect (too beautiful, too slick), and ugliness an involving effect (e.g. feeling sympathy). Low aesthetic beauty in a successful character can be intriguing, seeing that it invites the viewer to discover what allowed the character to overcome whichever difficulty he/she faces.

Beauty, goodness and realism have optimum levels where the ideal combination of distance and involvement equates to appreciation. Good, beautiful, realistic characters evoke too much involvement and too little distance, while bad, ugly, unrealistic characters may evoke too much distance and no involvement. Overall Hoorn and Konijn (2003) argue that complex characters that are not perceived as either purely positive or negative during the encoding stage challenge the viewer more and result in higher appreciation.

6.3.2.   Phase 2: Comparison.

During phase 2, the character is compared to the individual (viewer) in terms of similarity and relevance. This comparison culminates in a valence which is what the viewer would like to see happen to the character.

6.3.2.1. Similarity.

Similarity is believed to contribute to involvement and a positive appreciation of a character. It does not, however, explain ambivalence (characters that viewers love to hate), a fascination with negative characters, or an interest in superhuman characters. Although similarity contributes towards appeal, dissimilarity can also have a positive impact. This explains the idea of wishful identification discussed above. For a viewer to 'wishfully identify' with a character requires that the viewer identifies similarities, but also dissimilarities (traits to which the viewer can aspire) between him/herself and the character.

6.3.2.2. Relevance.

A viewer judges everything perceived in the narrative environment as personally relevant or not. Hoorn and Konijn (2003) disagree with the popular notion that relevance is a prerequisite for emotional involvement, and that if a stimulus is judged to be irrelevant, the emotional processing is stopped. They argue that this is not the case when interpreting fictional characters and that viewers endure a degree of irrelevance until the character satisfies other needs the viewer may have. However, should irrelevance be prolonged, they acknowledge that it will eventually increase emotions such as apathy and boredom (which will increase distance) and that emotional processing may cease. The factors deemed relevant when interpreting television may differ in some cases to the factors that are more salient in real life, as it will depend on the personal goals or motivations that are relevant to the specific viewing experience. In a later article Konijn and Hoorn (2005) define relevance as an indication of the potential impact a feature may have on an individual's goals. Relevance therefore implies a high degree of potential risk or benefit, while irrelevance indicates a neutral state in which there is an absence of both. This definition is suitable within their theory as it allows for high relevance that could also evoke distance (such as in the case of a threat). Where relevance designates the strength of an emotional response to the character, valence determines its positive or negative disposition.

6.3.2.3. Valence (what viewers would like to see happen to the character).

The positive and negative emotions that viewers have of characters are made up of the ethical, aesthetic and epistemic judgements that are relevant to the goals and concerns of the viewer at any given time. These feelings are evident in the anticipated valence of the storyline, i.e. what the viewer would like to see happen with the character.

6.3.3. Phase 3: Response.

Phase 3, response, is the conclusion of the complex process in which viewers interpret characters. The response a viewer will have to a character is the sum of both the distance and involvement experienced with the character. Hoorn and Konijn (2003) believe there is a constant duality between involvement and distance that are negotiated by elements in the text and their relation with the viewer. These dimensions are independent from each other and an optimum level of each is necessary for a viewer to be interested and engaged with a character and text. A character that elicits too much involvement and no distance will be perceived as boring, while a character with too much distance and no involvement might be irrelevant, both of which will result in low appreciation. The dimensions – involvement and distance, interact on a micro-level within the three phases of the process. Appreciation comprises of the ideal balance of both involvement and distance. Too little or too much of either decreases the overall appreciation of the character (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003; Konijn & Hoorn, 2005; Van Vugt et al., 2005).

6.4. How viewers relate to different character types

Green et al. (2004) suggest that disposition theory can be helpful in understanding how viewers relate to different character types. Disposition theory (Green et al., 2004) holds that we judge people in real life and hold a positive disposition to people who are perceived to be morally good and a negative disposition to people who are morally bad. It has, however, been illustrated in the discussion on the equal importance of attraction (involvement) and aversion (distance) to character appreciation that this rule does not explain all viewer relationships with characters (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003). Hoorn and Konijn (2005) empirically tested their theoretical model and compared a selection of good and bad, realistic and unrealistic, and beautiful and ugly characters.

Figure 2.4. Comparing involvement, distance and appreciation for characters representing a spread of evaluative traits (adapted from Hoorn and Konijn 2005, p127).

They found that viewers favoured realism in the portrayal of good characters, but favoured fantasy in the portrayal of bad characters. This offers some support to the notion that characters are seen as models of socially desirable action. In situations that are similar to real life, goodness is the norm for behaviour. On the other hand, when exploring badness, characters with unrealistic features are preferred and have to show their unrealistic features so as to reveal that they are abnormal, and therefore should not be imitated. Overall, positive assessments increased involvement with and appreciation of the characters, while negative assessments increased distance from the characters.

Tian and Hoffner (2007) conducted a study to compare parasocial relationships with liked, neutral and disliked characters. They found that parasocial interaction was a predictor for liked characters. Parasocial interaction was also found to be a predictor of influence, while identification was not. In terms of change and influence, they found that lower education and higher similarity predicted change or influence for all three character types. Comparing the three character types, larger degrees of similarity and identification were associated with liked and neutral characters than for disliked characters. It seems therefore that viewers are more likely to like characters that they perceive to be similar to them, and that similarity is associated with influence. This study found that parasocial interaction was only relevant to liked characters. Giles (2002) argues that parasocial interaction can take place without any identification being present, and that this is how viewers interact actively with characters that they dislike. For fictional and fantasy characters, where the realism dimension is too low to sustain parasocial relationships, Giles believes affinity is often the relevant way to describe their relationship with the character.

Tager's (1997) study of black South African women's identification and interpretation of The Bold and the Beautiful found that the majority of viewers identified with the female characters that strongly persisted against all odds. This supports Hobson's (1994) finding that the most popular female characters were those that struggled against the vicissitudes of life. If the characters were able to stay in control, they were seen as admirable and were only excused lapses in strength in extreme cases.

Perhaps both of these studies provide confirmation that although male soap audiences are growing, Borchers et al. (1994) were correct in identifying that soap operas have (and should have) female characters that have always been stronger than the female casts of other media. In soap operas, female characters do not feature only as girlfriends and wives, but as heroines and villainesses acting autonomously.

7. Engagement with the narrative

Two models warrant discussion in this section, as they combine narrative and characters, and begin to explain the complex processes through which viewers engage with a television programme. The first is the Model of Narrative Comprehension and Engagement of Busselle and Bilandzic (2008), and the second is the work of Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004) on transportation into a narrative.

7.1. The model of narrative comprehension and engagement of Busselle and Bilandzic (2008)

Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) combined elements of most of the theory discussed in this chapter into an integrated model that includes the viewer's interpretation of both character and narrative. Their theory of narrative comprehension and engagement consists of three phases, which are: comprehension, engagement and outcomes. Figure 2.5 is a visual representation of the model. They use a mental models approach to understanding how a viewer interprets a television programme.

Figure 2.5. Model of narrative comprehension and engagement. Adapted from Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).

The viewer's comprehension or interpretation of the soap opera consists of models that he/she builds around the story, characters and situation (the setting of the story). The social cognitive view of media and the viewers' interaction with it makes a distinction between the narrative meaning as communicated through the dialogue, and characters and storylines, as well as the viewers' interpretation thereof. Busselle and Bilandszic's (2008) model of narrative comprehensive and engagement makes this same distinction and uses a mental models approach to explain how the process of forming mental representation of the narrative is a necessary step towards viewer engagement[3]. Their main argument is that reality judgements will influence and potentially enhance or inhibit viewer engagement with the story. They identify three levels of reality judgements: fictionality, external reality and narrative reality, and find that only the former does not influence engagement.

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[3] A mental model is a cognitive structure that represents a part of the external world whether it be a process, typical behaviour in a situation, type of person, or any other slice of reality that the individual encounters in life.

The primary mental model in their theory is the situation model. The situation model includes the setting and the accumulated story of the soap opera. It is ever changing, seeing that it is the instrument or mechanism through which the rest of the soap opera is interpreted. When watching a soap opera, the viewer is confronted with loose standing incidents. The situational environment, which includes the rules of the soap (i.e. the narrative possibilities), the setting, the characters, and the story that has been encountered in the past, is the mode through which these individual incidents are strung together. When encountering a new piece of information, it is compared to previous pieces of information and either accommodated (the mental model is modified since the new piece of information does not fit with the old pieces) or assimilated (added to existing mental models that are similar).

We use the real world as heuristic when interpreting a fictional world. Since it is impossible for a soap opera to provide all the information necessary to convey a coherent story, we use mental schemas of people and situations in real life to make sense of information we encounter in soap operas. Two of these schemas are story schemas and genre schemas.

In contrast to real life, media stories have a beginning, middle and an end. When encountering a story a story schema is triggered. Soap operas signal to the viewer that a story is about to begin through their opening visuals and music. The same effect is achieved in theatre by the opening of the curtain and in a story book by a line such as "Long ago in a land far away…" This technique ushers in the deictic shift and it creates the anticipation that events will be temporally located and that some form of conflict might emerge and will probably be resolved.

Similarly, the activation of a genre schema retrieves knowledge about the conventions of the genre, and creates expectations about the nature of the events that will follow. These expectations colour the interpretation of the story, as each genre has specific narrative possibilities. When seeing a man and woman meeting at a restaurant on screen the event holds different narrative possibilities depending on the genre. If a spy-thriller genre is applied, the viewer might expect that one of the two individuals will hand the other an envelope that contains instructions on a mission. If the same scene is interpreted within a soap genre schema the viewer could realistically expect the man and woman to be in a relationship and that the scene will focus on the content of a dramatic conversation.

Included in the situation model are the character models and the story world models. When first meeting characters in a soap opera, they are represented by stereotypes which are mental models we hold from real life. As the story progresses and the viewer becomes more familiar with the character, the character model develops to include his/her identity, values and goals.

The story world model is the setting of the soap, which includes the place and time, and all that this implies. This setting sets down rules that are universally relevant to the characters and situations within the soap. If it was set in the 1980's for instance, the characters could not have cell phones.

7.2. Transportation

7.2.1.   Definition of transportation.

Green et al. (2004) believe that transportation or escaping into a story is in itself motivation to watch the story. They describe transportation as the melding of attention, imagery and feelings between the viewer and the text. They believe this process of being taken into the narrative world is a key aspect to media enjoyment. Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) (discussed in detail in the next section) identifies a concept that is related to transportation. They talk about the deictic shift, which is essential for narrative engagement. The deictic shift is a step in the process of narrative engagement in which the perspective of the viewer changes from his own, within his physical surroundings, to that of the soap. When the deictic shift occurs, the viewer interprets the events unfolding in the soap from a perspective inside the soap, as if he/she is in the soap. This is necessary for the viewer to become involved in the story.

7.2.2.   Characteristics of transportation.

In order to understand a story the viewer needs to take on a perspective or deictic position within the narrative. The word *deixis* relates to the context within which other words have meaning. Words such as *I, here, now* only have meaning in relation to the context in which the hearer is located. Usually this deictic centre is the here and now of the viewer's life, but to understand a narrative this needs to change to a position within the narrative. This notion of the deictic shift also explains why viewers have an emotional reaction to events that happen in the story. They are experiencing the events from a viewpoint within the story, and therefore have the impression of a direct experience.

7.2.3.   Enabling conditions for transportation.

Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) identify narrative structures that enable the deictic shift to occur. Written narratives rely on language to create a deictic shift, while film and television has camera angles and visual elements to create the setting. In written texts verbal deictic remarks that indicate motive and psychological states create a deictic centre from which to experience the story, e.g. long ago in a land far away. In television the perspective created by language in written text is achieved through visual effects. If a soap opera has regular scenes in a particular office setting, these scenes could be introduced by a shot of the outside of the building – situating the dialogue that follows in a particular context. This has the same effect as a rising curtain; it cues the audience to make a deictic shift in preparation of a narrative experience.

Transportation or deictic shifts are inhibited by things that remind the viewer that he/she is watching or reading a story (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green et al., 2004). Compare watching a movie at home on a high quality DVD to watching a pirated version of the same movie – where often the pirated DVD is taken by a video camera in a cinema. The latter might have poorer sound quality, will probably have recorded any noise the cinema audience made, could have the edges of the cinema screen exposed and could include features of the surrounding environment (the first row of seats, the exit sign), might be from an awkward angle (seeing the screen from the side) and could have someone standing up

during the movie with their profile showing up against the screen. It might be possible to ignore these things and become engrossed in the story, but every time a person stands up, or the audience laughs, the viewer will be reminded of his/her own here and now as opposed to the story's here and now.

Green et al. (2004) found that transportation is exclusive to narrative communication. A viewer could become engaged in, and even enjoy a non-narrative programme, but he/she will not be transported into it. This is because a non-narrative programme, such as a science programme or a speech, does not create an alternative world for the viewer to enter. It does not necessarily have to be fictional. Factual content, such as a documentary can also take the form of a story, but if it does not take the form of a story (and does not create an alternative world), enjoyment is invoked by something other than transportation (for example, information seeking needs).

7.2.4.   Effects of transportation.

Green et al. (2004) found a high correlation between transportation and enjoyment, and found that people who reported high transportation and enjoyment are more likely to recommend a story to someone else. Transportation is therefore an important contributor to enjoyment and overall appreciation. Transportation is also associated with attitude change where viewers, who reported higher transportation into a narrative, had beliefs that were more consistent with the narrative than viewers who reported lower transportation (Green et al., 2004).

8.   Positive viewing experiences

In the sections above the researcher attempted to understand the skills viewers use to interpret soap operas, the processes through which they interpret characters and storylines, and how they are engaged with the soap opera through the process of transportation. Enjoyment was also mentioned sporadically, where it was an outcome of another aspect of viewership.

The focus of this is to understand the positive viewing experiences that culminate in loyalty to soap operas. A final section on what constitutes positive viewing experiences is therefore appropriate. Different terms used to refer to positive viewing experiences will now be identified and the tripartite view of enjoyment, described by Nabi and Krcmar (2004) will then be discussed, as it is a comprehensive model that is most relevant to the research objectives.

8.1. Terms that relate to positive viewing experiences

Several authors (Green et al., 2004; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Raney, 2002, 2004; Raney & Bryant, 2002) attempted to arrive at an academic understanding of the concept of enjoyment and throughout literature, various terms are used to refer to the same concept (see below). The variety of terms used is, however, an indication of the undefined nature of the theoretical landscape.

Terms that can be found elsewhere in this literature study that imply positive viewing experiences include: liking (Cohen, 1991, 2001), affinity (Cohen, 1991, 2001; Giles, 2002), interest (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), preference and attraction (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004), and appreciation (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003; 2005). However, the term most relevant to the current research is enjoyment (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Nabi & Krcmar, 2004).

Most of these terms suggest a positive disposition towards media content, while not necessarily encapsulating the experiential part of viewing (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004). A viewer may, for instance, have an appreciation for the soap opera despite not enjoying the actual viewing experience (this apparent paradox is addressed below). The theoretical approach of this study (discussed in Chapter 3) emphasises lived realities and any term used to describe positive disposition to a soap opera should necessarily include the experience of viewing. *Enjoyment* (the conclusion made about the pleasantness of the viewing experience) and its related term derivative – *enjoying* (the experiential part of the concept – to enjoy) are therefore the most appropriate terms to use. The most complete view on positive viewing experiences and how it influences loyalty is Nabi and Krcmar's (2004) tripartite view of enjoyment.

8.2. The tripartite view of enjoyment of Nabi and Krcmar (2004)

Like Green et al. (2004) and Raney (2002; 2004), Nabi and Krcmar (2004) define enjoyment as an attitude with affective and cognitive aspects. Their unique contribution, however, is to add a behavioural dimension to the understanding of enjoyment. Nabi and Krcmar (2004) explain that an attitude is a complex feature made up of cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Cognitively a person develops beliefs about an object based on experience he/she has had of it. These beliefs are either positive or negative, based on the emotions felt during the encounter with the object. Behaviourally the person will then intend to initiate future contact with the object or to avoid it.

Nabi and Krcmar (2004) address the concern some readers might have that attitude is an end-state rather than an experiential process. They argue that attitude (or the cumulative belief) about the programme will fluctuate as the viewer encounters new information. The enjoyment-as-attitude perspective therefore addresses both the end state judgement, as well as the process through which viewing is experienced. Figure 2.6 is a visual representation of the model.

Figure 2.6. Tripartite perspective on media enjoyment. Adapted from Nabi and Krcmar (2004, p.297)

Enjoyment of a television programme consists of an affective, cognitive and emotional dimension. The affective reaction to the programme includes emotional concepts, such as empathy experienced with characters or specific affective states, such as sadness or excitement. The cognitive reaction includes judgements of characters' actions as moral or immoral, story assessments as real or unreal, and personal evaluations of the story as relevant or irrelevant. The behavioural reaction includes the act of viewing itself, as well as actions while watching, such as sitting on the edge of the seat or cooking. Each of these dimensions is influenced by a number of dimensions, such as existing knowledge, personal experience, personality, mood etc. The affective, cognitive and behavioural reactions combine in both an experiential enjoyment (enjoying while watching) and an end-state judgement or attitude. This attitude of enjoyment (or lack thereof) causes the viewer to have positive or negative viewing intentions, and ultimately determines the likelihood of future viewing behaviour (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004).

8.3. Reflection on the relevance of the tripartite view of enjoyment as attitude

Applying the tripartite definition of enjoyment to positive viewing experiences allows one to understand apparent problems posed by the variety of terms mentioned above. Within this understanding it could, for instance, be possible for a viewer to like a certain soap opera, have a general appreciation of the genre or have a preference for South African rather than international soap operas (all cognitive reactions), while not experiencing pleasant emotions (affective experience) while watching a specific episode, because of interruptions by other family members or having to check on dinner during the commercial breaks.

It is useful to think of enjoyment as an attitude in the context of the current study as it contributes a psychological perspective on the interpretive process through which loyalty develops. A cognitive and an emotional experiential process combine to form either a positive or negative belief about a soap opera, which in turn determines whether individual intends to become a loyal viewer. The exact nature of this interpretive process and the factors that influence the positive and negative valence of the affective, cognitive and behavioural responses will be addressed in later chapters of this thesis.

9. Conclusion: The psychological processes that culminate in loyalty to soap operas

In this Chapter, several psychological processes that contribute to audience loyalty to soap operas have been identified and discussed. These include perceiving and interpreting the behaviour of soap opera characters in a way that it is comparable to how we perceive and interpret that of people in real life. A strong argument has also been made for the relevance of the social psychological processes of identification and imitation (wishful identification) in viewers' relationship to soap opera characters, as well as the formation of pseudo social relationships with the characters. Other psychological concepts that have been identified as playing a role in making sense of television include the use of schemas and the fundamental attribution error.

The interpretations gleaned from this literature review have been synthesised into a conceptual model, indicating how psychological processes culminate in audience loyalty. In Chapter 7 and 8, the third hermeneutic will draw on this understanding, using it to further understand the interpretation made in Chapters 5 (the first hermeneutic of the soap opera viewers) and 6 (the second hermeneutic of the market researcher).

Chapter 3 that follows is a discussion of the interpretive framework within which this study was conducted. The chosen interpretive framework is hermeneutic phenomenology. After hermeneutic phenomenology's main components have been identified and explained, a research pathway, based on these ideas are defined. These ideas have, in turn, informed the methodology.

Chapter 3 - Interpretive framework

1. Introduction

Chapter 2 is a detailed account of the literature reviewed for this study. The current chapter is a discussion of the interpretive framework within which the research was conducted. A hermeneutic phenomenological framework was deemed most suitable. As seen in Figure 3.1, as throughout this chapter, is an illustration of how a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway was developed. The chapter comprises of three main sections. The first is a discussion on phenomenology. In this section the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger are contrasted and the researcher's choice of hermeneutic phenomenology is justified. The second section is a discussion of the key aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology that are pertinent to the study. The chapter concludes by setting out a detailed hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway based on these principles.

Figure 3.1. Graphical representation of the contents of chapter 3.

The choice of hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretive framework is especially useful in media studies, as it provides an understanding of the lived reality from the perspective of the viewer. As Rogge (1989) confirms:

> In order to do justice to the complexity of human actions in relation to the media, we need a method of hermeneutic interpretation. Applying such a method to the family in its specific set up as well as its broader social conditions enables us to describe those structural aspects which are relevant to the family's everyday media-related activities. Such an approach may be called hermeneutic and interpretive because it does not lose sight of the actual living situations. Rather, it relates media use to the concrete everyday world of a given family (p.172).

As will be discussed in this chapter, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach assumes that interpretation is necessarily bound to each of these contexts holding the promise of providing an integrated interpretation of the lived reality under study.

2. Phenomenology

This chapter begins with a discussion on phenomenology. A brief description of the history of phenomenology is provided to illustrate the relationship between Heidegger and Husserl. This is followed by a discussion on the ontological convergence and the epistemological divergence between Heidegger and Husserl. This section concludes with a justification for using a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework.

2.1. The history of phenomenology

Phenomenology was established in the early 20th century in the works of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre Heidegger, Husserl and others (Kemerling, 2001; Smith, 2008), and has since developed into arguably one of the most influential philosophical traditions of the twentieth century (Berrios, 1989; Smith, 2008). Husserl is considered the father of this interpretive paradigm and his original phenomenology is the systematic study of consciousness, which is the only phenomenon that one can be sure of as our experience of the world is constituted in and by consciousness. Phenomenology is literally is the study of things as they take on meaning from the perspective of a first person experience (Smith, 2008).

The question of how meaning is attached to objects is fundamental to the development of Western philosophy. It reaches back as far as Plato and Aristotle, through the rationalist-empiricist debate in the 17th century to the present day (Kemerling, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1986; Smith, 2008). Comparing different philosophical paradigms' understanding of how concepts are formed plots the development of phenomenology as it is known today. In an empiricist definition, the phenomena that appear before the mind are the worldly characteristics of things or our sensory perception of those characteristics. In the rationalist tradition, phenomena that appear before the mind are rationally formed ideas of the phenomenon. The question that arose amidst these developments was 'do objects exist outside of the mind or do objects exist only in the mind'? Husserl wanted a theory that was able to accommodate both. He wanted to be able to study the meaning of the consciousness of phenomena without discounting the shared reality of the phenomena that inhabit experiences (Smith, 2008).

Since the turn of the previous century phenomenology has had three major concerns: 1) the manner in which consciousness and the contents thereof relate to the external world, 2) the possibility of differentiating between mental and physical phenomena, and 3) the manner in which phenomena are distinguished from one another (Berrios, 1989; Kemerling, 2001).

Empiricists in the United Kingdom understood the relationship between the mental act, its contents and the external world with the received model (originally proposed by them). The received model holds that the mental experience is constituted by a process through which the external world (as the only source of knowledge) conveyed its information to the subject through the windows of its senses (Berrios, 1989). Consider, for example, Locke's theory of abstraction: ideas become general when the mind removes it from its specific context. If one considers the idea "blue" various instances of blue can come to mind, for example, blue sky, blue water, blue bicycle, blue eyes. All of these objects have something in common and an idea is formed when these instances of the idea are removed from their contexts (Polkinghorne, 1986). Concepts are formed when the mind generalises (finds commonalities between different objects that relate to the idea) and discriminates (ignores traits that are not relevant to the concept) (Polkinghorne, 1986).

Husserl disagreed with Locke on the fact that concepts could only emerge by abstracting experience (comparing different examples of blue). Consciousness could grasp general concepts independent from experience or else it would mean that an object is only blue because of its similarities to other objects, which is problematic, because how was the initial example of blue understood? Husserl insisted that to have consciousness is to grasp concepts and to understand generalities from the singular, to see things as examples. For Husserl, concepts are a way of being open to the world and do not exist exclusively – either physically or mentally (Polkinghorne, 1986). This stands in contrast to positivist approaches that acknowledge the existence of an objective reality that is independent from human experience and consciousness. In phenomenology the meaning of an object is dictated by how an individual is conscious of it in his/her immediate, first person, experience (Smith, 2008).

Today, there are as many as seven branches of phenomenology (Smith, 2008): transcendental constitutive phenomenology, naturalistic constitutive phenomenology, existential phenomenology, generative historicist phenomenology, genetic phenomenology, hermeneutic and realistic phenomenology. Furthermore, researchers often confuse Husserl and Heidegger's work (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003); they claim to have used Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology, while their research is based on Husserl's later transcendental phenomenology (Polkinghorne, 1986). There are distinct differences between transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology that both infer specific research characteristics. These differences and similarities and their implications will be clarified in the sections that follow.

2.2. The ontological convergence of Husserl and Heidegger

The main convergence between Heidegger and Husserl that is relevant to this study is ontological (what reality is), while the difference between them that will most affect this study is epistemological (how reality can be studied). Ontologically, phenomenology sees reality as lived experiences in which the individual who is experiencing the reality cannot be removed or separated from it. This stands in contrast to the Cartesian duality which postulates that reality is something separate from the individual and which can be studied objectively. Phenomenology abandons this positivist stance in favour of

studying lived experiences. For phenomenology, the focus is on how the world is lived by the person and it examines the taken-for-granted knowledge that informs human beings' existence (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

This approach appealed to Husserl for the possibility it offered of uncovering a reality that is based on experience and therefore certainty. His focus was to uncover the essences of experiences through conscious pursuit. Heidegger, on the other hand, believed that all consciousness is already interpretation. Although Heidegger and Husserl agree on what reality is, it is on how this reality can be studied that they diverge (Laverty, 2003).

2.3. The epistemological divergence between Heidegger and Husserl

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology uses a special method of reduction by means of which the invariant aspects of a particular phenomenon are identified and described. All knowledge in transcendental phenomenology is based on absolute certain insights that remain unchanged in any context. Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, in contrast, argues that all description – in fact all human awareness - is always already interpretative and that it cannot be removed from the context in which it is experienced (Laverty, 2003; Malpas, 2008; Wilcke, 2002).

Transcendental phenomenology is a way of thinking that aims to describe a reality that exists independently from individual interpretations. A researcher working from this paradigm would aim to identify his/her biases and keep the description of the phenomenon under study *pure* from it, a technique referred to as bracketing. Heidegger, however, argues that all description is always already interpretation. All forms of awareness are interpretive. A researcher working in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition therefore acknowledges that the meaning we make of an object or process cannot be understood in isolation from past meanings. In so doing, he/she will aim to include all elements that contribute to the historicity of the interpretation (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

The main divergence between Heidegger and Husserl is epistemological or concerned with how reality can be studied. Since the researcher's purpose for selecting one of these approaches is to inform a research design and interpretation of data, the choice of interpretive framework is made primarily on the epistemological characteristics of the approach. As will now be discussed, the hermeneutic phenomenological principles of enquiry, as described by Heidegger, are most appropriate for the current research project.

2.4. Justification for using a hermeneutic phenomenological interpretive framework

The study is a secondary analysis of existing data by means of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study since the lived reality under study (loyal soap opera viewership) is situated in an individual, historical, physical and social context, which has to be incorporated into the research design. For Heidegger, our

understanding of the world is inherent and inextricably linked to our being-in-the-world. Day to day knowledge precedes any theoretical understanding and not the other way around (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Paley, 1998). Loyalty to a soap opera necessarily implies that the viewer has a subjective affinity to the programme, which causes him/her to return to watch another episode repeatedly. It is a very individual and psychological set of events.

It could be argued that one who grasps the genre conventions of a soap opera would best understand how the genre practically sustains loyalty. But as the previous chapter showed, the link between a structural (or even procedural) understanding of the genre by the researcher or academic, and the subjective experience of loyalty (by a viewer) is not necessarily apparent. In contrast, Heidegger would assert that the person experiencing loyalty towards the soap opera would have the best understanding of it (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

This study aims to make a contribution to media psychology by bringing the active role of the viewer and the psychological processes that take place as the viewer experiences loyalty into consideration. For this reason, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach with an emphasis on interpretation by the viewer is the most viable interpretive framework.

3. Hermeneutic phenomenology

Some central concepts of Heidegger's philosophy will now be discussed. This section acts as an introduction to the full methodological application of hermeneutic phenomenology in the current study.

3.1. Dasein

For Heidegger, understanding is not a way of knowing facts about the world, but rather a way of being. If Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on Dasein (a term coined in his seminal work *Being and Time*), or the situated meaning of a person in the world (Laverty, 2003; Malpas, 2008). Reality is understood in terms of a human being's physical and temporal relatedness to the world (Malpas, 2008).

3.2. Historicity of interpretation

Forming the backdrop to our existence is a constant hermeneutic interpretation that is inextricably linked to history and the 'structures of interpretation that are in place'. The meaning we make of an object or process at any given time is inevitably built up from past experiences and past meanings and cannot be understood in isolation from it (Malpas, 2008). Participants that took part in the market research would therefore not have been able to express how they made meaning of a preferred soap opera without conscious or unconscious reference to a personal history of television viewing and past narrative moments with personal significance.

3.3. Facticity and the fusion of horizons

Facticity refers to the inseparability of our own being with that of others. We do not exist as individual entities that constitute meanings as individual thinkers, with no relation to others. Our understanding is co-constituted and synergised (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997) in our interaction with others. Heidegger sees our way of being as a reciprocal interdependence between the self, others and objects.

In a research context, hermeneutic phenomenology is therefore concerned with the biases that all interpreting individuals *(*the participant, the original market researcher and the current secondary researcher) bring to the process; with the acknowledgement that their mutual interaction in the process, in itself, influences the nature of the interpretations made (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997). As the interpreting individual (e.g. the current, academic researcher) develops an understanding of the lived reality under study, this lived reality under study gradually becomes part of his/her bias through the interpretation provided by others before him/her (the viewer). This is the process through which facticity is established, and this process is called *the fusion of horizons.*

The fusion of horizons is a term developed by Gadamer and describes how the frame of reference of the researcher and the lived reality under study come together. A horizon can be understood as the vision (knowledge, pre-understandings) available at a particular point in time and which is not static, but expands as our understanding of a phenomenon deepens (Debesay, Nåden & Slettebø, 2008; Wilcke, 2002).

3.4. Heideggerian prejudice

Heideggerian prejudice is a concept that describes the prejudgements that are necessarily present and influential in all interpretations. While interpreting a lived reality, one necessarily compares new interpretations with fore-meanings (a general grasp of the whole situation in advance). These fore-meanings are based on fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

As discussed above, the issue of prejudice is a key point of divergence between transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology. While the former attempts to bracket off the influence of researcher bias, the latter argues that it is impossible to step outside of your own pre-understanding. Since there is a exchange between the individual and the world as they comprise and are comprised by each other, the researcher should rather "become as aware as possible and account for these interpretive influences" (Laverty, 2003, p. 9).

As one continues with the task of interpretation, one may come across paradigm shifts (hermeneutic turns) or the fusion of horizons (Conroy, 2003; Debesay et al, 2008). A hermeneutic turn or paradigm shift is an instance in which a change takes place in one's understanding of how to interact with the

world (Conroy, 2003). The process through which all of this takes place is referred to as the *hermeneutic circle*.

3.5. The hermeneutic circle

The hermeneutic circle is a central concept in hermeneutic philosophy. It represents the circular nature of the interpretation shared between individuals and their interactions (Conroy, 2003; Debesay et al, 2008; Laverty, 2003). The circle represents how interpretation involves interpreting the parts and the whole within the context of prior interpretations. Figure 3.2 is a representation of the hermeneutic circle.

Figure 3.2. Hermeneutic circle.

Neither the whole, nor any of the parts can be interpreted without reference to each other (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). Attempting to interpret any part of the lived reality on its own would mean removing it from the circle of interpretation and its relation to other parts of the whole, and essentially stripping it of its meaning (Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997).

The circle is ever expanding. The researcher approaches the lived reality within the hermeneutic circle with certain pre-judgements (fore-groundings) from which he or she projects an understanding (fore-meanings or anticipation of what the interpretation will be). The researcher then interacts in the hermeneutic circle, and through paradigm shifts allows the interpretation to be adjusted. The circle expands and the process starts again with redefined pre-judgements, a revised anticipation of what the interpretation will be, and the potential of new paradigm shifts or hermeneutic turns (Wilcke, 2002). This process continues until the researcher reaches a temporary place of sensible meaning that is free of inner contradictions (Debesay et al, 2008; Laverty, 2003).

3.6. Changing the hermeneutic circle into a spiral

By definition, the hermeneutic circle is a closed loop. In a research setting, however, Conroy (2003) suggests the opening of the hermeneutic circle into a spiral, where interpretation will no longer be restricted by a closed loop of enquiry. Changing Heidegger's hermeneutical circle to that of a spiral (see Figure 3.3) allows the interpretation of a group of people to build on each other's understanding over time.

Figure 3.3. The hermeneutic spiral.

Hermeneutic phenomenology admits that a researcher can never truly achieve an insider's perspective. A double hermeneutic therefore emerges in which the participant interprets his/her own experiences and the researcher interprets the responses of the participant within the context of the interaction inside the research setting. A secondary analyst therefore creates a third hermeneutic in which the original double hermeneutic is re-examined. The current study is such a secondary analysis. It takes place at the periphery of the spiral and involves the creation of a third hermeneutic.

3.7. Modes of being

Heidegger (Conroy, 2003) distinguished between three modes of being, namely authentic mode of being, inauthentic mode of being and undifferentiated mode of being. While the modes of engagement determine how we interact with our environments, the modes of existence/being relate to the consistency between our actions and our motivations. It is important for the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher to be conscious of the modes of being when interpreting research participants' accounts of the lived reality (Conroy). Figure 3.4 compares the three modes of being. Each mode will be discussed below.

Figure 3.4. Modes of being.

The first mode of being is the authentic. In this mode of existence, a person's actions flow from his/her convictions. A person that exists in this mode is consistent and legitimate in the way that he/she thinks and interacts with the world. This stands in contrast to the inauthentic mode of existence where no consistency can be found between a person's actions and motivations. The most common mode of

existence is the undifferentiated mode of existence. In this mode, people act in the world without thinking about why they are acting in a certain way. There is no congruence between motivation and action. In this mode of existence, people act out of habit or under orders (Conroy, 2003).

3.8. Modes of engagement

Our actions are usually determined by a silent thought that plays on the background of the world in which we interact and behave, without thinking about what we are doing. Only when unusual things happen (in this case, when we are asked to comment on our experiences in a research context*)* are we prompted to assume a meta-thinking that allows us to compromise and reinstate this equilibrium in which we usually live (Conroy, 2003; Palley, 1998; Zahorik & Jenison, 1998).

Heidegger (Conroy, 2003) identified three modes of engagement in which we live in the world: ready-to-hand, unready-to-hand and present-at-hand. Figure 3.5 illustrates the interaction between these modes of engagement. Each mode will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 3.5. Modes of engagement in the world (adapted from Conroy, 2003).

3.8.1.   Ready-to-hand mode of engagement.

The first, and most common, is the inauthentic mode of engagement. Most of our actions and daily life take place in this mode. Behaviour in this mode is identifiably automatic, relies heavily on cultural conventions and customs, and does not include meta-thinking and deliberate action. Human beings are born into a society with cultural practices and social conventions. Many decisions about behaviour have already been made and any new members of the society are taught how these conventions work. For instance: people in the USA drive on the right-hand side of the road and the British (and their old colonies) drive on the left. These are simply aspects of the world that we live in. We do not think about the fact that we drive on this side of the road. Unless, our taken-for-granted knowledge is challenged, when visiting a foreign country that drives on the opposite side of the road, we will

continue not thinking about it. This is the silent thought within which we live and our actions are ready-to-hand (Conroy, 2003; Zahorik & Jenison, 1998).

3.8.2.   Unready-to-hand mode of engagement.

The second mode of engagement is what Heidegger calls the unready-to-hand mode of engagement. When a person becomes aware that the situation requires deliberate attention, he/she slightly adapts his/her way of thinking about and interacting with the environment to make it all work. Heidegger (Conroy, 2003) offers an example of using a hammer. We will start using the hammer in the ready-to-hand mode of engagement (i.e. using it without thinking of how, or that we are using it). If our use of the hammer fails to achieve the desired results, however, we will recognise that our way of being (our use of the hammer) requires deliberate attention and slightly adjust the way in which the hammer is used. In this way, our engagement with the world is unready-to-hand, as the action required unfamiliar (or non-automatic) behaviour (Conroy, 2003).

3.8.3.   Present-at-hand mode of engagement.

Should our use of the hammer still not produce the desired results, we will move over to the last and most strenuous mode of engagement, known as the present-at-hand mode of engagement. In this mode, we actively think about our situation and context, and make a deliberate decision on how to act. Heidegger believed it would be quite impossible to live in this mode and make conscious decisions on all our actions (Conroy, 2003; Zahorik & Jenison, 1998). Objects (and other features of our lived reality) are usually conceived of in terms of usefulness for the task at hand. While one is actively engaged in purposeful action, representations of objects in terms of their stable features are not possible. It is only when this purposeful action is interrupted that one considers the object in terms of its features, in a theoretical, present-at-hand manner (Zahorik & Jenison, 1998).

A television, for instance, is not represented by its features, i.e. square, black, aluminium, but rather for its ability to allow access to entertainment. While using the television, the viewer will interpret the television in a ready-to-hand mode of engagement and will not consciously think of the television. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is necessary for a viewer to be transported into the narrative and to allow him/her to enjoy the programme (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004).

3.8.4.   Application of the modes of engagement.

The modes of engagement are useful in wanting to understand how the viewer will engage with the object – soap opera. A soap opera viewer will mostly interact with the soap opera in the ready-to-hand mode of engagement but could, from time to time, be prompted to move into the conscious modes of engagement. This may happen, for instance, if the viewer is confronted with a family member that wishes to watch a different programme (anxiety), requiring the viewer to defend his/her viewing choice, or deciding to watch a repeated episode in another timeslot (unready-to-hand mode of engagement). If this does not resolve the situation sufficiently, he/she may be required to consider the

motivation for and specific role of watching soap operas in his/her life (present-at-hand mode of engagement).

As a participant in a market research study the viewer was in the most strenuous, present-at-hand, mode of engagement, seeing that he/she was required to reflect on the intricacies of the lived reality for an extended period of time. The academic researcher was also in the present-at-hand mode of engagement, as she was actively interpreting the lived reality of soap opera viewing from the different relevant perspectives.

4. Clearing in the woods

To explain the interplay between the world and our engagement with it through the silent thought mentioned above, Heidegger uses the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor. Imagine a person walking through thick woods and suddenly coming to a clearing. If he/she steps into the clearing and turns around to regard the woods from within the clearing, he/she sees the woods for what it really is. The reality of the woods comes up in relation to the clearing. The clearing can only exist in its relation to the woods and someone observing the woods can only come to an understanding of the woods if regarding it from within a clearing. A comparison to Plato's famous allegory of the cave (Dreyfus, 1996; Thomson, 2001) and the 1999 science-fiction adventure film The Matrix (Phillips, 2008) will further explain the metaphor.

Plato describes a situation in which a group of people are placed with their backs to the opening of a cave, facing a wall. The people are chained so that it is not possible for them to turn their heads around and look at the sun coming in from the opening. Various objects from life outside the cave are brought in and the sun casts their shadows on the wall for the group of people to see. If they are never freed from their chains and able to turn their heads around to see the sun, they will never realise that the objects they know and see are only shadows of their full selves. In the same way, the characters in the Matrix will never realise that the reality of what they experience everyday is a product of computer programming, if they are not unplugged from the Matrix (Dreyfus, 1996; Phillips, 2008; Thomson, 2001). The clearing in these metaphors would be Plato's sun or The Matrix's programming. Although it is what sustains reality, it remains in the background, outside of our everyday consciousness. Before setting out the detailed research pathway, the key principles of hermeneutic phenomenology as set out above, will now be summarised in relation to these metaphors.

The cumulative knowledge gained in our lived reality (our historicity of meaning, the total contents of the hermeneutic circle) provides the clearing (the sun or the computer programming). We are *Dasein* or in-the-world (situated inside the woods, chained in the cave, living inside The Matrix) and we remain there for as long as we live in the ready-at-hand mode of engagement and the undifferentiated mode of being. If something happens to disrupt this way of being (if we are asked to comment about the lived experience in a research setting; if we step into the clearing; if the chains are cut or if we

take the red pill) we are forced to assume a present-at-hand mode of engagement with the world. When this happens, we are bound to facticity and hermeneutic prejudice (we can never escape what the group knows collectively about the cave and shadows, or the knowledge we gained while walking through the woods or living in The Matrix). Our interpretation of the world (the sense we make out of the trees we see on the edge of the clearing, the objects that casted their shadows on the cave wall, or the unrecognisable computer code) is bound to what we knew it as while in-the-world. Husserl would urge the observer to bracket this knowledge out and interpret the newly revealed essence of the reality objectively, while Heidegger asserts that this is impossible (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002).

Our lived experiences (our understanding of being in the world) create the clearing in our lives. It both limits and opens what can be real and what can be done. Our shared experiences become the guide to what can be regarded as things, what can be regarded as human beings, and what counts as possible actions for us to take (Dreyfus, 1996).

The key proponents of hermeneutic phenomenology have been discussed in this section. In the next section this interpretive framework is translated into an actionable research pathway. This pathway was used as a guiding structure throughout the research to ensure that it remains within the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. The research pathway set out in the next section becomes the clearing (the sun, the computer programming) that sets the limits and opens up the methodological possibilities of the rest of the thesis.

5. A hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway

As research is a self-correcting exercise (where research findings may prompt the methodology to be revisited), constant reflection on the relevance of methods used and the value of insights obtained within a relevant paradigm of what constitutes science, is of critical importance. Methodology has to be congruent to the philosophical paradigm selected for the study, and in a practical way reflect the paradigm as the project progresses (Annells, 2006; Laverty, 2004). The principles of hermeneutic phenomenology have been outlined in depth in the above text. The methodological implications and applications that will ensure that the research is truly conducted within the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition will now be specified.

Like Conroy (2003) the researcher would like to emphasise an allegiance to the theoretical paradigm, by using the metaphor of a clearing to structure the research approach. The methodology is therefore presented as a "pathway in the woods" that unfolds within the natural environment of the lived experience, rather than a concrete road that is set in stone and that necessitates a compromise of the environment's natural character.

As will be described in Chapter 4 when discussing the methodology, the research is a secondary analysis of two sets of existing data (two hermeneutics): the lived reality of the soap opera viewer (the first hermeneutic) and the interpretation of this lived reality by the market researcher who conducted

the original study (the second hermeneutic). As the academic researcher embarked on this study, a third hermeneutic was created while she interpreted the lived reality of the soap opera viewer and the interpretations of the market researcher. The three hermeneutics are respectively represented as "footprints" (the lived reality of the soap opera viewer), "direction markers" (the interpretation of the market researcher) and "a map" (the interpretation of the academic researcher). Figure 3.6 is a graphical representation of the three sets of meaning units in the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor.

Figure 3.6. Three groups of meaning units within the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor.

In defining this metaphor the researcher wanted to find terms that are economical and easy to understand, while still being meaningful and symbolic of the hermeneutic phenomenological process. It is appropriate to refer to meaning units in the soap opera viewer's lived reality as footprints, since they are idiosyncratically left by the individual while bound to the surroundings (blending with materials and other footprints and being affected by the environment) (Conroy, 2003). Similarly, direction markers (or sign posts) in such an environment represent a second-level interpretation of fragmented information that is already present and, like footprints, it cannot be removed from its context without losing all significance and meaning. The name map co-ordinates for the last group of meaning units (that of the academic researcher) is also appropriate as these co-ordinates are (like footprints and sign-posts) inherently context bound, and would lose all significance if not used and regarded in relation to its geographical context. *Footprint*, *Direction Marker* and *Map Co-ordinates* are meaningful terms in this metaphor, as they make symbolic reference to the historicity and contextuality of all interpretations, while conveying the unique role each of these plays in the larger hermeneutic spiral.

The purpose of the research is to arrive at a clearing in the woods in which the academic researcher and the reader are able to look back at the trees (lived reality of soap opera viewership) and achieve a present-at-hand perspective on it (create a model of soap opera viewership that illustrates the link between psychological processes and loyalty). As the academic researcher progressed on this research process, she tracked the footprints of the soap opera viewers and attempted to walk through

the woods in the same path they did. The market researcher has walked on this path once before and has left direction markers at various points to help the academic researcher find the way[4]. The research is therefore mainly situated within the woods, although the soap opera viewer was guided to assume a present-at-hand mode of engagement with soap opera viewership during the market research, and went into the clearing for brief periods of time. As the market researcher followed the footsteps of the viewers with the help of the direction markers left by the market researcher, she gradually drew out a map to this lived experience. Through following this map, the academic researcher's main goal is to stand in the clearing with the reader, looking at the woods before the reader and future readers start making their own footprints in the woods.

5.1. Hermeneutic phenomenological research principles

Practically, a set of research principles can be set out as a pathway to ensure that the hermeneutic phenomenological (HP) tradition is maintained throughout the research process. The principles have been adapted from Annells (2006), Conroy (2003) and Laverty (2004) and guided the research process. They have been grouped into four sub-sets of principles, each set dealing with a different aspect of the approach, namely: a) the researcher's orientation to the narrative, b) sensitivity toward the researcher's own interpretive influences, c) the aim of the methodology, and d) practical ways of implementing the method.

5.1.1. Orientation to the narrative.

HP principle #1: Extend what is hidden inside the narrative accounts and interpret it based on background understandings of the viewers.

HP principle #2: Promote self-reflective practice by the participants through participation in the research and through offering an account of the researcher's understanding and interpretations.

HP principle #3: View every account as an interpretation made from a individual's background.

HP principle #4: View any statements made by the participant as being significant to him or her on some level.

HP principle #5: Regard every account as having its own internal logic. Whatever is discussed in an interview is considerable to its bearer whether conscious or not.

HP principle #6: Identify and reword to state the full meaning participants understandings within their own modes of existence and mode of engagement.

HP principle #7: Regard hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretation of interpretation made by the participants.

HP principle #8: Look beyond the actions of the participat to a broader background context and its relationship to specific events.

HP principle #9: Stay close to the narrative.

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[4] This is said, however, with the acknowledgement that there may be various other (equally valid) paths.

5.1.2. Sensitivity to own interpretive influences.

HP principle #10: Ensure that the researcher remains aware to his or her own mode of existence, and of engagement and foregrounding.

HP principle #11: Be conscious of the coping tools used by the researcher in any of the modes of existing.

HP principle #12: Allow the researcher's background knowledge to influence interpretation.

5.1.3. Aim of the methodology.

HP principle #13: Constantly maintain a questioning attitude and look for for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings and deeper understandings.

5.1.4. Practical application.

HP principle #14: Explicitly show the shared world of understanding between the researcher and the researched.

HP principle #15: Absorb yourself in the hermeneutical circle throughout the research spiral.

HP principle #16: Demonstrate the immersion of the researcher into the hermeneutical spiral.

HP principle #17: Progress in a circular manner between parts and the whole, what is disclosed and hidden, the world of the participant and the world of the researcher.

HP principle #18: Engage in hermeneutical interpretation along with the participants.

HP principle #19: Remain conscious of movements in understanding, and look for exemplars and principles.

Lastly, the analysis and interpretation has been written using language that remains consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. The term research participants was favoured over the term respondents, as it implies that the viewers who took part in the research co-created the meaning that emerged in the research. The term "findings" was favoured over the term "results", as the latter implies that a final conclusion (that does include the possibility of reinterpretation) has been reached. Overall, the language used in the thesis is focused on conveying that the researcher attempted to explain, understand and explore the lived reality rather than to test, prove or establish beyond all further interpretation any aspect of it.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter hermeneutic phenomenology was contrasted to transcendental phenomenology and it was argued that the former is an appropriate worldview for research in the lived reality of media usage. Key hermeneutic phenomenological concepts were discussed and a set of research principles that guided the practical implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research process were listed. The next chapter offers a detailed discussion on how these principles were applied.

Chapter 4: Methodology

1. Introduction

A discussion on hermeneutic phenomenological methodology should be a demonstration of how good judgement and responsible principles are applied within an interpretive context (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997). The interpretive framework has been discussed at length in Chapter 3. The current chapter deals with the methodology that flowed from the interpretive framework.

As depicted in Figure 4.1, this chapter consists of three main parts: the research context, the analysis process and a reflection on the methodology. The first part consists of a short introduction to the academic study and a discussion of the market research study of which the current thesis was a secondary analysis. It also includes the interpretive influences of the market researcher and the academic researcher. The second part is a detailed discussion of the conceptualisation of the analysis process, as well as the practical steps followed during the analysis. The chapter concludes in the third part with a reflection on the quality and the ethics of the research.

Figure 4.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 4.

2. The research context

As mentioned in Chapter 1 and the introduction to this chapter, this study was a qualitative, secondary analysis of a market research study conducted on behalf of the SABC. The aim of the current study was to understand the psychological processes that underlie positive viewing experiences and loyalty to a soap opera. In order to address this objective, a systematic process of analysis that was grounded in a theoretical framework and informed by a literature study had to be defined.

The reader will have read the discussion on the clearing in the woods metaphor which Heidegger uses to summarise the main principles of hermeneutic phenomenology. As discussed towards the end

of Chapter 3 this metaphor was used to structure the academic process to ensure that the research was conducted within the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition.

The research design was informed by the nature of the data available for analysis and the interpretive framework. The discussion on the methodology will therefore commence with a summary of the data sources.

2.1. Data sources

The perimeter of the clearing in the woods was demarcated by the data at the researcher's disposal. The study benefited from five distinct sources of meaning detailed in Table 4.1. Each of these will be discussed in the section to follow. Due to ethical considerations, only excerpts that relate specifically to the lived meaning of loyal viewership from the focus group transcripts, field notes and market research report was included (see section 4.2 for further discussion).

Table 4.1 *Data sources*

First hermeneutic - footprints *(Interpretations by soap opera viewers)*
1. Excerpts from verbatim transcripts of focus groups conducted nationally.
2. Excerpts from reflective diaries of viewers who participated in the deprivation exercise.
3. Focus group with participants who took part in the deprivation exercise.
Second hermeneutic - direction markers *(Interpretations by the market researcher)*
4. Excerpts from researcher's field notes.
5. Excerpts from market research report.
Third hermeneutic – map coordinates *(The researcher's own interpretations)*
6. Ongoing log book, decision trail and insights journal.

The study consists of three hermeneutics, each taking place at a different position in the hermeneutic spiral. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, the academic research process was designed to allow each level of interpretation to build on the previous, and to allow the researcher's own background knowledge and a literature review to influence the final interpretation. Also indicated in Figure 4.2, the Chapters were written in a sequence that followed the methodological timeline (this is discussed in Chapter 1).

Figure 4.2. Graphical representation of the methodology.

2.1.1. First hermeneutic data – footprints.

Data in the market research study conducted on Isidingo was primarily collected by means of focus groups. Participants' accounts of their experiences (footprints) are the essence of the first level of interpretation. Participants therefore included individuals who have experienced the social reality under study and who were able and willing to engage in conversation about it (Laverty, 2003). During the market research, all participants were recruited with these specific criteria in mind. Additional recruitment criteria included population group, gender, age and location. Participants were recruited by a professional market research recruitment company.

Table 4.2 details the demographic profile of the focus groups included in the sample. Six viewers participated in each focus group and each focus group was 2 hours in duration. Groups were held in market research venues with a one-way mirror to allow the market researcher and the client to view the groups. Groups were tape-recorded and verbatim transcriptions of the recordings were made. Participants received a R200 incentive to take part in a group.

Table 4.2 *The focus group sample*

	POPULATION GROUP	GENDER	AGE	VIEWERSHIP	LOCATION
1.	Black	Female	25-34	Regular	Johannesburg
2.	White	Female	50+	Regular	Johannesburg
3.	White	Female	25-35	Occasional	Johannesburg
4.	White and Indian	Female	25-34	Regular	Durban
5.	White and coloured	Female	25-39	Regular	Port Elizabeth
6.	Black	Male	35-49	Regular	Durban
7.	Black	Male	25-34	Regular	Durban
8.	Black	Female	30-40	Occasional	Johannesburg
9.	White and coloured	Female	18-24	Occasional	Stellenbosch
10.	Black	Male	25-34	Occasional	Johannesburg

A second source of footprints is the reflective diaries of five participants who took part in a deprivation exercise. Five participants were identified in the focus groups as exceptionally loyal viewers[5]. They were asked to stop viewing the soap opera for one week and keep a reflective diary of their experience. (They received incentives of a set of videos of the episodes they missed, as well as autographed photographs of the stars). This small selection of diaries is the second source of footprints. Table 4.3 summarises the demographic profile of the participants in the deprivation exercise. Although their individual ages were not preserved in the data, all participants were between 18 and 49 years of age.

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[5] No formal definition of exceptional loyalty exists. The market researcher subjectively decided from participants' responses in the focus groups whom to include.

Table 4.3 *The deprivation exercise sample*

	RACE	GENDER	AGE	VIEWERSHIP	LOCATION
1.	Black	Female	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
2.	Black	Female	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
3.	Black	Female	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
4.	Black	Male	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg
5.	Black	Male	Between 18 and 49	Regular	Johannesburg

2.1.2. Second hermeneutic data – direction markers.

Two sources of data are available that represent the market researcher's interpretation and therefore the second hermeneutic (the direction markers): 1) the researcher's field notes and 2) the market research report. The former is an informal document with anecdotal notes and thoughts collected during the course of the fieldwork. The latter – the market research report – is in the form of a PowerPoint document that was presented to stakeholders at the SABC. Excerpts from both these documents, that refer to the lived experience of loyal viewership was included and interpreted in the current study.

The market researcher used an independent moderator or focus group facilitator to facilitate the focus groups and observed each group from an adjacent viewing room. Field notes are therefore interpretive comments generated by the market researcher while observing each group in session. After the conclusion of the fieldwork, the focus groups were transcribed and analysed together with the market researcher's notes. The market researcher lastly prepared the report which was presented to the stakeholders at the SABC.

The academic researcher purposefully consulted both the field notes and the market research report when analysing the second hermeneutic. The former was included in an attempt to stay close to the narrative (HP # 9) and the latter in an attempt to include an integrated understanding that consolidates all interpretations into a conceptual whole (HP # 19).

2.1.3. Third hermeneutic data – the map.

Interpretation in Heideggerian prejudice implies that the researcher's interpretation is linked to his/her own 'foregrounding' or background and 'fore meanings' or interpretations (HP Research Principles # 10-12). These join the interpretations of others (the first researcher and the participants) in the hermeneutic spiral. During analysis, the academic researcher continued along the hermeneutic spiral of interpretation with a continuous cognisance of the foregrounding to which all interpretations were

inextricably linked and progressed towards the development of principles and a theoretical understanding.

Since Heidegger believes it is impossible for the researcher to distance him/herself completely from his/her own foregrounding, the academic researcher kept a reflective diary or decision log of her interpretive process. These are not presented in a separate chapter, but forms part of Task 2: Interpretation - in the analysis framework discussed later in this chapter.

2.2. The data structure

The academic study takes place on the outside of the hermeneutic spiral and the academic researcher therefore did not have input into the content of the data when it was first collected during the market research study. The content of the data is dependant on the focus group discussion guide in the first hermeneutic and the presentation structure in the second hermeneutic. Detail on these structures will now be provided.

2.2.1. The first hermeneutic – the discussion guide.

The following is an extract from the discussion guide used in the focus groups, including only the questions that 1) did not relate to any of the exclusions discussed in a later section on ethical considerations in this chapter, and 2) held the promise of eliciting interpretations that refer to the current study's research question.

As in all qualitative data collection, however, the discussion guide (see Table 4.4) remains a guide which is often changed to naturally adapt to the conversation. Each transcript discussed in the chapter dealing with footprints therefore did not contain all of the questions included here in this sequence.

Table 4.4 *Discussion guide*

1. General viewing preferences
▪ TV Channel preference. Reasons.
▪ Types of programmes preferred.
▪ Family programmes vs. personal indulgence.
2. Soaps
▪ Viewing behaviour
o Which soaps are viewed?
o Why do you watch soaps?
o Frequency
o Is there someone you watch with?
▪ Comparison

- Elements that would cause a soap to fail.
- (Deprivation) If they had to take all soaps off the air, what would they lose?

3. Viewer relationship

- When did they start watching and why?
- Who in household watches? Reasons. Do they influence your viewing choice?
- Main drivers.
- If they had to take Isidingo off the air?
- Why regular/ why occasional.
    - Reasons for changes in viewing behaviour.
- How does Isidingo of say 5 years ago compare with current? Two years ago (mine vs. on media).
- If not mentioned spontaneously:
    - 'Some people say that Isidingo deals with social issues. Have they noticed it? Which can they remember?'
    - What is the family's take-out?
    - How do they handle these issues?
    - Do they want more/less of it in future?

4. Storylines

- Recall and appeal of main plots and sub plots.
- What are the really hot themes?
- What types of stories are preferred? *(Deep delving into the appeal of the story…what are the personal touch points?)*
    - Long (e.g. Cherel) vs. short (e.g. Hostage)
    - Social/ private lives vs. business environment vs. suspense stories
- Prompt specific storylines – which preferred etc.
- If they could write the next storylines, what should happen?

5. Characters

- Favourites?
- Involvement with characters, i.e. with which characters do they have an almost real-life relationship, with and which not? Who do they talk about at work? Who would they catch themselves thinking of afterwards?
- *Deprivation exercise:* all pictures on the table. Drop characters down a mine shaft one by one. What would the impact be? In-depth exploration of contribution and meaning of main characters.
    - *7 most important and 3 least…*
- Which character do you aspire to most?
- One gets certain types of characters that can be in a story e.g. the Mother, the bitch,

> the tycoon, the village idiot, nice guy, knight in shining armour, antagonist, gangster, villain, cop/law, underdog , rebel, etc.
> - o Which of these types of characters do Isidingo need?
> - How do they feel about the Matebani family?
> - What role do they see Vusi playing?

Footprints were also obtained from the diaries kept by loyal viewers who took part in the deprivation exercise. This exercise was designed to be spontaneous and participants were not given any formal structure within which to make their comments. Viewers also discussed their experiences in a focus group after the conclusion of the exercise.

2.2.2. The second hermeneutic – the presentation structure.

The second hermeneutic is contained within the market researcher's field notes and the market research presentation. The field notes were structured around the same general content as the discussion guide, seeing that they were made during the course of the focus groups. The presentation comprised of the following sections:

<u>Research context</u>
- Background
- Research objectives
- Methodology
- Sample

<u>Key findings</u>
- Understanding the influence of soaps
- The viewer's relationship with Isidingo
- Characters
- Storylines
- Strategic implications

2.2.2.1. *The second hermeneutic is more complete than the first.*

The market research project's data set was wider than the data included in the first hermeneutic, as it consisted of a total of 21 focus groups. The second hermeneutic therefore includes reference to focus groups that were not included in the discussion of the first hermeneutic. The second hermeneutic is also more complete than the first. Less prominent characters were, for instance, discussed in the second hermeneutic that were not discussed in the first. This is due to two reasons: Firstly, the second hermeneutic represents all the market researcher's interpretations, while (for reasons of economy) the first hermeneutic set out in Chapter 5 only represents an extract of 10 focus groups. Secondly, within hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher is encouraged to elaborate

on the interpretations of the research participant in order to create fuller interpretations and rectify incomplete interpretations (HP #13).

2.3. Interpretive influences

In keeping with the hermeneutic phenomenological research principles #10-12, it was important to describe any factors that influence the interpretations made by the market researcher and academic researcher. This was not done in an attempt to protect their interpretation from these biases, but rather to use and acknowledge the influence that it might have.

2.3.1.   The market researcher's interpretive influences.

The context within which the market researcher's interpretation was made is her experience in conducting research on television audiences and programmes, and her personal experience as a soap opera viewer.

The market researcher has several years of experience in conducting market research for local broadcast agencies, including the national broadcaster (the SABC) and the only pay-tv operators DStv and M-Net. Her experience spans all genres and audiences, and includes channel, programme and platform evaluations, channel, programme and platform development studies, genre studies and many audience studies. Within the soap genre, the market researcher has conducted numerous studies on three prominent local soap operas, including Egoli, 7de Laan and Isidingo as well as conducting a study testing concepts for new soaps. The market researcher is personally also an avid soap viewer and at the time of the research, would have described herself as a loyal Egoli and 7de Laan viewer.

2.3.2.   The academic researcher's interpretive influences.

The context within which the third hermeneutic is positioned includes various memories that shaped the academic researcher's understanding of a soap opera. These include early memories of watching soap operas, reading various articles in the media, as well as experience gained in her academic and professional careers.

Her first memory of watching a soap opera is watching the American soap opera - Santa Barbara during the 1980s. She recalls it as being dramatic and lavish. She also remembers watching Egoli with her mother in the soap's early years and writing a review of Egoli for a creative writing class in high school, in which she critiqued the acting of some of the newer members of the cast as over dramatised. She also has a memory of her mother – an Afrikaans language teacher – teaching her that every story has a plot line in which tension and conflict builds to a climax, after which the story is resolved and that readers (or viewers) get engrossed in a story because of a need to see the tension resolved. Her understanding of realism in television is unfluenced by memories of her mother teaching her of the importance of realism in décor, props, costumes and make-up in school theatre productions.

Another piece within the interpretive whole that is her lived reality of soap operas, is that she enjoyed a story a lecturer told her class in her third year of undergraduate study. A very popular female character in a soap opera in India was sent to school in the story and research showed that female admissions to tertiary institutions was statistically significantly higher following the year that the storyline played on air.

After she completed a BPsych degree she pursued a career in market research at a company which specialises in broadcast media research. Before commencing this academic study, the researcher had completed various studies on other television programmes, through which she realised that viewers tend to prefer certain genres; that transportation is a necessary determinant of viewer enjoyment of a story; and that storylines and characters are what interest viewers of narrative genres.

She had never watched the soap opera that forms the main context for this study, Isidingo, and knew it only as a soap opera in which Michelle Botes played the main character (the villainess Cherel). She has encountered most of the soap operas produced locally through other research conducted on television and therefore has an overall perception of the nature of each soap opera.

During the writing of the first draft of this thesis, three incidents took place which had an important influence on her interpretation of the data. She firstly read an interview with Michelle Botes that emphasised the educational possibilities of Isidingo to her. Gray Hofmeyr, the producer of Isidingo asked Michelle Botes if she believed that a television drama such as Isidingo has any value to the nation. She replied that she does believe it has immense value. She believes that the storylines are a reflection of our society and that there are opportunities for education in stories such as Nandipha's AIDS, Agnes's illiteracy, and how to start a small business. This is also true about the role of the law in our society, abuse, violence, etc. She expressed the opinion that it is important that these issues are addressed and explored, and that soaps offer such an opportunity in a non-threatening way (Retief, 2008).

The second incident that transpired during the time of writing was the death of Ashley Callie, the actress who played Lee Haines in Isidingo. The researcher found various comments on web-based viewer forums where viewers expressed their sadness, and she came across a website dedicated to Ashley Callie, created by her fans. These viewer responses reiterated the importance of the characters to viewers in their experience of the lived reality.

The last incident that had an impact on the researcher's interpretation of the data was an article that appeared in a national paper on the first of April 2008. At the time, the country experienced a power crisis with power outages in many areas. The article read that the government had asked that all soap operas be moved from their usual broadcast time in the evening to broadcast times between 12H00 and 14H00 in an attempt to save electricity (Willems, 2008). Viewers were outraged. The realisation

that the paper was able to make a successful 'April Fool's Joke' with this story illustrated the significance of soap time.

This section dealt with the research design, the sources of meaning (data sources), sampling, the structure and content of the data, and the interpretive influences of the two researchers. The next section will deal with the conceptualisation of the analysis process before setting out the detailed steps through which the analysis was conducted.

3. Analysis and interpretation

The next section describes the process through which the analysis and interpretation was conducted. It firstly deals with the conceptualisation of the analysis and interpretation process, then follows with an overview of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. Lastly the implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway is illustrated.

3.1. Conceptualising the analysis and interpretation processes

In recognition of the hermeneutic phenomenological principle of historicity, it is fundamental to provide an audit trail of the method through which analysis was conducted, as this will allow the reader access to the interpretive process. A discussion of methodological approaches from which the current methodology has been derived, will be presented in this section. The authors referenced are summarised in Table 4.5. Each of these approaches will be described below.

Table 4.5 *Literature review of methodological processes*

Author	Main methodological contribution
Conroy (2003)	A structured hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology.
Laverty (2003)	Contrast between methodological considerations of phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology.
Ratner (2001)	A structured process for the identification and interpretation of themes.
Ryan and Bernard (2003)	Techniques to identify themes.
Thompson (1997)	A narratological interpretation of a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) illustrate various techniques to identify themes. They suggest that analysis should be done through a systematic process involving four main tasks: (1) discovering themes and sub-themes, (2) winnowing themes to a manageable few, (3) building hierarchies of themes, and (4) linking themes into theoretical models.

Ratner (2001) describes a structured process for the identification and interpretation of themes as summarised in Table 4.5. After central themes have been defined, themes are grouped into related

categories using the manipulative techniques of cutting and sorting (grouping individual expressions in which the same themes manifest). Ratner (2001) calls this level of organisation the 'General Theme', which conveys the broader meaning of related central themes. The meaning of each general theme is then explained and developed into a thick description in the General Structure before all general structures are then integrated and compared in the General Summary.

Table 4.6 *The analysis process as described by Ratner (2001)*

Statement	Central Themes	General Theme	General Structure	General Summary
Significant statement quoted verbatim from narrative account.	CT 1 CT 2 CT 3	GT 1	A thick description of each General Theme.	All general structures integrated and compared in the General Summary.
	CT 4 CT 5			

Laverty (2003) explains that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach starts with the researcher engaging in a process of self-reflection in order to use his/her biases and assumptions as an integral ingredient to the interpretive process. Meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched as they engage in the hermeneutic spiral and identify many constructions or multiple realities. Interpretation is influenced by pre-understandings and a movement between the text and its context. Through special attention to language, and an appreciation for the interpretive nature of human existence, an understanding incorporating the perspectives of the researcher and researched emerges.

Thompson (1997) argues that the concept of the hermeneutic circle implies that the research should start with a thorough review of the historic and cultural conditions relevant to the domain of interest. This ensures a broad and thorough frame of reference from which to embark on the interpretive process. He points to five key aspects of the hermeneutic view of stories: plot lines, symbolic parallels, intertextual meanings, existential themes and cultural codes, and continues to demonstrate how this approach generates three levels of interpretation. These are: (1) discerning the key patterns of meanings expressed by a given participant in the texts of his/her consumption stories, (2) identifying key patterns of meaning that emerge across the consumption stories expressed by different participants, and (3) deriving broader conceptual and managerial implications from the analysis of consumer narratives.

The methodology of Conroy (2003) is perhaps the most practical application of an HP research process. She uses a six-aspect interpretive phenomenological approach, which she describes as: 1) attending to footprints and concurrent preliminary interpretation (identifying meaning units and making preliminary interpretations), 2) in-depth interpretation (which involves writing a précis of what was said

and adding to the interpretation), 3) second reader introduction to the narratives (an audit involving five independent readers also contributing an interpretation), 4) paradigm shift identification (where she looks for hermeneutic turns in her own, as well as others' interpretations), 5) exemplar development (identifying representations of consistencies), and finally 6) principle development (integrated interpretations). Her approach moves from the inner core of the hermeneutic spiral (aspect 1 and 2) where there is a more immediate engagement between the researcher and the researched, to aspects 3-6 where there is a broader conceptual interaction with the data. The approach also convincingly illustrates how allegiance to the hermeneutic principles is upheld. Her interpretive framework, in contrast to that of Ratner, has only three levels as illustrated in Table 4.7, the actual narrative, a précis column and an interpretive column. The interpretive column consists of rich descriptions of themes identified and contains all levels of interpretation within the hermeneutic spiral, i.e. her own preliminary, as well as in-depth interpretation and the interpretation of second readers, as well as reference to her on-going log.

Table 4.7 *Conroy's (2003) interpretive framework*

Narrative #1	Précis	Interpretation
Verbal account of participant.	*Paraphrased summary of concept conveyed in the narrative – making the implicit explicit.*	• *Theme labels and explanations.* • *Second reader interpretations.* • *On-going reflective diary logs.*

The précis and interpretation become 'footprints' (her terms for meaning units) in their own right and provide fertile ground for mature interpretive phases of the research. I will now discuss the interpretation framework adapted from these approaches.

3.2. Overview of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway of this study

As Figure 4.3 illustrates, the interpretive framework was designed to follow the hermeneutic spiral of interpretation with each new level of interpretation building on the previous. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, interpretation started at the centre of the spiral with the interpretations provided by the soap opera viewers. These interpretations are elaborated on by the market researcher, which is then completed by the academic researcher.

Figure 4.3. The hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway of this study.

Practically, this interpretive process consisted of three primary tasks: 1) attending to footprints and direction markers; 2) finding themes and 3) drawing the map. The first task, attending to footprints and direction markers involved identifying meaning units (Task 1A) and elaborating on them (Task 1B). This provided a rich narrative from which to identify themes (Task 2). Lastly, the researcher prioritised themes, related them to theoretical thinking and arrived at a final, integrated interpretation. Table 4.8 summarises the steps, as well as the hermeneutic phenomenological principles on which each was based.

Table 4.8 *The interpretation framework*

CHAPTER	**Chapter 5 and 6:** Data			**Chapter 7:** Discussion
TASK	**Task 1: Attending to footprints and direction markers.**		**Task 2:** Interpretation	**Task 3:** Drawing the map.
	Task 1A: Finding footprints.	**Task 1B:** Accentuating footprints.		
DESCRIPTION	Extracting sections from the focus group transcripts and market research report that relate to the research question.	Writing a précis. Paraphrasing initial interpretations to make the implicit explicit and provide a preliminary interpretation.	Finding themes. Identifying recurrent ideas that relate to the lived meaning of loyal soap opera viewership.	Organisation and prioritisation of themes and sub-themes; relating themes to literature and creating a final integrated interpretation.
REFERENCE	Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Conroy, 2003; Thompson, 1997; Ratner, 2001	Conroy, 2003; Thompson, 1997; Ratner, 2001	Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Conroy, 2003; Ratner, 2001	Conroy, 2003; Ratner, 2001;Thompson, 1997

HP PRINCIPLES	#2, 6, 9, 14, 17 and 18.	#1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 13.	# 13, 14, 17 and 19.	# 1, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 19.

3.2.1. Defining a meaning unit.

Interpretation and meaning making in the mature phases of the analysis process was based on a consideration of the meaning units identified in the first, exploratory phases. The validity of the third hermeneutic is therefore entirely dependant on the integrity of the thematic categories identified within the first and second hermeneutic (Ratner, 2001).

Ratner (2001) argues that a meaning unit should be a coherent and distinct meaning extracted from the narrative being studied. To qualify as a meaning unit, it must conserve the psychological integrity of the theme being expressed, by neither reducing it to meaningless abbreviated segments, nor confounding it by making references to other ideas.

Meaning units should also have a direct relevance to the research question. In the analysis, the researcher found ideas that qualify as themes under the above definition, yet held no relevance to positive viewing experiences and subsequent loyalty to a soap opera. In such cases, the meaning unit was not included in the theme hierarchy.

During Task 1 in the interpretive framework, the researcher therefore looked for psychologically significant phrases that represented a coherent and distinct idea relevant to the lived meaning of loyal soap opera viewership. This process was used for the re-interpretation of both the soap opera viewer (footprints) and market researcher's (direction marker) interpretations.

3.2.2. Defining a theme.

After identifying (Task 1A) and elaborating on meaning units (Task 1B), the researcher looked for themes that reoccurred in the narrative and related to the research problem. The objective was not to arrive at an objective view, but rather to elaborate the interpretation to include all psychological processes that made a significant contribution to audience loyalty.

A theme is an interpretive conclusion that the participant ascribes to and allows to influence his/her behaviour. Participants' descriptions of their behaviour or beliefs are expressions that present the theme to the researcher. The data preserved in verbatim transcripts can be seen as a collection of expressions through which the researcher is able to discover the themes or interpretive conclusions that constitute participants' lived realities (Opler, 1945).

Themes should depict the psychological significance of the meaning units (Ratner, 2001). If a soap opera viewer surmises that she need not be concerned about what other family members would

prefer to watch during soap opera time, it could be inferred that she is emphasising her own needs over that of the family, and that it is a form of self-gratification. Any inference made about the psychological significance of a statement should, however, be consistent with the larger body of text. If it is clear from other parts of the narrative that the whole family consensually watches the soap opera with her, self-gratification would likely not be an accurate description.

Meaning units and themes have now clearly been defined. To follow is a discussion on the researcher's own interpretive framework, based mainly on that of Conroy (2003), yet also drawing from other theorists where deemed appropriate.

3.3. Implementation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway of this study

The hermeneutic phenomenological analysis pathway of this study has been described above. I will now discuss the practical implementation of each of the tasks identified in the preceding section with reference to specific strategies that were followed to complete the analysis.

3.3.1. Task 1: Attending to footprints and direction markers.

The first task when analysing the first and second hermeneutic was to attend to the footprints and direction markers. In this task, the researcher first identified meaning in the focus group transcripts, diaries, research fieldnotes and market research presentation that held significance to the research question. After these meaning units were identified, the researcher paraphrased the narratives to make their implicit meaning explicit.

3.3.1.1. Task 1A: Identifying meaning units that held significance to the research question.

Since only extracts of the full transcripts are being included (refer to section 4.3 on the ethical considerations), the first step in engaging with the narrative was to make text selections in accordance to the definition of what constitutes a meaning unit (refer to 3.2.1 above). The identification of meaning units requires a decision on what comprises a distinct and coherent theme, Ratner (2001) warns that the identification of meaning units can only happen once the researcher is familiar with the complete account, i.e. once the researcher understands what the soap opera viewer is saying. This sub-task therefore entailed an attempt at "understanding the internal logic of the expression" (HP Research Principle #5) to ensure that the verbal accounts selected were meaningful within context of the larger narrative.

3.3.1.2. Task 1B: Writing a précis - paraphrasing narratives to make the implicit explicit.

Ratner (2001) put forth a procedure for identifying culturally significant themes in narrative statements. He explains that after identifying 'meaning units' the researcher paraphrases them into "central themes".

I revisited the interpretations of the participants and the original researcher with specific focus on drawing out what was hidden in the narrative accounts that the narrators were not conscious of. This allowed the development of principles that are based on the reinterpretation of all interpretations.

The essence of the footprint remained intact (i.e. the conceptual integrity of the expression was preserved), but was made clearer and more pronounced. The original meaning unit was translated, interpreted and reworded to elucidate its full meaning.

Some expressions of themes were palpable while others were subtle, symbolic or even idiosyncratic. The meaning and psychological significance of a theme were therefore not always apparent in the words used to describe its expressions, and had to be inferred based on implicit rules, assumptions, and distinctions.

For this reason, the researcher took note not only of what was said, but also with what was implied or suggested by what was said (Ratner, 2001). It was therefore impossible for the researcher to distance herself from the dialogue. To make the necessary interpretation and provide the additional depth, the researcher stepped into the clearing, bringing with her, her own interpretive influences.

Table 4.9 Conroy (2003) illustrates the interpretive framework within which analysis took place. An excerpt is taken from one of the participants' responses as an example of the analysis in this phase.

Table 4.9 *The interpretive framework – Task 1*

Task 1A: Finding footprints		Task 1B: Accentuating footprints
Narrative #1 *Black female, regular viewers, age 50+*	**Précis**	**Interpretation**
Focus group excerpts in accordance to the definition of a meaning unit.	*Paraphrased summary of concept conveyed in the narrative – making the implicit explicit.*	• *Theme labels and explanations.* • *Includes on-going reflective diary logs.*
M: Which soap do you watch? "I watch Isidingo because it is not as far fetched as Days and Bold"	- An Isidingo viewer yet has some knowledge of Days of our Lives and The Bold and the Beautiful" - Colloquially called "Days" and "Bold" - Groups Days and Bold in one category. - Recognises fantasy storylines in Days and Bold.	T1: Makes distinction between Escapist and Reality soaps T2: Only views soaps within own soap genre. *Diary note 08/01/2008: I learnt today that Days*

	- Inherent value judgement: possibly sanctions disapproval of escapist soaps as expressed by members of her culture or social group. - Perceives realistic storylines in Isidingo. - Preference for Isidingo based on it being different from Days and Bold. - Spontaneously justifies preference for Isidingo.	*started in 1965- even before TV in SA. These (escapist soaps) could be the generic against which all other soaps are compared.*

The first column relates to Phase 1 A: "Finding footprints" and contains verbatim quotations from the text that relate to the research question. The second column consist of what Conroy (2003) calls the précis. Phase 1B: "Accentuating footprints" is recorded here as it is a summary of the narrative, yet makes the implicit explicit.

The précis should be interpretive but the comments should remain meaningful to the context it refers to, as well as relating the full meaning expressed (Conroy, 2003; Ratner, 2001). If a viewer said "I watch my soap every chance I get", it could not be summarised as "regular viewer" or "misses some episodes" or even "internally motivated to watch". Although each is technically accurate on some level, not one of these descriptors succeeds in communicating the apparent, inherent longing that she has to watch more episodes.

In the example in Table 4.9 the précis column presents a summary of all the unsaid but implied content inherent to the statement: "I watch Isidingo because it is not as far fetched as Days and Bold". The speaker could also have said that: 1) she does not watch Days of our lives and The Bold and the Beautiful but she has pre-existing knowledge of it, to the extent of being comfortable to use their colloquial names, that 2) she knows "Days and Bold" has unrealistic storylines, 3) she thinks that soaps with such storylines should not be watched, 4) soaps with perceived realistic storylines are superior to those with unrealistic storylines, and that 5) her choice to watch Isidingo is as much a rejection of "Days and Bold" as it is an approval of Isidingo.

Each one of these statements is a part of the whole experience, however, only when combining them do we "stay close to the lived experience" (HP Principle # 9). These statements did not represent the "theme" as per the researcher's definition. Themes (as defined in 3.2.2) were recorded in the interpretive column.

For this reason, the researcher did not use the interpretive structure put forth by Ratner (2001) above, as she believed it creates the risk of fragmenting lived experiences (a key Husserlian concept) into

disconnected sub-themes, which will necessarily need to be combined in a later stage of the research to retain the psychological integrity that Ratner (2001) sanctions. The Interpretation Worksheet suggested by Conroy (2003) (Table 4.6) and illustrated in Table 4.9 was more appropriate, as it utilises the précis column to accentuate, elaborate and "thicken" the narrative account while allowing the theme to emerge from the collective concept in Task 2.

3.3.2. Task 2: Interpretation.

Tasks 1A and B prepared a rich narrative from which to extract themes. Observational techniques, as described by Ratner (2001) and Ryan and Bernard (2003) were then used to identify themes (Task 2) in the narrative.

The following techniques were applied:

- Repetition: Looking for ideas that reoccurred within and across different accounts. The number of repetitions necessary to constitute a recurring theme was relative to the overall content and nature of the interpretations. For example, some characters were particularly enjoyed by most loyal viewers.

- Indigenous typologies or categories: Looking for terms or expressions that were used in an unusual way by all members of the group, for example, referring to Days of our lives and *The* Bold and the Beautiful as "Days" and "Bold".

- Metaphors and analogies: Looking for metaphoric speech that left out information everyone knows (which is implied by what is said), for example the expression "Watching soaps is like coming home"; leaves out that people are usually relieved when arriving home; feel comfortable in familiar surrounding, experiences a sense of belonging, and usually knows the other people who are also home intimately.

- Similarities and differences: Comparing different groups' answers to the same question. Similarities could lead to themes, while differences could be telling of sub-themes within different demographics. For example, regular viewers were more individually motivated to watch soap operas, while occasional viewers' viewing were more dependant on social influence.

- Linguistic connectors: Looking for words and phrases (such as 'if', 'before', 'instead of') that indicate causal relationships, for example, "I watch Egoli because I recognise some of the places the scenes are filmed in…"

- Missing data: Looking for things that are not mentioned, for example, all male groups mentioned that they like and admire the character Barker, while none of the female groups expressed the same sentiment.

- Theory related material: Apart from identifying indigenous themes, the researcher also looked for confirmation of concepts mentioned in literature, for example, looking for evidence of pseudo-social interaction with characters (Cohen, 2001).

One of the first sources of a-priori themes was the set of interview questions asked (as summarise in the discussion guide). Unlike the literature review, these themes were partly empirical (Ryan &

Bernard, 2003) as they were designed to address a certain problem/objective identified by the commissioning client and already included some hypotheses. Research questions were also adapted within the group to immediately accommodate empirical information that emerged in the conversation with participants. The discussion guide as presented at the beginning of this chapter therefore represents the first collection of a-priori themes that influenced the nature of the interpretations made.

3.3.3. Task 3: "Drawing the map" – final integrated interpretation and theory development.

The concluding task in the HP interpretive framework entailed creating an extensive, integrated description of the lived experience from the individual-level of expressions and meanings (Thompson, 1997). The researcher's immersion in a background of literature on the subject was the most relevant in this stage. Interpretation at this point was neither pulling out a theory from the data nor fitting an understanding derived from literature onto the text. Rather, the researcher's developing theoretical background became an frame of reference within which interpretation took place, while engagement with the participants' narratives allowed the opportunity for these initial (theoretical interpretations) to be changed and extended (Thompson, 1997).

3.3.3.1. Conceptual Preparation – creating an orienting frame of reference.

The researcher's conceptual preparation (Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997) included a literature review and making explicit her own biases and assumptions that were used as an integral part of the interpretive process (HP Research Principles #10-12). The literature review contributed insights on audience research, television research and research on soap operas within different contexts, and equipped the researcher with a broader knowledge base from which to interpret the current data. The reflective diary allowed the researcher to make her pre-existing ideas explicit and actively use it as interpretive influence during analysis.

A literature study could be regarded as an appeal to objectivity through an attempt to gather all information available on the research topic and offering an all-inclusive view of the topic. The literature study in the current study was not included in an appeal to objectivity. Doing so would be diluting the current hermeneutic phenomenological study with a key principle of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. True to the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition the researcher admits that all interpretation remains context bound and that no objective conclusion on the psychological processes culminating in audience loyalty could really be made.

By including the literature study, the researcher allows insights from other studies to become part of the context from which her interpretations are made. All within the understanding that another researcher, interpreting the data following a different literature review could arrive at an interpretation different from her own. A thorough revision of the academic knowledge available on the subject broadens the researcher bias. This is essential as the success of the study depended on the breadth

and depth of the researcher's background knowledge and her ability to make conceptual connections between literature and data (Thompson, 1997).

3.3.3.2. Prioritising themes.

Opler (1945) suggests that the importance of a theme relates to; 1) the frequency in which it appears, 2) if it appears in different types of ideas and practices, 3) the reaction of participants if the theme is violated, and 4) the degree to which a theme's expression is controlled by specific contexts. These guidelines were used to create hierarchies of themes during Task 3.

3.3.3.3. Linking themes into theoretical models.

In Chapter 7 the hierarchies of themes were interpreted in cognisance of theoretical models identified in the literature review, as well as the researcher's own biases captured in the reflective diary. As if in a hermeneutic circle of her own (HP Research Principle #15), the researcher neither 'projected' her background understanding onto the data, nor tried to 'extract' a theory from it. She engaged in a dialectical process, in which the one interpretation shaped the other to arrive at a fuller interpretation that neither of these could have produced on its own.

3.3.3.4. Identifying paradigm shifts.

As explained in Chapter 3, Dasein refers to a person being-in-the-world. If applied to this study it would mean the viewer mostly engages with the soap opera with what Heidegger calls the ready-to-hand mode of engagement. In this undifferentiated mode of existence, silent thought determines his/her actions until the taken-for granted-background is challenged. When this occurs (such as when a soap viewer is asked to overtly comment on her lived experience in a research setting) the soap opera viewer will change her way of being and acting to match her new context.

The same process occurred when the researcher commenced with the interpretive task. The hermeneutic task of interpretation always inherently implies a shared meaning. When trying to understand a text, the comprehension of the reader starts with an understanding she anticipates will emerge. This anticipation or projection is bound by a taken-for-granted background which encompasses the exploratory terrain and determines what the reader expects she will find (Conroy, 2003).

In this way, making sense of other's interpretations provided the opportunity for hermeneutic turns or paradigm shifts to emerge. The researcher looked for themes that alluded to a degree of consistency in interpretation, but she also looked for inconsistencies and fluctuations in the nature of interpretations in all levels of the enquiry. She also expected her own projected understanding to be challenged. This recognition that paradox exists was in keeping with Heidegger's thinking about historicity. It acknowledged that everyday interpretation merges with re-interpretation, and is the practical application of the notion of interdependence, where our knowledge and experience is co-constituted with others (Conroy, 2003).

4. Reflection on the methodology

The last part of this chapter is a reflection on the methodology. This reflection includes a discussion on the quality of the research and the ethics of the research.

4.1. Quality of the research

Traditionally the quality of research is judged based on its validity (or the extent to which the methodology succeeds in studying the envisaged research topic) and reliability (the extent to which the same results will be achieved by another researcher repeating the methodology). These measures have to be redefined within a hermeneutic phenomenological context, however.

The quality of a study should be judged by the terms of its own paradigm (Golafshani, 2003; Rolfe, 2006). The discussion on the reliability and validity of the research therefore draws on the principles of research within hermeneutic phenomenology as presented in Chapter 3.

4.1.1. Validity of the HP research pathway.

In hermeneutic phenomenological research, validity is an issue of rigour (Laverty, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1981) provide four tests of rigor which are useful to increase the validity of hermeneutic phenomenological studies. The tests are:

1) Truth value (credibility), which refers to how close the interpretation conforms to what the participants are trying to say. Truth value can be increased if participants are able to review their own narratives, as well as interpretations made in later stages of the research (HP Research Principle #2). Seeing that the researcher is unfamiliar with the original participants and this falls outside the scope of a secondary analysis the researcher stayed as close to the narrative as possible when reviewing the first and second hermeneutic. HP Research Principle #9.

2) Applicability (fittingness), which is how useful the research is considered to be by those who read it. As discussed in Chapter 8, the current study makes a useful contribution to media psychology, media studies and research methodology.

3) Consistency (audit-ability), referring to equal treatment of all participants' data. A semi-structured analysis procedure, as is set out above, guides the interpretation process and ensured consistency in the analysis of each account. One set of theme identification techniques was used where appropriate, while the research adheres to the HP Research Principles throughout.

4) Neutrality (confirmability) or the extent to which the research is objective from researcher bias. Neutrality and confirmability can never be achieved completely within the hermeneutic

phenomenological paradigm since each reader brings with him/her a different background that will necessarily create different interpretations. A clear decision trail has, however, been left to allow the reader access to the full interpretive process (HP Research Principles #10 and 11).

4.1.2. Reliability of the HP research pathway.

Reliability, or the possibility that another researcher performing the same study will arrive at the same findings, is another aspect of methodological rigour that is traditionally discussed when considering the quality of research. Like validity, this notion also has to be redefined within a hermeneutic phenomenological context. With its emphasis on interpretation and historicity, no hermeneutic phenomenological study would qualify as reliable, since each reader or subsequent researcher will add a unique history to the study.

Where bracketing (keeping the research pure from researcher bias) is a core principle in transcendental phenomenology, multiple instances of interpretation that allow patterns to emerge, a detailed discussion on how these patters emerged, as well as the interpretive process itself, is critical to reliability in hermeneutic phenomenological studies (Laverty, 2003). This, as well as most of the goals discussed under validity, can be achieved by keeping a decision trail that documents rational, procedure, outcome and a prolonged persistent engagement with the narrative (Laverty, 2003).

Within this context, I have attempted to address the issues of research quality in the following ways:

a. By making explicit the order in which chapters were written and reviewed to allow a subsequent researcher to re-walk the same path as I did (although he/she will leave their own footprints).
b. By providing a detailed account of the methodology in earlier sections of this chapter.
c. By separating the third hermeneutic from the first and second to ensure that the reader can effortlessly follow the researcher's decision trail.

4.2. Ethical considerations

Two major ethical considerations arise when conducting secondary analysis of archived qualitative data. The first is preserving the confidentiality and anonymity of original research participants, and the second is the protection of copyright and the complex issues of ownership and control of research data (Mauthner, Parry & Backett-Milburn, 1998).

Debate on the ethics of revisiting archived qualitative data includes the preservation of contextual information that could arguably make the data more useful to secondary researchers. Mauthner et al. (1998) argue that this information does not necessarily increase the value of an archived data set to be equal to when it was used in primary research. According to them even if contextual information was preserved, the meaning does not in the data but in the process of interpretation employed to make sense of it. This view is congruent to the hermeneutic phenomenological approach followed in

the current secondary analysis, although some contextual information was preserved in the dataset that was analysed. Contextual information that was preserved and used in this study includes the age, gender, race, location and viewing behaviour of the research participants. The above information does not pose significant ethical challenges because no identifying information was captured and used. The research participants were therefore anonymous to the researcher, addressing Mauthner et al.'s (1998) first ethical consideration.

Not being able to identify research participants does, however, pose a challenge in itself. Ideally, the secondary researcher should contact the original research participants and obtain consent to re-use the data (Heaton, 1998). However, Heaton argues that when a secondary researcher is not able to contact the research participants of the primary research to obtain additional consent, the researcher should make a professional judgement on whether the secondary analysis violates the agreement made with the research participants in the primary research.

Informed consent was obtained from participants in the primary research by Qualitative Intelligence (QI). The process through which consent is obtained in all QI's studies follows a two-phased approach. During the process of identifying and recruiting potential research participants, the interviewers who are tasked with recruitment are given a recruitment script. The recruitment script discloses the purpose of the research and asks the potential participant if he/she would be interested in participating in the research, should they qualify. The first consent is then given verbally by the participant as a willingness to be screened for possible inclusion in the research. Participation is therefore voluntary and research participants obtain a financial incentive to thank them for their contribution to the research once they have contributed. The second consent is obtained at the commencement of the focus group. The moderator welcomes the research participants to the focus group and begins by explaining the purpose of the session and the role of the observers in the adjacent viewing room. The moderator assures respondents of anonymity and obtains permission to record the discussion and transcribe it for further analysis.

As suggested by Heaton (1998), the academic researcher made a professional judgement that the study does not violate the agreement made with participants. This judgement was based on an analysis of the consent described above. Firstly, participants are not identified by personal information and the agreement that their anonymity will be protected remains intact. Secondly, participants gave permission for the focus groups to be recorded, transcribed and used in further analysis. The term further analysis was not defined when the original agreement was made. The academic researcher therefore makes a professional judgement that secondary analysis conducted months after the conclusion of the research is included in this term.

The second ethical consideration identified by Mauthner et al. (1998) is the protection of copyright, ownership and control of the data. The data-owner is the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) who commissioned the market research study. The SABC has provided written permission for

the data to be used in the study. The broadcast media industry is, however, an increasingly competitive environment. The researcher therefore took the following precautions to ensure that the competitive intelligence of the data-owner is protected:

1. The complete transcripts of focus groups with viewers of the soap opera were analysed, but only excerpts that allude to the psychological processes that contribute to the formation of loyal viewership were included as verbatim quotations in the chapter dealing with footprints.

2. The complete market research report was analysed, but only excerpts that allude to the first researcher's interpretations on the psychological processes necessary for the formation of viewer loyalty were included in the chapter dealing with direction markers.

3. The following elements of the market research study did not form part of the current study:
   a. The market research brief detailing the SABC's strategic objective with the soap opera, the research and envisaged changes to the soap opera.
   b. The strategic recommendations made to the SABC in the market research report.

A last ethical consideration is the protection of the propriety information of the market research agency who conducted the primary research. Propriety information of the market research agency includes their interpretation of the client brief and their approach to compiling the market research proposal and presentation. The market research agency, Qualitative Intelligence (QI), has provided written permission that the data may be used in the study. The researcher did, however, take caution to protect the research agency's competitive intelligence by not including the market research proposal or the full presentation in the study. By only including excerpts that make significant contributions to the interpretation of the lived reality under study, QI's propriety information is protected.

The research was also approved by the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities. The committee considered all possible ethical difficulties associated with the research including: a) informed consent, b) risks and possible disadvantages to the participants in the original market research, the data-owner (the SABC) and the market research agency (Qualitative Intelligence), c) the anonymity of the participants in the market research study, d) the protection of proprietary information of the data-owner and the market research agency, e) the dissemination of the research results, and f) the storage of research data.

5. In conclusion

Chapter 4 is a detailed discussion of the methodology used in the study. It sketched the context of the study with reference to the market research study on which the current study is a secondary analysis.

It provided a brief introduction to different authors' approach to secondary analysis and interpretation within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. The current study draws mostly on Conroy (2003) and follows an interpretive framework that – consistent with the clearing-in-the-woods metaphor – completes a hermeneutic spiral. The methodology consists of three primary tasks which, completed with cognisance to the HP Principles outlined in Chapter 3, produced an integrated, rich interpretation of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty.

Chapter 5 includes Task 1 and 2 for the First Hermeneutic. It deals with participant's understanding of their lived meaning and includes the meaning units and themes that relate to the psychological processes they experience as conducive to their loyalty to a soap opera.

Chapter 5: The first hermeneutic

1. Introduction

The methodological application of the theoretical perspective was discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The study is structured around three hermeneutics: that of the research participants, the first researcher in the market research study and the current study. The current chapter analyses and summarises the first hermeneutic or the soap viewers' interpretation of their lived reality. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, the content of this chapter consists of four main sections. The chapter commences with a description of the sample and a presentation of the meaning units. Following the presentation of the sample and meaning units, the ten themes identified in this hermeneutic are presented and discussed. Lastly, one inconsistency in the data (which is considered a hermeneutic turn in the interpretation) is discussed.

Figure 5.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 5.

2. Description of the sample

The sample consists of 10 focus groups as well as a set of diaries from a group of participants who participated in a deprivation exercise, and a focus group with the participants who took part in the deprivation exercise. A total number of 65 participants' interpretation is included in the first hermeneutic. Each group is defined as consisting of either loyal or occasional viewers and also represent a spread of gender, age and race groups[6]. Table 5.1 summarises the sample of the focus

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[6] The academic researcher is aware that race in South Africa is contested (Posel, 2001). In an attempt to stay as close as possible to the narrative (HP#9) these classifications are used as they are used in the original market research proposal. This also follows the categories currently used by Statistics South Africa to classify people (Lehohla, 2005).

groups and the participants (referred to collectively as one group) who participated in the deprivation exercise.

Table 5.1 *Sample summary*

GROUP	RACE	GENDER	AGE	VIEWERSHIP	Location	N
1.	Black	Female	25-34	Regular	Johannesburg	6
2.	White	Female	50+	Regular	Johannesburg	6
3.	White	Female	25-35	Occasional	Johannesburg	6
4.	White & Indian	Female	25-34	Regular	Durban	6
5.	White & coloured	Female	25-39	Regular	Port Elizabeth	6
6.	Black	Male	35-49	Regular	Durban	6
7.	Black	Male	25-34	Regular	Durban	6
8.	Black	Female	30-40	Occasional	Johannesburg	6
9.	White & coloured	Female	18-24	Occasional	Stellenbosch	6
10.	Black	Male	25-34	Occasional	Johannesburg	6
Diaries and focus group	Black	Male & Female	25-49	Regular	Johannesburg	5
TOTAL						65

3. Presentation of meaning units

In preparation for this chapter, the academic researcher read through the focus group transcripts in search of verbatim quotations that related to the research questions. As illustrated in Table 5.2 each verbatim quotation was then paraphrased into a précis to explicate its inherent meaning. After writing each précis, the academic researcher identified the meaning units that relate to the research questions (footprints) in each focus group. The academic researcher lastly compared the footprints present in all the groups and calculated the total number of groups that mentioned each footprint. Table 5.3 summarises the result of this calculation.

Table 5.2 *The process through which footprints were identified*

	Task 1: Attending to Footprints		Task 2: Recording footprints.
TASK	**Task 1A:** Finding verbatim quotations.	**Task 1B:** Accentuating verbatim quotations.	
DESCRIPTION	Extracting verbatim quotations from the focus group transcripts that relate to the research questions.	Writing a précis. Paraphrasing verbatim quotations to make the implicit explicit.	Identifying re-current meaning units in the précis that relate to the lived meaning of loyal soap opera viewership.

LOCATION	Analysis document not included in the thesis.	Analysis document not included in the thesis.	Table 5.3	

Table 5.3 lists the footprints on the left and indicates: 1) the total number of groups that mentioned each footprint, 2) which groups mentioned the footprint, and 3) whether the groups that mentioned the footprint were regular or occasional viewers. To reduce data, only footprints that occur in the interpretation of three groups or more are included in the summary, as a general rule. Exceptions are when a footprint expressed by only two groups could be considered a violation (or opposite) of another footprint (e.g. four groups believe storylines in local soaps are resolved quickly and two groups believe storylines in international soaps drag out) or if it was expressed by groups of the same demographic (e.g. two black male groups appreciative of the fact that the Matebanes retain links to their cultural heritage).

Table 5.3 *Footprint summary*

Footprint	No of groups	Which groups	Regular or occasional viewers or some of both (mixed)
Motivation for viewing			
1. Viewers are very interested in certain characters and less interested in other characters.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
2. Viewers are interested in following the resolution of storylines.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
3. Psuedo-social interaction.	5	1, 4, 5, 9 and 11	Mixed
4. Loyalty based on being up to date with the storyline and not necessarily watching every episode.	3	4, 5, 10	Mixed
5. Soap's proximity to real life as a motivation for watching.	5	1-3, 5 and 6	Mixed
6. Loyalty is compared to an addiction.	4	2,5,9 and diaries	Mixed
7. Viewership is positively influenced by the specific timeslot in which the soap airs.	5	1, 3, 6, 8 and 9	Mixed

146. Escapism[7]	3	2,3, 5	Mixed
Soap repertoires			
8. All watch Isidingo.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
9. Watch 7de Laan, which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo.	5	2, 3, 5, 9 and 10	Mixed
10. Watch Backstage, which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo.	4	3, 4, 8 and 10	Mixed
11. Watch The Bold and the Beautiful.	7	1-5, 9 and 10	Mixed
12. Watch Days of our lives.	4	1, 4, 5 and 10	Mixed
13. Viewership includes local soap operas (other than Isidingo).	10	1-10	Mixed
14. Viewership includes international soap operas.	7	1-5 and 9-10	Mixed
15. Soap repertoire includes three or more soaps.	7	1-5, 7-8	Mixed
Viewing behaviour			
16. Watch Isidingo during the prime timeslot at 18:30 on weekdays during which the new episode is aired.	6	1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
17. Watch any of the repeat transmissions including the next day repeat in the morning or the weekend omnibus.	6	4-7, 9 and 10	Mixed
18. Viewers channel hop during commercial breaks.	3	8-10	Occasional only
19. Watch soaps with female family members.	7	1-3, 5-7 and 10	Mixed
20. Watch soaps in a mixed group of family members.	4	3, 6, 7, and 9	Mixed
21. Was introduced to Isidingo by other family members.	4	2, 7, 8 and 9	Mixed
22. Have developed own loyalty since being introduced by another family member.	4	2, 7, 8 and 9	Mixed
23. Discuss what happens in Isidingo with other people.	6	1, 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10	Mixed
24. Time in which the soap is watched is regarded as a time for physical and/or mental relaxation	3	1, 2 and 9	Mixed
25. Non-TV related responsibilities (such as chores) sometimes compete with Isidingo.	4	1, 3, 8 and 9	Mixed

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[7] This footprint was identified after all the other footprints and true to the hermeneutic phenomenology principle of historicity, it was numbered accordingly.

26. Viewership of Isidingo extends many years.	7	1-3, 6, 7, 9 and 10	Mixed
Beliefs about soaps			
27. Good soaps have realistic storylines.	8	1-6, 9-10	Mixed
28. International soaps are different from local soaps.	4	1, 2, 4 and 10	Mixed
29. Prefer storylines that are realistic.	6	1-3, 6 and 9-10	Mixed
30. Dislike unrealistic storylines.	4	1, 4, 5 and 6	Regular only
31. Storylines progress quickly in good soaps.	4	2-4 and 9	Mixed
32. Dislike when an actor is replaced.	3	5-7	Regular only
33. Good soaps are technically realistic (incl. acting, sets and production quality).	4	1, 2, 4 and 10	Mixed
34. Soaps have storylines that are generic to the genre.	7	1-3, 5, 6, 8 and 10	Mixed
35. Dialogue in local soaps includes vernacular, South African languages.	3	4, 5 and 10	Mixed
36. The storylines in local soaps are up to date with current events and are resolved quickly.	4	3-5 and 9	Mixed
37. Storylines take very long to resolve in International soaps *(Relates to previous footprint).*	2	4 and 9	Mixed
38. Storylines in local soaps resemble real life.	3	2, 5 and 10	Mixed
39. International soaps are more likely to have unrealistic storylines than local soaps.	4	1, 4, 9 and 10	Mixed
Beliefs about Isidingo			
40. Isidingo is appreciated for having quality acting.	3	2, 5 and 10	Mixed
41. Isidingo is appreciated for having storylines that are resolved quickly.	3	1, 2 and 4	Regular only
42. Represents an ideal South Africa in terms of race relations.	3	3, 8 and 10	Occasional only
43. Isidingo is for mature audiences.	3	6, 7 and 10	Mixed
44. Has storylines based within a business context.	5	3, 6, 7, 8 and 10	Mixed
45. Has characters that resemble people the viewer could know from real life.	5	1-4, 6 and 10	Mixed
46. Is a serious soap.	4	1-3, 5	Mixed
47. Has strong characters that challenge each other.	3	1-3	Mixed

48. Has intriguing storylines.	4	1-4	Mixed
Isidingo and social issues			
49. Isidingo deals with social issues.	10	1-10	Mixed
50. Isidingo educates people on how to deal with social issues.	8	1, 3-8 and 10	Mixed
51. Isidingo deals with HIV/AIDS	10	1-10	Mixed
52. Isidingo deals with mixed race couples.	10	1-4, 5-10 & diaries	Mixed
53. Isidingo deals with homosexuality.	3	1, 3 and 6	Mixed
54. Isidingo teaches viewers about people who are different from themselves.	3	5, 8 and 10	Mixed
Storyline preferences			
55. Viewers speculate about what will happen in storylines.	6	1, 4-6, 9 and diaries	Mixed
56. Enjoy short storylines more, but understand the need for longer storylines.	5	2, 4-7	Regular only
57. Storylines should involve both the business and private lives of characters.	4	2, 3, 6 and 7	Mixed
Storylines recalled			
58. Revenge and conflict between Cherel and Barker.	11	All groups and diaries	Mixed
59. Joe and the chicken.	5	2-4, 7 and 10	Mixed
60. Barker setting up Rajesh	4	1, 4, 6 and diaries	Regular only
61. Cherel murdering Duncan.	6	1,2,4,5, 9 and diaries	Mixed
62. Zeb's infidelity and child.	3	1, 6 and 10	Mixed
63. Tanya's suicide	6	1-4, 6 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Barker Haines			
64. Involved with and knowledgeable about Barker	10	1-10	Mixed
65. Like and admire Barker (males only).	3	6,7 and 10	Mixed
66. Barker is invincible.	5	2, 4-6 and 10	Mixed
67. A need to see Barker's humane side, which is Lee.	4	2-4, 9	Mixed
68. Barker should get punished for all he did.	3	2, 6 and 9	Mixed
69. Barker manipulates in relationships	3	1, 2 and 4	Regular only

70. Barker is immoral.	3	3, 9 and diaries	Mixed
71. Barker and Cherel are rivals.	10	1-10	Mixed
72. Learn from Barker not to be an overprotective father.	3	3, 6 and 7	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Cherel			
73. Barker and Cherel is the core of Isidingo's appeal.	5	3, 4, 5, 9 and 10	Mixed
74. Very involved with Cherel, have very strong opinions on her.	10	1-5, 7-10	Mixed
75. Cherel is resilient.	4	1, 4, 5 and 10	Mixed
76. Cherel is strong.	5	1, 3, 6, 8, and 9	Mixed
77. Cherel should get punished for murdering Duncan.	3	1,6 and 9	Mixed
78. Cherel also shows her vulnerable side.	4	2-4, 9	Mixed
79. Have knowledge of her past and have empathy for her.	6	1-5, 9	Mixed
80. Cherel is determined.	3	1, 8-10	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Lee Haines and Rajesh			
81. Involved with Lee, have empathy for her.	7	1-4, 8-9 and diaries	Mixed
82. Lee is under the influence of her father.	8	1-6, 10 and diaries	Mixed
83. Lee could and should stand up to her father.	6	1-4, 9 and 10	Mixed
84. Lee is a strong business woman.	6	1-4, 8 and 9	Mixed
85. Lee should develop and attain the same success in her personal life as she has in her professional life.	4	4-6, 9	Mixed
86. Lee could take over from Cherel as the main bitch.	4	3, 5, 7 and 10	Mixed
87. Viewers have empathy for why Lee is as naïve as she is.	4	1, 3 and 6	Mixed
88. Know Rajesh.	4	2-4 and 9	Mixed
89. Rajesh was framed by Barker.	3	1, 3 and 6	Mixed
90. Lee and Rajesh in a relationship.	5	1, 3, 5, 6 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: The Matabane Family			
91. Love the Matabanes.	7	1, 2, 4 and 6-10	Mixed
92. The Matabanes retain links to their cultural heritage *(two black males groups)*.	2	6 and 10	Mixed

93. Would not like the Matabanes to go through financial trouble again, but understand that it would be reality if they did.	3	2, 7 and 9	Mixed
94. Have watched the Matabanes work very hard for what they have achieved over the years.	3	6-7 and 9	Mixed
95. The Matabanes are admired as a real family.	5	4-6, 8 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Agnes			
96. Like and admire Agnes.	8	1-4, 6-7, 9 and 10	Mixed
97. Agnes will do anything for her family.	3	1, 2 and 10	Mixed
98. Agnes is strong.	5	1, 2, 6, 7 and 9	Mixed
99. Agnes is recognised as fulfilling a mother role.	7	1-5, 7 and 9	Mixed
100. Agnes should be unfaithful to Zeb.	3	2, 6 and diaries	Regular only
101. Take Agnes's side over Zeb.	6	1,2,4, 7-9	Mixed
102. Agnes worked very hard.	4	1, 2, 5 and 6	Regular only
103. Agnes is recognisable as someone that one could know in real life.	3	1, 2 and 4	Regular only
Beliefs about characters: Zeb			
104. Like and identify with Zeb.	3	6, 7 and 10	Mixed
105. Strongly dislike Zeb.	3	2, 3 and 9	Mixed
106. Have empathy for Zeb.	5	1, 2, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
107. Recognise Zeb as someone they could know in real life.	5	2, 3, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
108. Zeb is in conflict with his daughter.	6	1-4, 6 and 10	Mixed
109. Zeb teaches viewers how not to behave	4	4, 6, 7 and 10	Mixed
110. Zeb is old fashioned and too traditional.	3	2, 4 and 9	Mixed
111. Zeb rejects Agnes.	3	2, 6 and 9	Mixed
112. Disapproves of both his children's relationships.	3	2, 3 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Lettie and Joe			
113. Know Lettie.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
114. Know Joe.	11	1-10 and	Mixed

			diaries	
115.	Lettie and Joe's relationship.	11	1-10 and diaries	Mixed
116.	Watched Lettie grow up on screen.	5	1-3, 6 and 7	Mixed
117.	Lettie is in conflict with her father.	6	1-4, 6 and 10	Mixed
118.	Lettie should stand up to her father.	3	2-4 and 6	Mixed
119.	Approve of Lettie's relationship with Joe.	4	2,3, 6 and 7	Mixed
120.	Lettie should continue the relationship with Joe.	4	4, 5, 7 and 10	Mixed
121.	Lettie should be reunited with Vusi – her ex-boyfriend.	6	1, 4-5, 7-8 and 10	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Nandipha and Parsons				
122.	Know Nandipha.	8	1, 3-4, 6-10	Mixed
123.	Nandipha is HIV positive	8	1-4, 6, 8, 9 and 10	Mixed
124.	Nandipha is an essential character because of her HIV status.	3	1, 3 and 10	Mixed
125.	Nandipha teaches one how to deal with HIV/AIDS.	3	1, 3, 6 and 9	Mixed
126.	Nandipha should get ill – her HIV should progress to AIDS.	3	6, 8 and 10	Mixed
127.	Know Parsons.	7	1-4, 6 and 9-10	Mixed
128.	Nandipha and Parsons are married.	4	1, 3, 6 and 9	Mixed
129.	Should adopt a child.	2	3 and 9	Mixed
Beliefs about characters: Papa G				
130.	Enjoy and like Papa G.	10	1-3, 5-10 and diaries	Mixed
131.	Papa G is humorous.	4	4-5, 8-9	Mixed
132.	Papa G is a bad guy who has taken a good turn after jail.	3	4,6 and 9	Mixed
133.	Papa G is enjoyed for his particular way of speaking, which is colloquially referred to as "Tsotsi taal".	5	4-5, 7-9	Mixed
134.	Papa G is involved in organised crime.	3	4-6	Regular only
135.	Papa G is using both Cherel and Barker.	3	3, 6 and diaries	Mixed

Beliefs about characters: Maggie			
136. Know and like Maggie.	6	1-4, 6 and 7	Mixed
137. Maggie is a gossip that interferes with other people's business.	3	4, 6 and 10	Mixed
138. Maggie should get a relationship.	3	1, 3 and 4	Mixed
Other characters			
139. Know Frank Xavier.	8	2-10	Mixed
140. Frank Xavier is a worthy adversary to Barker.	6	2-4 and 6-10	Mixed
141. Know Harriet as Barker's secretary from his past.	3	1, 3-4	Mixed
142. Anticipation of what Harriet will reveal.	3	1,3,4	Mixed
143. Vusi used to be in a relationship with Letti.	6	1,4,5,7,8 and 10	Mixed
144. Should get back together with Letti.	6	1,4,5,7,8 and 10	Mixed
145. Len is liked for his demeanor.	3	4,9 and 10	Mixed

Table 5.3 above represents a complete record of footprints that are prominent across the interpretation of viewers. The data will now be presented as it combines into themes of interpretation. Footprints are not mutually exclusive, seeing that some may contribute to more than one theme. After the presentation of the data in themes, one inconsistency in the data that is regarded as a Hermeneutic Turn will be discussed.

4. Presentation of themes

As discussed in the previous chapter, a theme is an interpretive conclusion that the participant ascribes to and allows to influence his/her behaviour. Participants' descriptions of their behaviour are expressions that present the theme to the researcher. The footprints can therefore be seen as a collection of expressions through which the researcher is able to discover the interpretive conclusions that constitute participants' lived realities. From the footprints presented in Table 5.3 10 main interpretations or themes emerged, some consisting of a number of sub-themes. In keeping with the hermeneutic principle of historicity, these themes are presented in the order in which they were identified, rather than ranked in order of prominence.

Table 5.4 *List of all themes*

Themes from the first hermeneutic
Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour.
Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters.
Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.
Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.
Sub-theme 2.3: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters and viewers relate differently to these two types of characters.
Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.
Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?
Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.
Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines preferred.
Theme 4: A preference for all things real.
Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.
Sub-theme 5.1: Isidingo's characters are real.
Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.
Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational.
Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcasted.
Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership.
Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour.
Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre.
Sub-theme 9.1: Local and international soaps represent two sub-genres that are distinct because of the difference in realism between them.
Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism.

Each of these themes will now be discussed. The discussion of each theme will commence with a listing of all the footprints on which it is based. The numbers in brackets next to the footprints indicate the number of groups that mentioned the footprint. For this purpose the group of participants in the deprivation exercise is regarded as one group, i.e. the same as a focus group. A discussion then follows on how different footprints combine into a theme and verbatim quotations from the focus group transcripts or the précis are mentioned to further illustrate the meaning of the theme.

4.1. Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour

Footprints:

#8 Isidingo watched by all (11).

#22 Have developed own loyalty since being introduced by another family member (4).

#6 Loyalty is compared to an addiction (4).

The first theme that emerges collectively from the footprints is that viewers have developed loyalty or a desire to watch Isidingo on a regular basis. Footprint #8 assures the researcher that viewers watch Isidingo and would be in a position to make meaningful interpretations about it. This is supported by footprint #22 which implies that although viewers might have been introduced to the soap by family members, they have since developed a personal interest in the soap. The last footprint, #6, supports the notion further. Regular viewing of Isidingo has become such a regular occurrence in some viewers' lived realities that they equate it to an addiction, as captured in the précis below:

> The word addiction is used to describe the viewer's interpretation of her inclination to watch the soap daily. Addiction usually includes a need for continued exposure to a certain substance at regular intervals. It also includes a loss of control over if the substance will be used or not. By using the word addictive, the viewer is implying that she has a very strong need to watch every episode.
> (Précis, group 2, line 110)

As the précis extract from Group 2 above suggests, an addictive behaviour could be expected to be so entrenched that the viewer feels an overwhelming, almost uncontrollable urge to satisfy the need. One of the participants in the deprivation exercise also compared her longing for the soap which she was not allowed to watch for a week, to feeling withdrawal to an addictive substance: "I [feel] like I missed a daily tablet that I'm addicted too. Not watching Isidingo is not very easy for me" (diary entry, black, female, regular viewer).

Within this context, all other footprints represent a rich narrative from which to understand how viewers experience loyal soap opera viewership. The research methodology therefore holds a legitimate promise of answering the research questions.

4.2. Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters

Continued viewership or loyalty to the soap opera is primarily motivated by viewers' interest in seeing specific characters. This lies at the crux of the viewers' interpretation of their soap viewing experience and most other discussions or interpretation of the soap relates to how they perceive certain characters and the storylines that surround them. These are some of the strongest footprints, seeing

that all 11 data sources (i.e. all 10 groups as well as the diaries) give evidence to it. This theme consists of three sub-themes.

4.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.

Footprints:

#1 Viewers are very interested in some characters and less interested in other characters (11).

Researcher's interpretation of footprints #64-#145 – all footprints on individual characters.

#57 Storylines should involve both the business and private lives of characters (4.)

Being familiar with a character's history and knowing him/her as a full, integrated individual contributes to the viewer developing a relationship with the character. This background knowledge creates a backdrop within which they interpret and react to characters' actions, and shapes the viewer's expectation on future developments. Although most know that Barker and Cherel started out as a married couple, they have watched them scheme and plot against each other even to the extent of committing murder.

> Do you think she [Cherel] could ever get back together with Barker?
> I don't think either of them will let that happen.
> Maybe they will.
> Yes, because they are so alike.
> Yes, but still I wouldn't want to get back together with someone that killed my son,
> there is too much water under the bridge between them.
> Maybe it wasn't her.
> Hah! We all know that she did it!
> (Group 9, line 751-763)

When one participant in the group, quoted above, is willing to give Cherel the benefit of the doubt, she is quickly dismissed with a call to the group's collective knowledge about her: we all know better. This same background knowledge explains why viewers are able to empathise with Cherel. They know that she has suffered abuse in her childhood and yet, despite a series of challenges, she has developed into a strong person who is able to cope with adversaries and who does not easily give up.

In the same way they have also watched Agnes work hard to achieve the financial security her family enjoys today. They know that her family is her first priority and that she has proven her ability to overcome difficulty. This background shapes how viewers empathise with her when her husband does not see her as his first priority, and it also explains why they expect the Matabane's to follow the same path of success should they be challenged with more financial difficulty.

Viewers have a need for knowing characters as complex and not one-dimensional. During the discussion on storylines, participants were asked if they prefer storylines that deal with characters' personal or private lives and it was shown that viewers prefer that both of these enjoy attention. Having access to characters' private and professional lives, allows the viewer to understand the character better and knowing characters intimately, makes viewers interested in their storylines and encourage regular viewing behaviour.

4.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.

Footprints:

#1 Viewers are very interested in some characters and less interested in other characters (11),

#3 Pseudo-social interaction (5)

Throughout the narrative it becomes clear that loyal viewers develop a relationship with characters that resemble relationships they have with people in real life. Viewers discuss the characters with friends and family as if they are talking about real people. When they are unable to watch the soap (as simulated in the deprivation exercise) viewers miss the characters as if missing friends whom they have not seen in a while. They use words like "people" and "person" to refer to characters and when characters die, viewers feel heartbroken as if losing a friend or family member in real life.

> How do you feel about death and murder and when characters end?
> Upset, it is very sad.
> Yes, because you get used to that person and then they are not there anymore.
> (Group 5, line 435-439)

> I think you get so involved with the characters. Yes, they become almost real for you.
> (Group 2, line 118-119)

> Why do you talk about soaps more then you talk about other stories?
> Because it is like people's lives.
> (Group 9, line 170-172)

Further proof of the notion of pseudo-social relations is viewers being so involved with the storyline in context of the personification of characters that they fantasise about interacting with characters:

> It's like you are in it with them. Like that scene last week with Lee. I told her.
> What do you mean you told her?
> [I told her to] confront her father. It is almost like something you can relate to in your
> own personal life as well.
> (Group 9, line 220-223)

You actually fantasise if you were there what you would do. Especially when it comes to Barker because he is always up to something.

(Group 5, line 295)

4.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters and viewers relate differently to these two types of characters.

Footprints:

#1 Viewers are very interested in some characters and less interested in other characters (11).
Researcher's interpretation of Footprints #66-#127 – all footprints on individual characters.
Refer to Table 3 below.

One hermeneutic turn that strikes the researcher as helpful in understanding the research question was sparked by a discussion on "hate" characters and "normal characters" in Group 5. Since these terms were only mentioned in one group, they do not qualify as a theme. Nonetheless, in line with HP principle number 8 *(HP #8* That the researcher should look beyond the participants' actionsto a broader background context and its relationship to individual events)*, the researcher assumes that this dynamic is true for the larger sample. Through the application of HP #1 she has therefore drawn out what is hidden in the larger narrative in search of proof that this interpretation is true for more viewers. (See extract from group 3 below)

There are some characters that [are extremely irritating], but because they are part of the plot you can't actually see them off.
So characters that you hate might actually be good for the show?
Yes I think so.
I think the hate character is the best thing that can happen to a soap.
Yes (laugh).
They actually bring you back because you want to see what rubbish they are up to now.
Exactly.
They are normally unpredictable as well.
If you see the mother figure in the soap then that mother figure is predictable to me because I am a mother, like if I see a hate character that person is constantly unpredictable and you want to know what is the next mischievous move.
(Group 5, line 153-169)

Zeb makes me cross.
Then he should be in the story because you need a few characters that cause a bit of problems.
(Group 3, line 728)

According to these two groups some characters are strongly disliked, but because they are the main cause of conflict they actually encourage repeat viewership. Viewers look forward to seeing what the "hate character" is getting up to. Hate characters are unpredictable and manage to surprise on a regular basis and this surprise is very enjoyable to watch. Hate characters stand in contrast to more traditional characters that are well known, understood and predictable. One example of the latter would be a typical mother figure which, by being a mother herself, a viewer may be able to understand and predict. Although liked more, the mother figure is not necessarily enjoyed more.

Table 5.5 is a summary of the themes relating to what viewers know about and think of the most prominent characters. In keeping with HP principle number 9 (HP# 9: Stay close to the narrative), the researcher uses group 5's terminology of "hate" and "normal" characters. And based on group 5's definition, the researcher subjectively labelled each character as either a hate or normal character, based on the interpretation that viewers have of him/her. Hate characters are defined as those who cause conflict for other characters and who elicit negative emotions, strong opinions and anticipation from viewers. Normal characters are defined as those portraying characters that could be recognisable from real life and that viewers typically identify with.

Participants were asked to identify the most and least important characters in Isidingo. The frequency in the prioritisation column in Table 5.5 relates to the number of groups who selected the character as one of the essential characters. When regarded in context of the rest of the table, the Prioritisation frequency provides a useful measure by which to gauge if the character is of interest and by implication contributes to loyalty.

If one regards the traits viewers associate with each character, a conceptual interpretation of the personality traits that influence viewers' relationships with a character begins to form. Barker, Cherel and Zeb emerge as the hate characters and since interest in two of the hate characters, namely Barker and Cherel is the highest, it seems that characters that cause conflict and whose behaviour is motivated by malicious intent contribute significantly to loyalty.

Character type can, however, not be the only factor that influences loyalty, as Agnes and Lee – both normal characters – are ranked high, while Zeb – a hate character – is lower. The character type is more telling with regards to the type of relationship viewers develop with the character.

Table 5.5 *Summary of viewers' interpretation of the most prominent characters*

	What viewers know about Barker	What should happen in future	Viewer relationship	Character type	Priority - number of groups that think character is essential
Barker	Immoral (3) and invincible (5). Manipulates people, incl. Lee for his own gain (3). Cherel's archrival (10).	Should reveal his humane side (4). Should get punished (3).	Love to hate him. Admiration from males.	Hate	10 groups
Cherel	Have been through a lot in her past (6). Barker's archrival (10). Resilient (4) and determined (3). Strong (5) but also shows her vulnerable side (4).	Should get punished (3).	Love to hate her. Admiration from females.	Hate	10 groups
Agnes	Works hard (4). Strong (5). Family is her first priority (3). A mother (7). Could know her in real life (3).	Should be unfaithful to Zeb (3).	Endearing	Normal	8 groups
Papa G	Humorous (4). Bad guy who has taken a good turn (3). Speaks in Tsotsi taal (5). Involved in organised crime (3). Use both Cherel and Barker (3).	Eager to have him surprise them. (Researcher's interpretation)	Endearing	Hate and normal.	7 groups
Lee	Under the influence of her father (8). Strong	Should stand up to her father (6).	Amicable to endearing (females).	Normal	6 groups

	business woman (6). Was in a relationship with Rajesh (4). Understand why she is so naïve (4).	Should be as successful personally as she is professionally (4). Could become the main bitch (4).			
Lettie	Saw her grow up on screen (5). Is having a relationship with a white man (11). In conflict with her father (6).	Divided opinion on whether she should continue this relationship (4) or settle in another one (6). Should stand up to her father (3).	Younger females identify with her. Males are enjoying her for the conflict she is causing.	Normal	6 groups
Maggie	A gossip (3).	Should get a relationship (3).	Distant for males and younger females. Endearing for older females.	Normal	5 groups
Nandipha	Is HIV positive (8). Married to Parsons (3).	Should get ill (3). Should adopt a baby (2).	Distant interest.	Normal	5 groups
Zeb	In conflict with his daughter (6). Tests the white boyfriend (5). Rejects his wife (3). Old fashioned and too traditional (3). Is someone you could know in real life (5).	Should get punished for what he did to Agnes (3). Should continue to torment Joe (black males) (2).	Strongly disliked by white females. Strongly like by black males.	Hate for females. Normal for males.	5 groups

Rajesh	In a relationship with Lee (5). Framed by Barker (3).	Should get revenge towards Barker (Researcher's interpretation.)	Interest	Normal	3 groups
Frank	Worthy adversary to Barker (6).	Viewers unsure. Waiting to see what will happen. (Researcher's interpretation.)	Distant interest	Potential hate.	0 groups
Joe	In relationship with Lettie (11). Managed to pass Zeb's test (5).	Should get challenged further (2). Divided opinion on whether he should continue this relationship (4) with Lettie or break up (6).	Interest in him extends only as far as his relationship with Lettie goes.	Normal	0 groups
Parsons	Married to Nandipha (3).	Should adopt a baby (2).	Distant interest.	Normal	0 groups
Harriet	Barker's secretary who knows him from his past (3).	Betray Barker (3).	Distant interest.	Normal	0 groups
Vusi	Was in a relationship with Letti (6). Training as a Songoma (2).	Should be reunited with Letti (6).	Distant interest.	Normal	0 groups
Len	Liked for his demeanor (3).	-	Distant interest.	Hate and normal.	0 groups

Hate characters like Barker and Zeb cause conflict in the viewer's emotional experience of the soap, as they bring new twists to the plot that normal characters have to deal with. Normal characters such

as Agnes, Maggie and Lee serve a different role. They are liked and viewers associate with them. It is possible that viewers are vicariously reacting to the hate character as if they are themselves the normal characters.

> Sometimes you get so involved in the soap, like with Barker, sometimes you get so frustrated and angry and you feel like you can get inside the show and just attack them.
> (Group 5, line 277)

Two characters warrant further discussion in this dynamic, i.e. Papa G and Zeb. Papa G is interpreted as a very complex character. He is generally liked and viewers interpret him as someone they may know from real life. Viewers know that this character has a history of involvement in organised crime and appreciate that the character has attempted to deviate from his past criminal ways. All are aware that he is pretending to be a confidant to both Barker and Cherel for his own gain. This, combined with his idiosyncratic demeanor which is humorous, yet believable, makes him a character that is thoroughly enjoyed by a range of viewers from different backgrounds. He successfully combines the intriguing qualities of a normal character with that of a hate character. The former successfully nurturing an attraction with the viewer, while the latter ensures that there is enough mystery to him to keep viewers interested and guessing at his next move.

> Why are Georgie and Cherel always scheming? Is he Cherel's informer or is he Barker's informer? He's a real conniver. He comes across with his sweet talk but I maintain he's real corrupt yet a great charmer, 'Ek sê ek sê'. Pretty dangerous (diary entry, black, male, regular viewer).

Another interesting character is Zeb. Zeb illustrates that viewers may react to characters like they would to people in real life. White female groups emphasise with Lettie in her relationship with her father and they also take Agnes's side over him. They are extremely critical of Zeb, accusing him of being old fashioned, too traditional and stubborn. For this group of viewers, Zeb is clearly a hate character.

> He doesn't deserve his wife he should just go to his girlfriend.
> (Group 9, line 603)

> Everything he does irritates me, he destroys the story, it is modern times and he can't get with it.
> (Group 3, line 506)

For black males, however, Zeb is a source of enjoyment. They understand him, defend him and encourage him. After thoroughly appreciating Zeb torturing Joe with the chicken incident, for example,

they would like to see Zeb confront Joe with even more African traditions, like making him pay Labola for Lettie's hand. They also approve of him being unfaithful to Agnes.

> Zeb is the King. He has his own palace. He knows when he gets home, he is king.
> He is 'Tau ya Africa' (African Lion).
> (Group 10, line 331)

> I like Zeb. What if you marry someone who cannot bear children, what do you do?
> You do it like Zeb, you find a second wife (laughter).
> (Group 10, line 203)

> She's so sweet and she's married to that idiot who doesn't see what he's got. But
> that's how we all African men are. (Laughter).
> (Group 7, line 312)

The enjoyment these viewers experience from watching Zeb relates to their identification with him, while the white and coloured female group feels antagonised by him. Characters can therefore be classified as both hate and normal characters depending on how the audience interprets them.

4.3. Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines

4.3.1. Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?

Footprints:

#100 Agnes should be unfaithful to Zeb (3).

#83 Lee could and should stand up to her father (6).

#135 Papa G is using both Cherel and Barker (3).

#111 Zeb rejects Agnes (3).

#60 Barker setting up Rajesh (4).

#61 Cherel murdering Duncan (6).

A dramatic technique that viewers find particularly intriguing is waiting for characters to find out what they already know. Viewers speculate about when Zeb will notice that Agnes has undergone a make-over and how he would react if he found out that she has a potential suitor. They are frustrated with Lee for not realising her father is manipulating her and long to see her stand up to him. They enjoy sharing in Papa G's secret that he is using both Cherel and Barker without them realising it. In his case, they hope that Cherel and Barker does not find out and have immense respect for the fact that he succeeds to fool the archrivals.

You know exactly what she [Cherel] did but no one else does, they don't know so that is what makes her appealing.
(Group 9, line 532)

I am curious to know whether Aggie is still carrying on with her affair with Pula. Should Zeb find out I think Hell will break loose (diary entry, black, female, regular viewer).

The entertainment value of anticipating how the story will change once the character finds out what they already know is immense. This sub-theme also resonates with the next one in which viewers speculate about upcoming twists in the plot.

4.3.2. Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.

Footprints:
#2 Viewers are interested in following the resolution of storylines (11).
#23 Discuss what happens in Isidingo with other viewers (6).

Soap operas linger in the viewer's mind after the conclusion of an episode; a viewer reflects about the characters they are interested in. Viewers who participated in the diary exercise made various comments that illustrate how this theme emerges between viewing occasions: "I wonder what will happen…", "I think…", "I can imagine…", "Curious to know", "Dying to see", "Nosy to see", "My gut tells me that…" (diary entries). Viewers assimilate new information they learnt into existing knowledge of the characters and wonder about what will happen next. This makes its way into conversations with fellow viewers and links the one episode with the next, as it provides a motivation for viewing.

Every Friday, I have noticed, the soap ends with an event that forces you to watch on the Monday.
(Group 5, line 81)

I wonder what will happen after last week's drama. After the Pule and Lettie drama. I think the Matabanes must forgive each other and move on. Zeb must have learnt his lesson [that matchmaking doesn't work]. He must accept Joe and Lettie's relationship and learn to live with it (diary entry, black, male, regular viewer).

You can also speculate and discuss every day what you think is going to happen because it has that element of surprise to it.
(Group 9, line 186)

This is an important footprint in finding the path to understanding viewer loyalty. The storyline is the first point of contact with a new viewer. Once the viewer is intrigued by a storyline he/she is motivated

to start watching on a regular basis, with the promise of a resolution as reward. At this early stage, character involvement is not yet relevant, as the viewer has no knowledge of the characters, their past or motives. Once the viewer grows in knowledge about the soap, he/she develops a preference and special interest in specific characters. At this point it seems as though the storyline diminishes slightly in importance. It becomes part of the background through which the character is communicated and the viewer sustains a relationship with the character. The storyline becomes part of the taken-for-granted knowledge of experiencing the soap. This is clear when one considers that most viewers in the current study, answered firstly with reference to a character when motivating viewership. As this quote from Group 4 illustrates; they are responding to a question on what made them start watching initially:

> Something will happen that catches your attention and draws you and then you want to know what will happen next. Maybe like someone gets shot and then you want to know who shot that person and why and I think once you start watching then you get into it.
> That is how I started watching Days I wanted to see what will happen next and then it took weeks for that thing to happen so I got into it.
> It is always a drawn out long thing with Days.
> Yes (laugh).
> (Group 4, line 47-69)

Viewers are first introduced to the soap in the manner described above (through interesting storylines). As time progresses, they become involved with the characters, as this quote from group 5 illustrates: "You become addicted to the characters and what is going on in their lives" (line 91).

This also explains why viewers prefer shorter storylines but admit that longer storylines are necessary. Shorter storylines that are resolved within a few days allow the pleasurable resolution after tension to happen more often than not. Longer storylines, such as the underlying plot of Barker and Cherel's continuing feud is necessary background within which to interpret shorter storylines. Without the longer storylines or themes that reoccur within the soap, the viewer cannot get to know characters and build lasting relationships.

4.3.3. Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines preferred.
Footprints:
Refer to Table 5.6 below.

Research participants were asked to name the storylines they recall following in Isidingo and to indicate which of these they particularly enjoyed. They were also asked to indicate preferences for specific outcomes in the storylines of characters. From these discussions, the researcher was able to identify plot types that viewers interpret as interesting and that they would be likely to follow in the

manner discussed above. Table 5.6 summarises how storylines are grouped under plot types. Storylines are not mutually exclusive, as some contain more than one pertinent theme.

The most pervasive theme that emerges is storylines that deal with individual characters, their development, personal challenges, vices and virtues. This is followed by conflict, romantic relationship conflict, immorality and its consequences, humour and social issues.

Table 5.6 *Storyline summary*

Character development	Individuals, their development, personal challenges, vices and virtues	Immorality
• Lee could and should stand up to her father.		
• Lee should develop and attain the same success in her personal life as she has in her professional life.		
• Lee could take over from Cherel as the main bitch.		
• Joe and the chicken.		
• Lee could develop into more.		
• Nandipha should get ill – her HIV should progress to AIDS.		
• Papa G is a bad guy who has taken a good turn after jail.		
• Maggie should get a relationship.		
Character vulnerability		
• A need to see Barker's humane side, which is Lee.		
• Have knowledge of Cherel's past, have empathy for her.		
• Involved with Lee, have empathy for her.		
• Viewers have empathy for why Lee is as naïve as she is.		
• Have empathy for Zeb.		
Personal challenge		
• Barker setting up Rajesh.		
• Joe and the chicken.		
• Would not like the Matabanes to go through financial trouble again, but understand that it would be reality if they did.		
• Have watched the Matabanes work very hard for what they have achieved over the years.		
• Nandipha should get ill – her HIV should progress to AIDS.		
Immoral behaviour		
• Cherel murdering Duncan.		
• Barker manipulates relationships.		
• Revenge and conflict between Cherel and Barker.		
• Zeb's infidelity and child		

• Papa G is involved in organised crime.		
Malicious intent		
• Barker setting up Rajesh.		
• Anticipate that Harriet has something up her sleeve.		
Punishment		
• Barker should get punished for all he did		
• Cherel should get punished for murdering Duncan.		
Romance		
• Lettie and Joe's relationship.		
• The possibility of Agnes having an affair.		
• Approve of Lettie's relationship with Joe.		
• Lettie should continue the relationship with Joe.		
• Lettie should be reunited with Vusi – her ex-boyfriend.		
• Maggie should get a relationship.		
• Lee should develop and attain the same success in her personal life as she has in her professional life.		
Conflict in romantic relationships	**Romantic Relationships**	
• Barker setting up Rajesh (and sabotaging Lee and Rajesh's relationship).		
• The possibility of Agnes having an affair.		
• Barker manipulates relationships.		
• Take Agnes's side over Zeb.		
• Zeb rejects Agnes.		
Conflict in other personal relationships	**Business Relationships**	
• Revenge and conflict between Cherel and Barker.		
• Barker and Cherel are rivals.		
• Frank Xavier is a worthy adversary to Barker.		
• Anticipate that Harriet has something up her sleeve.		
Family conflict	**Family Relationships**	**Conflict**
• Lettie and Joe's relationship.		
• Zeb's infidelity and child.		
• Lee is under the influence of her father.		
Humour		**Other**
• Papa G is humorous.		
• Joe and the chicken.		
Dramatic climax		
• Cherel murdering Duncan.		

• Tanya's suicide.	
Social issue	
• Lettie and Joe's relationship.	
• Nandipha teaches one how to deal with HIV/AIDS.	

4.4. Theme 4: A preference for all things real

Footprints:

#5 Soap's proximity to real life as motivation for watching (5).

#27 Good soaps have realistic storylines (8).

#29 Prefer storylines that are realistic (6).

#30 Dislike unrealistic storylines (4).

#32 Dislike when an actor is replaced (3).

#33 Good soaps are technically realistic (including acting, sets and production quality) (3).

The realistic, everyday content of some soaps is what distinguishes it from other genres. It consists of normal, recognisable characters that deal with normal, realistic issues. This need for proximity to the lived reality seem to be a pervasive theme as 1) it appears often, 2) it is expressed in reference to behaviour of characters in Isidingo and competitive soaps, in the appearance of characters and the nature of storylines i.e. across different contexts, and 3) viewers react negatively when this theme is violated in each of these contexts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

> How does one classify a soapie, how do we say this is a soapie and this is not a soapie? "It goes about us. Yes, about people. It is about ordinary people and what happens in their lives, I think that is why people are so involved in soapies."
> (Group 3, line 2-16)

The participants prefer storylines that are familiar from their own livelihoods over storylines that are unfamiliar, and dislike any storylines that include elements that could be seen as fantasy. Viewers prefer storylines that are culturally relevant and familiar.

> It's very rare in our culture to see people having affairs between family members, so such things we don't relate to.
> (Group 1, line 48)

> For me it is very unrealistic like people being possessed by demons and things like that, but that is just for me, I know other people enjoy that but I don't like that.
> (Group 5, line 139)

The participants are very sensitive to inconsistencies in characters. A story told about a character should make sense as a whole. Any portrayals of the character, e.g. his/her physical appearance,

place of residence, values, and behaviour - should fit within his/her background and offer a legitimate motivation for it.

> They [stories on business and private lives] go hand in hand. That's the reality check again. On Days you see Hope living in a mansion, but she does not have a job and Bo is a policeman. (Laughter).
> (Group 7, line 262)

Anything that reminds the viewer that he/she is watching a fictional story acts as a hurdle for the viewer to move into the ready-to-hand mode of viewing. They therefore also dislike any technical aspects that diminish the perceived reality of a soap opera. This includes storylines that take too long to get resolved, actors who are replaced to play the same character, poor acting, or an unrealistic set.

> On Isidingo, if they changed Papa G that would be very discouraging. There are just some characters you can't replace. The actors live the characters in a way that no other actor can.
> (Group 6, line 58)

> You need a hospital [as part of the set], it is part of life, I mean babies are born, people get sick, and it is a part of life.
> (Group 2, line 278)

4.5. Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality

Viewers interpret Isidingo as a unique soap within the larger soap genre on offer in South Africa, because of its ability to simulate South African reality. Throughout the narrative it is clear that viewers appreciate the fact that Isidingo is an accurate portrayal of their lives and offers this quality as an explanation on why they watch Isidingo.

> Why do you watch Isidingo?
> It was also different from other soaps, and it still is different. Other soaps are mainly for youngsters and about love only. I thought I was the target market for Isidingo, because it addressed things happening at work, at home… things that I could associate with.
> It also showed South African diversity, all races are represented… that's what also attracted me.
> (Group 8, line 52-54)

[Soaps] symbolise our every day life. On Isidingo Zeb failed to notice that his wife has changed dramatically. She started wearing make up and did her hair up, but he did not notice, and someone else did. That's exactly how we are in real life.
(Group 6, line 22)

4.5.1.   Sub-theme 5.1: Isidingo's characters are real.

Footprints:

#35 Dialogue in local soaps include vernacular, South African languages (3).

#45 Has characters that resemble people the viewer could know from real life (5).

#103 Agnes is recognisable as someone that one could know in real life (3).

#107 Recognise Zeb as someone they could know in real life (5).

#40 Isidingo is appreciated for having quality acting (3).

In Isidingo, this phenomenon is enhanced by the fact that a number of characters are believed to be so realistic that they resemble people one could know in real life. Characters that are regarded as especially realistic include Agnes, Zeb and Papa G. Character portrayals, including acting, dialogue and appearance are also seen as being close to reality.

He [Papa G] is like an uncle we know. Our uncles are like that you know…
(Group 10, line 309)

Isidingo characters are natural and they keep their culture, the South African culture.
If you have short hair, you keep your short hair, they don't make you wear fake extensions and wigs.
(Group 1, line 62)

There are, however, a number of characters – specifically Barker and Cherel who are the most popular characters – that are not overtly interpreted as people one could know from real life, but viewers try and make sense of them realistically. They long to see Barker's humane side and they justify Cherel's personal traits from "knowing what she has been through" (Group 4, line 642).

4.5.2.   Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.

Footprints:

#41 Isidingo is appreciated for having storylines that are resolved quickly (3).

#43 Isidingo is for mature audiences (3).

#46 Is a serious soap (4).

#49 Isidingo deals with social issues (10).

#51 Isidingo deals with HIV/AIDS (10).

#52 Isidingo deals with mixed race couples (10).

#53 Isidingo deals with homosexuality (3).

Isidingo's content is interpreted as real. It is perceived to be up to date with current events and stands in contrast to international soaps. Storylines in Isidingo are also resolved as quickly as they would unfold in real life. The storyline moving so quickly encourages regular viewership, as viewers are hesitant to miss any important developments. This sustains a healthy and entertaining build up and resolution of tension, and it contributes to the perception of realism.

> If Christmas is being celebrated – they are celebrating also. Like yesterday they were
> talking about a game of Bafana Bafana – and that they were going to watch the game
> at half past 8. So they are up to date with what is happening in life.
> (Group 7, line 244-248)

> What are those things that make you sit and watch Isidingo and not other soaps at
> that time?
> Days and Bold can take two to three weeks on one issue. On Isidingo, it takes a
> week at most. You have got to keep up or you miss a lot.
> Isidingo is an everyday thing.
> (Group 1, line 117–122)

> I mean if someone is getting married, it will take two or three days maybe a week, but
> there [In Days of our Lives] it will take a month.
> (Group 4, line 83)

Isidingo also addresses a number of issues pertinent to the South African society. Social issues mentioned throughout the narrative include corruption, drugs, abuse, rape, sexuality, homosexuality, family conflict, and particularly interracial relationships and HIV/AIDS. Viewers' insistence that Nandipha's HIV should develop into AIDS points again to a need for proximity to reality. If she does not become ill, viewers may forget that she has HIV, and the message that her character can communicate will be lost. Some viewers also expressed the sentiment that Nandipha should adopt a baby, bringing yet another issue into the narrative.

4.5.3.   Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational.

Footprints:

#50 Isidingo educates people on how to deal with social issues (8).

#54 Isidingo teaches viewers about people who are different from themselves (3).

#42 Represents an ideal South African in terms of race relations (3).

#72 Learn from Barker not to be an overprotective father (3).

109 Zeb teaches viewers how not to behave (4).

One theme provides an explanation for why the realism of local soaps and Isidingo in particular is so appreciated – the educational value inherent to it. The social issues addressed and the problems

characters face, are so realistic and close to viewers' own experiences that they learn from the soap. Through watching the characters solve problems, viewers learn how to solve their own problems.

> Sometimes you have a problem and you see the same problem on the soap and it helps you to solve yours.
> (Group 1, line 9)

Viewers learn from characters' mistakes and successes and internalise the lessons learnt by the characters:

> There are things that you can learn especially from Isidingo. That's why I'm watching it – there are things you can learn and practice. Like what things? Okay, like what I've recently seen in Isidingo with Mr. Matabane choosing for Lettie. I have a daughter and I mustn't be like Mr. Matabane. So when my daughter brings a white guy into my place, my home, then I won't say 'Why are you bringing this guy' you know. So you're prepared? Yes – I am prepared – it's happening.
> (Group 7, line 58 – 80)

> It's not in our culture, men generally don't cook. In soaps men cook and support their wives doing house chores. That's encouraging to us. I find myself helping more around the house because I know it's acceptable for me to do that. It also makes my wife happy and proud of me…
> (Group 6, line 139)

The soap is trusted for giving good advice and many viewers rely on the soap to educate family members:

> I think people can learn from it when they are watching it. For instance my Dad is very strict, a lot like Lettie's dad, interrogates her boyfriends and things like that. And then when we watch Isidingo I just give him the look and you can see he relates and feels bad.
> (Group 4, line 357-359)

> I'm divorced and my daughters live with me. My eldest one is 13 years old. I can't speak to her about sex and condoms and stuff. I basically rely on television to educate her about that. I have seen many episodes of Isidingo where they address sex and AIDS and condoms, but I can't bring myself to talking about it with my daughter. I should just call her to sit and watch Isidingo with me, next time the topic comes up.
> (Group 6, line 133)

Finally, the soap opera shapes viewers' interpretation of social issues and viewers believe that it may have an impact on how issues are perceived by the larger population:

> Isidingo is a vision that all South Africans should be striving towards as a rainbow nation.

> I can actually see it changing other people, not necessarily me, but I now understand why people do the things they do. Nandipha is HIV positive and married to Parsons who is negative. That can only be the meaning of true love.

> (Group 10, line 195 – 197)

4.6. Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcast

Footprints:

#24 Time in which the soap is watched is regarded as a time for physical and/or mental relaxation (3).

#25 Non-TV related responsibilities (such as chores) sometimes compete with Isidingo (4).

A new episode of Isidingo is broadcast every evening at 18:30. For many viewers, the convenience of the timeslot is a major determinant of regular viewing. Late afternoon and early evening is a time in the household when the family arrives home and many chores are being done before settling down for the evening. It is a thoroughly planned time of the day in which the household routine is built around the soap. The female viewer especially, would make sure that her chores are either completed by the time Isidingo starts or that she is able to finish what needs to be done during the commercial breaks in the soap. It is also a time that many viewers regard as a time for mental and physical relaxation that does not require too much effort from the viewer. The timeslot is just before primetime when most families settle down in front of the TV. This offers a unique viewing opportunity that more often than not results in the family watching soaps because of the convenience of the timeslot.

> It is a nice way to come home and wind down.
> (Group 4, line 226)

> Also people that work I think sit down maybe with a glass of wine or a cigarette or whatever and that is their time out period.
> (Group 2, line 95)

> At the end of the day, 18:30 is the time when we all sit down and relax with our feet up, and Isidingo tended to be what was playing while we all had our feet up, and I suppose we make a habit of it.
> (Group 8, line 46)

One male group explained that:

> They [soaps] are a part of our household. You come in and you switch on the TV, the
> mood is right for soaps, they warm the house up.
> (Group 6, line 108)

Soaps are an ideal complement to the mood and activity in the household at that time. In the same way smells and sounds can make one feel at home and comfortable as if one is in a safe, familiar place; soaps can enhance or create a certain atmosphere at home. It is associated with the good feelings of arriving home after work and looking forward to a relaxing evening with family. It makes one feel comfortable and welcome at home, and complements other positive feelings one might have when arriving home after work.

A number of soaps are on air during this time and the few hours preceding it. This results in a soap block where some viewers watch a few soaps one after the other.

> I start with Days of our Lives then Bold then Egoli then I switch over to Isidingo.
> (Group 2, line 6)

> That's the only thing I do at home, when I finish cooking and cleaning, I just watch
> soaps.
> (Group 1, line 5)

Non-TV related responsibilities sometimes compete with soaps because it is such a busy time in the evening:

> I come home around 5pm and I have house chores to do.
> (Group 8, line 74)

4.7. Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership

Footprints:

#19 Watch soaps with female family members (7).

#20 Watch soaps in a mixed group of family members (4).

#21 Was introduced to Isidingo by other family members (4).

#22 Have developed own loyalty since being introduced by another family member (4).

#23 Discuss what happens in Isidingo with other people (6).

The following quotes illustrate the importance of the social aspect of viewership.

I have a friend and she is English and she watches East Enders on DStv. I am not allowed to phone during that time, and I don't phone because I know she is going to be upset.

(Group 2, line 117 – 126)

At the beginning, I watched because my daughter watched it. Now I watch it even when she's not there… it doesn't matter.

(Group 8, line 32)

I give in to my children sometimes. They want to watch Backstage and they nag and nag, so some of the days I just let them you know.

(Group 8, line 76)

Soap opera viewership has a social dimension for viewers. Many viewers were introduced to Isidingo through another person in the household and often continue to watch the soap with that person every evening. Viewers are conscious of the soaps that friends and family members watch. They respect each other's soap time and speculate together about what is going to happen in future storylines.

Why will you talk about soap operas and you won't talk about dramas or comedies with your friends? Because everyone watches them. Yes, you have something in common. You can also speculate and discuss everyday what you think is going to happen because it has that element of surprise to it. You get a top up every day.

(Group 9, line 180-190)

4.8. Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour

Footprints:

#4 Loyalty based on being up to date with the storyline and not necessarily watching every episode (3).

#16 Watch Isidingo during the prime timeslot at 18:30 on weekdays during which the new episode is aired (6).

#17 Watch any of the repeat transmissions including the next day repeat in the morning or the weekend omnibus (6).

#18 Viewers channel hop during commercial breaks (3).

#13 Viewership includes local soap operas (other than Isidingo) (10).

#14 Viewership includes international soap operas (7)

#15 Soap repertoires includes three or more soaps (7).

One difference between loyal and occasional viewers is that the latter often define loyalty loosely and would include following the storyline, i.e. being up to date with what is happening, as loyalty. While the

regular viewer would insist on watching every episode and even every minute of every episode (as the quote on the telephone call below illustrates), the occasional viewer is satisfied with watching a few episodes a week or watching at intervals in which interesting storylines pull them in.

> Last night it upset me because just when I wanted to watch - it was where Maggie and them wanted a party and they wanted some booze – the phone rang and it was that political thing and they were asking me if I was an ANC supporter so I missed a bit.
> (Group 2, line 25)

Some viewers follow two soaps in one timeslot. They supplement the prime slot viewership with repeat broadcasts such as the weekend omnibus, but mostly they watch both soaps at the same time. This involves that they switch between the two competing soaps during add breaks. Should a plot catch their attention in one, they might invest more viewing time in the particular soap until the storyline is resolved.

> You know what happens to me, there is maybe a piece in Isidingo like when that black girl brought that white guy home, now I am anxious because I want to see what the father is going to do, and then I want to see what is going on there and I am not worried about other soapies. Then maybe on the other soapie there is something else I want to see like that other girl that committed suicide then I wanted to see that.
> (Group 3, line 60)

> I watch Backstage sometimes, so when Isidingo is not so exciting, I watch Backstage, and when Isidingo is exciting I stick with it. But I keep flipping back to Isidingo even when I watch Backstage, just to see if something dramatic has happened or not.
> (Group 8, line 78).

At first, the academic researcher considered that this behaviour implies that regular viewers' loyalty is based more on character relationships, while occasional viewers follow storylines only. However, this cannot explain the full lived reality, seeing that many occasional viewers also have a history of watching Isidingo for years, and should have developed character relationships.

Many occasional viewers also have a wide knowledge of the characters (transcending the immediate storyline), as well as strong opinions on what should happen to the characters in the future. There is also evidence of occasional viewers discussing characters with other viewers, as well as speculating about what will happen. All tell-tale signs are thus present in occasional viewers' interpretations to indicate that there are indeed character relationships.

One could also assume that occasional viewers have a broader repertoire that extends beyond Isidingo and local soaps, but a comparison of the repertoire of occasional and loyal viewers (Table 5.7) indicates no differences.

Table 5.7 *Soap repertoires of regular and occasional viewers*

	Size of repertoire	Local or international soaps
Regular viewers of Isidingo	Average of 4 soaps	Both
Occasional viewers of Isidingo	Average of 4 soaps	Both

The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mostly related to viewing behaviour. As Table 5.8 illustrates, occasional viewers are more likely to occasionally follow interesting storylines in competing soaps than regular viewers.

Table 5.8 *Viewing behaviour of occasional and regular viewers*

Occasional viewers:	Regular viewers:
Get pulled into competing soaps with interesting storylines.	No evidence of being pulled into competing soaps with interesting storylines.
Interrupt viewing at the resolution of major storyline.	Less likely to interrupt viewership at the resolution of major storylines.
Evidence that viewership is supplemented with repeat broadcasts, including the omnibus.	Watch Isidingo during prime time premier every evening.

4.9. Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre

Footprints:

#34 Soaps have storylines that are generic to the genre (7).

#5 Soap's proximity to real life as a motivation for watching (5).

#9 Watch 7de Laan which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo (5).

#10 Watch Backstage which competes in the same timeslot as Isidingo (4).

#11 Watch The Bold and the Beautiful (7).

#12 Watch Days of our Lives (4).

#13 Viewership includes local soap operas (other than Isidingo) (10).

#14 Viewership includes international soap operas (7).

#15 Soap repertoire includes 3 or more soaps (7).

Soap viewership is also interpreted as an interest in the soap opera genre. Each group of participants watch at least one other soap opera, while seven of the groups watch three or more soap operas. The soap operas that are watched include a range of local and international soaps and include soap operas that are broadcast in the same timeslot as Isidingo.

Viewers recognise that there are types of storylines that are common to the soap genre that are repeated on a regular basis across all the different soaps. Storylines mentioned include characters becoming ill and going to the hospital, weddings, pregnancies, marriages, relationships and physical intimacy. They also recognise characters that are found across the genre. One viewer in Group 3, for instance, believes that Barker is the JR of Isidingo.

4.9.1. Sub-theme 9.1: Local and international soaps represent two sub-genres that are distinct because of the difference in realism between them.

Footprints:

#28 International soaps are different from local soaps (4).

#35 Dialogue in local soaps include vernacular, South African languages (3).

#36 The storylines in local soaps are up to date with current events and are resolved quickly (4).

#37 Storylines take very long to resolve in international soaps (contrasted to preceding theme) (2).

#38 Storylines in local soaps resemble real life (3).

#39 International soaps are more likely to have unrealistic storylines than local soaps (4).

Viewers experience a clear distinction between local and international soaps, and the distinction relates mostly to the perceived realism that they put forth. Local soaps are believed to portray real life and being up to date with real-life events. They also include vernacular South African dialogue.

Overall, international soaps are believed to contain more elements that could be interpreted as unreal. International soaps are seen as having more unrealistic storylines than local soaps and taking too long to resolve these storylines.

4.10. Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism

Footprints:

146 A need for escapism (3).

#24 Time in which the soap is watched is regarded as a time for physical and/or mental relaxation (3).

Viewers enjoy watching Isidingo because it allows them to immerse themselves in the narrative and forget their day-to-day concerns for a while. The problems portrayed are not the viewer's own, it becomes a way to escape from their own problems.

> It is the only time that you can fantasise and leave your world that you are in.
> (Group 5, line 299).

> You imagine you are in it. You transport yourself into the fantasy.
> (Group 5, line 287-293)

5. A hermeneutic turn: understanding the motivation for watching international soaps

While the first hermeneutic explains clearly why viewers enjoy local soaps, it does not sufficiently explain why viewers watch international soaps. In particular, the academic researcher expected that the strong emphasis on realism as an enabling factor for viewership of local soaps, combined with the perception that International soaps are unrealistic would imply that viewers do not watch international soaps. As Table 5.9 reveals, however, this is not the case, as three international soaps are prominent in the repertoires of a range of groups:

Table 5.9 *Viewership of international soap operas*

	Number of groups	Which groups
Bold and the beautiful	7	1-5, 9 and 10
Days of our lives	4	1, 4, 5 and 10
Passions	2	4 and 5
All my children	1	5

The HP principles of research provide guidance on how to deal with inconsistencies. While in Husserlian, transcendental phenomenology, inconsistencies would indicate errors. This is not the case with the current philosophical paradigm of hermeneutic phenomenology. Inconsistencies are different dimensions to the full reality under study. The researcher can therefore deal with these inconsistencies within the hermeneutic spiral without the fear of compromising the integrity of the study. The following HP principles provide guidance on how to deal with contradictions and viewers' motivation on why the watch International soaps will be explored based on these principles:

HP# 5: Deem every account as having its own internal logic; whatever is brought to an interview is significant to its bearer, consciously or not.

HP# 9: Stay close to the narrative.

HP# 8: The researcher should look beyond the participant's actions, events and behaviour to a larger background context and its relationship to individual events.

HP# 1: Draw out what is hidden within the narrative accounts and interpret them based on background understandings of the viewers.

The academic researcher will assume that although the data is apparently contradictory or problematic, it is not a the case and that there is logic that simply needs to be discovered. Since the first hermeneutic was primarily concerned with interpreting the experience of viewing Isidingo, the academic researcher will draw on the second hermeneutic, as well as on literature in an attempt to understand this inconsistency in viewers' own interpretation. She hopes that in doing so she will arrive at a fuller, more complete understanding in Chapter 7.

6. Conclusion

Ten themes that relate to how viewers interpret the lived reality of loyal soap opera viewership are present in the first hermeneutic. These include how viewers interpret and relate to characters and storylines, the importance of realism, the role that the timeslot plays in sustaining viewership, and the role that genre plays in viewers' overall likelihood to encounter the soap opera. It also illustrates the need for escapism that lures some viewers to the soap opera and demonstrates the main difference between loyal and occasional viewers to be their viewing behaviour.

Chapter 6 deals with the market researcher's interpretation, or the second hermeneutic. To ensure that the research process is a spiral where one interpretation builds on the other, Chapter 6 will be presented with a general structure derived from the themes identified in this chapter. A discussion of an integrated understanding of these two sections within the literary background will form the first part of the third hermeneutic in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6: The second hermeneutic

1. Introduction

This chapter represents the market researcher's interpretation of the lived reality. The analysis process through which the findings in this chapter have been structured was discussed in Chapter 4. As Figure 6.1 illustrates, the chapter consists of two main parts: the presentation of the themes and the movement in interpretation from the first to the second hermeneutic. The interpretive framework of Chapter 5 was revisited from within the second hermeneutic. The second hermeneutic largely elaborated on the interpretations of the first hermeneutic, although a few unique contributions were added to the interpretation. Eleven main themes were identified which will now be discussed in detail.

Figure 6.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 6.

2. Presentation of the second hermeneutic themes

Interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenology takes place in a spiral in which the second interpretation builds on the previous interpretation. This chapter is therefore based on the thematic structure of the previous chapter, and is designed to comment on the themes based on the findings from the first hermeneutic.

2.1. Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour

The market researcher recognised that some viewers have developed an addiction to Isidingo based on years of viewership. This was particularly prevalent in a focus group held with the viewers who participated in the deprivation exercise. In addition to asking them to keep diaries, the market

researcher also held a focus group in which the participants were asked to talk about the experience during the week. Viewers found that breaking the habit of watching Isidingo daily was extremely difficult. The market researcher noticed that some of these participants experienced severe symptoms of loss during the course of the week, attributing it to their so-called addiction to and withdrawal from the soap opera. Although a psychological diagnosis of the participants' symptoms was not made, the market researcher felt that using the term 'anxiety attacks' was warranted.

Some respondents felt the loss so acutely that they experienced anxiety attacks. The feeling of loss also resulted in mood swings. Emotionally they experienced turmoil, that left them feeling almost desolated, depressed. Tremendous experience of loss resulting in self-pity, restlessness, apprehension. Huge threat to their comfort zone (market researcher field notes, deprivation group).

There was also evidence of other habitual behaviour affected, for example, not having the usual evening cup of tea in front of the television, nor discussing the episode with other people. Most profound was the fact that none of the participants in this exercise substituted watching Isidingo with another television programme.

Not one respondent went to another television programme. Instead they frantically tried to keep themselves busy with trivial household chores, some went to bed and one respondent listened to 702. Others went socialising or went to church, but it's interesting that no other television programme seemed to have the influence to lure them in (market researcher field notes – deprivation group).

This theme, and especially the fact that loyal viewers did not replace the soap with another television programme, relates to the recruitment process. The presence of this theme affirms that some viewers who engaged in the research process, were in fact loyal Isidingo viewers. Since they are aware of the fact that they are regular viewers, they would have been able to interpret this lived reality and provide useful input into what makes them loyal to the soap opera. The presence of this theme confirms that the rest of the study holds the promise of revealing the psychological processes that are inherent to pleasant viewing experiences and loyalty to soap operas.

2.2. Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as involvement with characters

The most significant loss experienced during the deprivation exercise was a loss of the characters themselves. Papa G, Georgie, Barker, Cherel and Zeb were amongst the characters that viewers mentioned in their diaries, indicating that the motivation to watch is based on character involvement.

When trying to explain declining interest or reasons for viewers to interrupt their viewership, the market researcher found that viewers very seldom cite storylines as a reason, but rather the disappearance of characters. This, together with the wealth of data in the larger focus group sample

on characters, convinced the market researcher that loyalty to Isidingo is strongly linked to character involvement.

This also relates to the concept of vicarious living (living through what one observes in another)f. The market researcher believes that the blur between fantasy and reality leads to viewers believing they can create a healthier or more exciting lifestyle, based entirely on the behavior of the soap characters. Through vicarious or substitute living they live the lives of their characters.

2.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.

Isidingo has a strong legacy and an aging audience that literally grew up with it. Viewers saw the soap make the transition from the mine setting to the media world and have watched characters mature. The market researcher noticed that the majority of loyal viewers have been watching Isidingo for many years and concluded that their loyalty must, in part, be related to their familiarity with the soap and its characters.

2.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.

Viewers favour specific characters over others and become so engrossed in the storyline that the distinction between reality and fantasy diminishes. Viewer identification with the character and his/her storyline is so strong that events and emotions affecting the character are experienced in such clarity that it resembles real life, personal experiences. This involvement with characters as if they are real people, is both a cause and result of continued, loyal viewership. The market researcher attempts to understand this phenomenon and mentions Dunbar's number as a possible explanation.

Figure 6.2. Dunbar's number (from market research presentation).

The second hermeneutic includes a reference to Dunbar's number as an explanation of why soap opera viewers become so involved in the soaps (see Figure 6.2 which is an extract from the presentation made to the client by the market researcher). Robin Dunbar is a British anthropologist who, by using studies of different anthropologists, discovered that there is a relationship between the size of the neo-cortex of each of the 36 primates studied and the size of the social groups within which it functions. He arrives at a mathematical formula and by using this formula, he predicted that 147.8 is the average group size for humans. According to the market researcher, this number corresponds to data available on various village and tribe sizes in many cultures. Dunbar (2003) believes that humans are able to form meaningful social relationships with a maximum of 150 people. Since we are limited in the number of people we can know at one stage, we place excessive value on these slots. The second hermeneutic concludes that because of the amount of time regular viewers invest in soap characters, they are able to take up some of these positions, therefore possibly replacing other social relationships.

2.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer in terms of an emotional reaction to the character.

The second hermeneutic asserts that many characters evoke strong emotions in viewers. This relates to the concept of 'normal and hate' characters as the emotions evoked are essentially positive or negative, and the characters that evoke negative emotions from viewers are the hate characters which were identified in Chapter 5, while the characters who elicit positive viewer emotions are the normal characters identified in Chapter 5. For example, Agnes is believed to play a mother role for many characters, not only her children. The power struggles between Cherel and Barker (and some other characters) create a feeling of power, control, frustration and achievement. Zeb's traditional thinking frustrates especially young women while men enjoy and relate to the control he has. Vusi's window into the traditional black spiritual realm pleases some black viewers, but makes others feel exposed and vulnerable to being misunderstood by the viewers of other races on a cultural level.

The market researcher believes that because viewers are so emotionally involved with characters, they find it difficult to conduct an objective character evaluation. The market researcher warns the production team before presenting her feedback on the characters that they should keep the viewer's inability to distance him/herself from the emotional experience of the characters in mind and realise that it is part and parcel to the appeal of the soap. Negative feedback should therefore not be understood as necessitating intervention, but rather as an indication of the emotions that are evoked by the character. (Please refer to Chapter 7 for the academic researcher's opinion on this issue).

> With this [viewers inability to be objective about characters] in mind, their
> [viewers'] criticism in the following character descriptions does not
> necessarily warrant change…it is rather an indication of how characters are

currently positioned as a basis for future development (extract from research presentation).

Character segmentation is an analytic tool that is often used in media market research (Livingstone, 1989, 1998). Character segmentation can be done in different ways depending on the study and purpose. Livingstone (1989) asked viewers to sort Coronation Street characters based on perceived similarities in personality. The data was analysed by using statistical multi-dimensional scaling software and the characters were plotted on three scales, namely: masculine/feminine, staid/roguish and modern/traditional in approach to life. Through the same methodology Livingstone (1998) conducted character segmentations of the characters in Dallas, EastEnders and Coronation Street. Characters were plotted on a wide variety of scales including, amongst others: male/female, immoral/moral, business oriented/pleasure oriented and so forth. Through this character segmentation, Livingstone was able to identify character traits that are aligned and opposed. She discovered, for instance, that a character that is seen as being family oriented would also be seen as warm, likeable, steady and moral. The market researcher also conducted a character segmentation to prioritise characters in terms of their contribution to loyalty to Isidingo. This character segmentation was, however, done based on qualitative data and did not involve multi-dimensional scaling. The character segmentation that will now be discussed was based on the market researcher's interpretation of viewer discussions of the individual characters.

The market researcher segmented the Isidingo characters on two variables, namely importance and number of viewers emotionally involved with the character. The importance variable relates to the number of characters connected to a specific character's storyline. Figure 6.3 is an extract from the market research presentation and represents the result of the segmentation.

Figure 6.3. Character segmentation (from market research presentation).

The vertical axis (the number of viewers emotionally involved in the character) is an indication of viewer interest in the character. Characters that are placed toward the top of the vertical scale are therefore important contributors to overall viewer loyalty to the soap. The researcher also segments characters in terms of the number of storylines that were connected to the character (horizontal axis in Figure 6.3) at the time of the research. Characters toward the right of the scale have a potential impact on a large number of storylines and other characters, while characters to the left of the scale exist largely in isolation. Combined, these two measures provide a useful map of the weight that different characters hold in influencing loyalty.

Characters that fall in the top right-hand quadrant are characters that are both connected to many storylines and enjoy strong viewer involvement. These characters were prominent in the storylines at the time of the original research, as well as being the characters that viewers had significant emotional investment in. These characters can realistically be seen as the largest contributors to viewer loyalty at the time of the research. Characters in the top left-hand quadrant were perhaps less prominent in storylines at the time of the research, but because of established viewer relationships with these characters, they still enjoyed great viewer interest. Characters in the bottom right-hand quadrant are characters with which not many viewers have strong relationships, but they were perceived as instrumental to storylines at the time of the research. Lastly, characters in the bottom left-hand quadrant represent characters that were neither instrumental to the storylines at the time of research, nor did they enjoy significant viewer interest. These are background characters that are not critical to any storylines and are there purely for the sake of other characters. The top two quadrants

are relevant to the current research question, as characters in these two quadrants can be expected to increase viewer interest and saliently influence loyalty.

2.2.3.1. *Quadrant 1 (upper - right).*

Quadrant 1 (upper - right) consists of characters that elicit strong emotional response from viewers, while also being connected to many storylines.

2.2.3.1.1. *Barker.*

Viewers are very invested in Isidingo's immoral tycoon. He elicits negative emotions for most, yet he is thoroughly enjoyed. Viewers love to hate him. He escapes all retribution and his continued ability to do so entices continued involvement with the character. Barker is compared to Stefano DiMera in Days of our Lives and JR Ewing in Dallas, and the market researcher calls Barker "an institution". Viewers are ready to see Barker punished for what he has done, although he should again prevail after some punishment. The sentiment is that any betrayal from Lee will have the most hurtful effect on Barker.

2.2.3.1.2. *Cherel.*

Female viewers love Cherel for her strength and drive. They respect and aspire to her. Male viewers do not have the same identification with her, but love the scandal that follows her. Viewers have a wealth of knowledge about Cherel and she evokes emotional involvement with the large majority of the audience. She evokes a range of positive and negative emotions, including: being admired, aspired to, venerated, envied, held in awe and despised. She portrays strength and influence, determination and 'raw guts' – all of which intrigue viewers.

The prospect of Barker and Cherel rekindling their love is met with extreme (positive and negative) emotion. This is yet again witness to the fact that almost all viewers are emotionally invested in them, and that most storylines between them would be met with increasing enthusiasm.

2.2.3.1.3. *Papa G.*

Papa G or Georgie is tremendously liked by a large demographic spread of viewers. They love his unique way of speaking, which is named 'Tsotsie taal'. Especially black males recognise him as someone from the townships or from their immediate environment. He is described as a 'cool operator'. He is seen as a gangster gone right and viewers enjoy watching his unique style. His reformation from a gangster to a legitimate business man was inspiring to many viewers.

2.2.3.1.4. *Zeb.*

Zeb is recognised as a portrayal of a typical African father. Black viewers relate to him as the family provider. When his strict control of his family goes too far, it frustrates viewers, especially younger

women. This real representation of a traditional African man is appreciated by many as a window into black culture.

2.2.3.1.5. *Letti.*

Many viewers have strong opinions about the character Letti, which is indicative of high emotional involvement with her. There are two contrasting ways in which the character is perceived, however. She is seen as strong and determined by white and coloured female audiences, but is also seen as a 'spoilt little brat' by black females. Younger black males believe her attractiveness adds to the appeal of the soap.

2.2.3.2. Quadrant 2 (upper left).

Quadrant 2 (upper left) represents characters who elicit strong emotional response from viewers but who less connected to other characters.

2.2.3.2.1. *Ma Agnes.*

Agnes is experienced as a true mother – many viewers referring to her as Mamma Aggie. As the pillar of strength of her family, young women aspire to her, older women admire her and males take comfort in her. She contributes a sense of stability and strength to the soap and is believed to be as much a rock for the soap as she is for her family. Very high levels of positive emotional involvement are visible for this character from all sub-segments in the audience. Financial difficulty for the Matebanes would achieve high emotional involvement from large parts of the audience. If possible, good should prevail for them.

2.2.3.2.2. *Lee.*

Viewers have empathy with Lee because they have witnessed her undergo many obstacles. Most viewers agree that she has the potential of becoming stronger in her private life and gain as much control there as she has at work, "She must come out of her cocoon". She is seen by many as a worthy successor to Barker and formidable rival to Cherel. Viewers do not believe that she can become evil like her father.

2.2.3.2.3. *Rajesh.*

Rajesh is mostly evaluated in a positive way. He is very popular, especially amongst female viewers. During the time of the research, perceptions were that he could become stronger.

2.2.3.2.4. *Nandipha.*

Little is known about Nandipha, apart from the fact that she is HIV positive and is in a relationship with Parsons. She is perceived as having a positive attitude toward being HIV positive and is therefore seen as inspiring. This is particularly true of viewers who increasingly experience the effects of HIV and AIDS around them. Viewers also appreciate Nandipha's soft and down-to-earth nature.

2.2.3.2.5. Len.

Len is loved for his straight-forward honesty. His demeanor adds excitement ('spice and spunk' according to participants). Female viewers also find Len attractive. He is recognised as a type of character that appears in many soap operas and his type of character is experienced as a "refreshing balance to the conniving characters".

2.2.3.3. Quadrant 3 (lower right).

Quadrant 3 (lower right) includes characters that do not elicit strong emotional response from viewers, but were instrumental in the storylines at the time of the research.

2.2.3.3.1. Frank.

Frank is respected and liked by most viewers. Viewers believe he has the ability to go head to head with Barker; however, he will not succeed in replacing the tycoon. He is seen as an innovative and unpredictable character and this creates both excitement and expectation that something interesting will unfold.

2.2.3.3.2. Maggie.

Maggie is appreciated as a gentle female, but many viewers find it hard to connect with her. This is especially true for male viewers who dislike her for being a typical gossip. She is described as a relative who you are not too fond of – illustrative of the fact that she is well known, but not necessarily liked.

2.2.3.3.3. Joe.

Joe is exclusively known as Letti's white boyfriend. Most viewers who are interested in the storyline of Joe and Letti's relationship invest emotionally in Letti and Zeb, rather than Joe. He is, however, integral to the conflict Letti and her father is experiencing.

2.2.3.4. Quadrant 4 (lower left).

Quadrant 4 (lower left) consists of characters that do not elicit strong emotional response from viewers and that were not instrumental in the storylines at the time of the research.

2.2.3.4.1. Harriet.

Some viewers find Harriet, Barker's secretary, frustrating as she is yet another character that Barker manipulates. Viewers anticipate that she will grow to become more of an individual than merely an employee. There is also the anticipation that she could betray Barker.

2.2.3.4.2. Vusi.

For many viewers, Vusi's disappearance from the immediate storylines left a gap that has not been filled by any other character. Some black male viewers experience frustration at his career choice of

leaving a prominent position in the mining industry to train as a sangoma, and feel that it was a mistake. Overall, viewers react positively to the prospect of having him return.

2.2.3.4.3. Lolly.

Viewers do not display strong opinions over Lolly, and this is diagnostic of their low involvement with her. She is interpreted as young and fun, and viewers believe she managed to turn difficult circumstance into her favour.

2.2.3.4.4. Parsons.

Viewers have warm feelings towards Parsons, however, these emotions are diluted by the perception that his role has reached a climax and that he is not interesting any longer. He is still appreciated for being genuine.

2.2.3.4.5. Mandla.

Mandla, Barker's lawyer, is not particularly valued by any viewer segment. Much criticism is aimed at him being a lawyer, with most viewers agreeing that he isn't strong enough at present.

2.2.3.5. Other characters.

There are a few characters that viewers have not made an emotional investment in. These include: Tim, Dumisani, Erin, Kyle, Leon, Natasha, Niemand, Paul, Pule, Siyanda, Stella, Steve and Tandeka.

2.2.4.   Sub-theme 2.4: Representation as agent of identification.

Most viewers have a need for relating to at least one character. The norm seems to be that viewers form more meaningful, stronger relationships with characters that are of their own race. This is confirmed by Eyal and Rubin (2003) and Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) who believe that viewers are more likely to imitate characters from the same gender, race, attitude and background than their own. Certain cultural attributes may also contribute to viewers having a strong affinity to a character. This is true, for example, of Zeb's traditional, patriarchal values or Papa G's manner of speech. Viewers also feel closer to characters that are in a similar life stage than themselves. For example viewers, who are mothers themselves, easily identify with Agnes and younger females' negative reaction to Zeb illustrates how they identify with Letti. But the set of attributes with perhaps the broadest reach, are values and attitudes which are able to sustain strong affinity with characters across age or race barriers. A white female may identify with the way Agnes handles a problem, or a young black male may aspire to Barker's power.

The following is a summary of the distinct viewer groups in the study based on their values, TV viewing behaviour and the characters in Isidingo that they most relate to. This summary is based on the market researcher's analysis of the different viewer segments.

2.2.4.1. Students aged 18-24 years old.

The youngest segment in the study includes male and female viewers between the ages of 18 and 24 years. These viewers are leaving home, and although families are still important they seem to be less of a priority than friends. A "cultural convergence" between race groups was identified in the more affluent part of the segment where racial differences in interests and aspirations are dispersed. This segment is highly experimental and disloyal in their media preferences, although it includes soaps and series with a preference for humorous content. They are also aspiring to be serious and up to date with current happenings and therefore also appreciate news and actuality content. The characters students identify with most include Barker, Cherel and Georgie for the males, and Cherel, Agnes, Lolly, Georgie, Barker and Lee for the females. Younger females across race groups have a fairly negative investment in Zeb.

2.2.4.2. Adult male viewers 25-34 years old.

The next segment is adult males aged 25-34 years. They are getting settled in their family and careers and have very specific priorities. Their view on life tilts towards the more serious aspects, such as planning for the future and coping with increasing economical demands. Their viewing repertoire consists mainly of series, news and a definite focus on sport. The distinguishing factor between loyal and occasional Isidingo viewers in this segment is that loyal viewers tend to watch with their family, while occasional viewers have no social incentive to watch. The Isidingo characters they relate to strongly are Barker, Cherel, Georgie, Parsons, Zeb and Lee.

2.2.4.3. Adult female viewers 25-34 years old.

Like their male counterparts, adult female viewers are also focused on getting their careers and family settled. They fear failure and are very focused on specifically defined personal goals. They are very avid television-watchers, watching much more television than male viewers as well as older and younger female viewers. They enjoy watching a wide selection of soaps, talk shows and series. Characters they are specifically interested in include Agnes, Cherel, Barker, Georgie, and Vusi.

2.2.4.4. Mature male viewers 35+ years old.

The mature male viewers' careers are established and reaching a high point. They are interested in news happenings and sport, and they use the media to wind down from a day at work. For them, TV ownership (or being able to make the viewing choice) is largely restricted to the prime-time news bulletin during the week and sport on Saturdays. During other times in the week these viewers – some of whom are fathers - often succumb to the preferences of other members of the family. Their viewing repertoires therefore also include family viewing, such as soaps, reality game shows, series and movies. Their viewership of Isidingo is fairly superficial and uninvolved. Characters they are most interested in are Barker, Cherel, Zeb and Georgie.

2.2.4.5. Mature female viewers 35+ years old.

The last segment is female viewers over 35 years of age. These viewers are more often than not mothers and being very family oriented, often place the needs of their family before their own. They are concerned with the health of themselves and their families, and the long-term stability of the country. Together with their male counterparts, some of them remain active in their career and other areas later into their lives (50+). The mature female viewer appreciates viewing occasions that join family members together. This would include the Sunday movie or everyday local soaps. Personally she likes talk shows, romantic and sentimental genres. This group is possibly the most loyal soap viewing segment of all. They have a very strong affiliation with Agnes, but also relate to Lee, Cherel, Barker and Len.

2.3. Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines

Loyalty to Isidingo is sustained first and foremost by an emotional investment in specific characters. It is through the storylines in which these characters are involved, that the viewers get to know them. Understanding characters is therefore also related to understanding their storylines. For this reason, unpacking popular storylines provides insight into the behaviour, motivation and character traits viewers enjoy in characters.

The following storylines are identified in the market research report as prominent storylines that are recalled and enjoyed:

- Every storyline between Barker and Cherel.
- Mama Agnes's success story from rags to riches.
- Georgie's sordid success story of shebeen to club.
- Letti and Joe's interracial relationship.
- The Matebane family's life experiences.
- Lee's affair with Rajesh.
- Cherel killing Duncan.
- Doep investigating Cherel.
- The sadness of Doep and Tanya marrying and Tanya then committing suicide.
  - It left audiences sad and in a rage, but it worked precisely because it is so <u>true to life,</u> i.e. the realness factor that only Isidingo offers.
- Barker setting up Rajesh.
- Lee's kidnapping.
- Vusi's dilemma between becoming a traditional healer and his ordinary work.
- Tanya, the father, the grandfather and the rape.

2.3.1. Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?

This theme is not addressed in the second hermeneutic. It is likely that the market researcher did not regard this sub-theme as salient in the original market research in context of the larger, more pervasive themes.

2.3.2. Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.

Cliffhangers are storylines that build to a climax and is left unresolved at the end of an episode. The market researcher believes these, together with other storylines, enhance the entertainment value of the soap opera, but are less critical than character involvement in sustaining loyalty.

2.3.3. Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines that contribute more to loyalty.

The market researcher identified a number of essential ingredients to make storylines intriguing. These are: strong female role models; malevolent human nature to revel in other human beings' suffering; complex social relationships made comprehensible to the ordinary viewer and maintaining real-life circumstances to assure the integrity and believability of the South African lifestyle. The last two are discussed under theme 5 - *The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.*

2.3.3.1. Strong female role models.

Female viewers are very involved with the strong characters in Isidingo, and their relationships with these characters are based on identification and aspiration. Strong female role models are therefore an essential element in sustaining viewer interest. The first example of this dynamic is viewers' relationship with Agnes. They admire Agnes for her relationship with her family and the fact that she regards her family as her first priority over anything else. Cherel is another example. Although much of Cherel's appeal lies in viewers enjoying her devious scheming, she is admired for her unwavering courage towards all adversaries. This is particularly true for her ability to challenge all the male adversaries that cross her path. Nandipha is another strong woman whose positive attitude to HIV/AIDS is encouraging as well as educational and female viewers adore her for this reason. More evidence to the importance of this theme is viewers' tendency to express a need to see the moral fibre of female characters develop. They wish, for example, that Lee will realise that her father manipulates her and become stronger in her personal life; that Agnes would defy her husband and that Letti would stand up to her father.

2.3.3.2. Malevolent human nature to revel in other human beings' suffering.

Another important story element is the destruction of relationships, which the market researcher believed to be something the depraved human heart takes pleasure in. She mentioned a few storylines to illustrate how this story characteristic is practically played out: Cherel's scheming to destroy Barker; Cherel's quest for revenge; Cherel's suffering in prison, and Barker's brilliant masterminding crime.

The market researcher then made reference to a study conducted in Scotland that possibly explains why malevolence appeals so much to soap opera viewers. Figure three below is an extract from the market research presentation.

Figure 6.4. Understanding why malevolence appeals (from market research presentation).

The researcher explains that psychologists in Scotland invented a memory test similar to the game known as Chinese whispers. Ten volunteers were required to read four different texts and then to write down on paper what they could remember. They were then passed onto another ten who did the same. The process was repeated four times. A comparison between the final versions of the texts and the originals, showed that "gossip-like" information was best remembered and passed on with higest degree of accuracy. This included information regarding deception, infidelity and the interactions of other people. Purely descriptive information about individuals and their surroundings were recalled much less accurately. The researchers concluded that personal and social data are highly relevant to humans, and that it could be related to a primal survival mechanism where a key survival mechanism is paying attention to other people's private lives and interactions.

2.4. Theme 4: The importance of fantasy and realism

The second hermeneutic does not make specific reference to viewers' preference for realism. It rather discusses realism contrasted with fantasy, as important variables when comparing soaps (refer to discussion of Theme 9 below) and that viewers have an appetite for both. When understanding loyalty

to Isidingo, however, the market researcher acknowledges that the soap's status as one of the most realistic soaps on offer on TV, contributes to the loyalty of viewers.

This reiterates the hermeneutic turn identified at the end of the Chapter 5. Viewers clearly watch both local and international soaps, and subsequently have a need for both the realism in the former and fantasy in the latter. A need for realism is therefore not a driver in loyalty to all soap operas but – as illustrated in Theme 5 below – it is a driver of loyalty for Isidingo.

2.5. Theme 5: The Specific Appeal Of Isidingo Is Interpreted By The Viewer As Its Ability To Simulate Reality

2.5.1. Why Isidingo is real

Despite the above, Isidingo is clearly positioned as a realistic soap. Isidingo is perceived by both loyal viewers and viewers who are less intrigued by the soap as the leading South Africa soap in terms of realistically portraying South Africa as it is today. This is especially intriguing for male viewers who favor realism in their overall viewing diet.

> Isidingo compares well with other soaps in terms of its South Africanness (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, aged 30-39 yrs).

> Isidingo is considered the leader of South African soaps, really reflecting the different races (market researcher field notes, mixed race female group, aged 25-34).

> Isidingo although not viewed regularly, is the leading South African soap in terms of realistically portraying South Africa as it is today. Viewers believe the racial mix and the sensitivity of racial interaction are exceptionally well done (market researcher field notes, white and coloured female group, aged 25-34).

2.5.1.1. Maintaining real-life circumstances to assure the integrity and believability of South Africa lifestyle.

A key to Isidingo's appeal lies in its ability to portray the everyday lives of South Africans. This specifically includes being representative of social groups that are both traditional and non-traditional in outlook. It also means making characters as believable as possible. Papa G with his typical demeanor is a success story in this regard.

(Please refer to essential ingredients of storylines under Theme 3 above).

2.5.1.2. Sustaining identification.

The realism of Isidingo as communicated through its realistic storylines and lifelike characters has a very important implication for loyalty. The market researcher believed that the more realistic the soap is, the easier it is for viewers to identify with characters and the challenges that they face. And because identification with characters seems to be one of the most important influencers in loyalty, realism by implication becomes an important element in understanding loyalty.

2.5.2. Sub-theme 5.1: Most of Isidingo's characters are real.

Papa G, Agnes and Zeb are specifically identified as characters you could know from real life. As discussed earlier, the market researcher acknowledged that there are two characters in Isidingo – specifically Cherel and Barker – that are not seen as realistic.

2.5.3. Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.

An important part of Isidingo's appeal is its ability to include social issues in its storylines in an entertaining manner, and making complex social concerns comprehensible for the ordinary viewer. The soap succeeds in tutoring viewers on how to deal with social issues in a way that almost goes undetected. For a South African audience to whom social issues such HIV and AIDS, depression, corruption and racial conflict remains very relevant to their everyday livelihoods, this "edutainment" will remain important.

2.5.4. Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational.

Viewers spend time with soap characters and storylines every day and when they strongly identify with characters the soap plays a significant educational role. The market researcher explained, for instance, that black viewers relate so strongly to the Matabane family that they acquire life skills through following their storylines. Through their identification with the Matebanes the viewer learns how to deal with everyday problems, as well as more serious tribulations.

To them, soaps are the main tutor of the school of life. They are so immersed in the unfolding of the characters' lives that they relate very strongly to it . Not only do they believe they get advice on how to deal with real-life problems, but they also pick up tips in terms of a whole lot of other things relating to fashion, social behaviour, speaking English, raising children, etc. (market researcher field notes, black female group, 35-49 yrs).

2.6. Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcast

The second hermeneutic includes a reference to a viewer's need to maintain sanity between the stress of the day at work and coping with domestic demands at home. The market researcher was convinced that soap operas provide a much needed time for relaxation during which the viewer is able to recuperate after the day's work and the evening's demands at home.

The market researcher described the time during which soap operas are on air as a highly planned, "ritualised" time in the household. Tasks and chores are planned in accordance to when the soap opera is on air. Family members do the same things every night at that time. The adult female family members watch soaps, young children play outside to not disturb the soap viewers and may

occasionally also watch soaps. The male family members tend to be busy elsewhere in the home and may occasionally also join in watching the soap.

> Reluctant admittance to watching some soaps, mainly because they allow their wives to 'reign' during those hours (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, 25-34 yrs).

The market researcher called this time an "emotional time-out" that all family members need and enjoy. The timeslot in which the soap opera is broadscast is integral to its appeal in this regard.

2.7. Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership

The market researcher noticed that viewers are influenced by family members with whom they share their TV. They tend to watch soaps with family members and when family members do not agree on the specific soap to watch, the children often get their way. The market researcher believed that mothers often relinquish control of the remote, and by implication the viewing decision, to other family members.

Backstage is preferred by their kids and they have no interest in fighting with their children about it. It seems as if Generations is more the soap families prefer to watch to get their soap fix (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, aged 30-39yrs).

The tendency to discuss the soap opera with fellow viewers – as identified in chapter 5 - was also confirmed by the market researcher: They love being able to discuss it at length with colleagues/ friends (market researcher field notes, white & Coloured female group, aged 25-34).

2.8. Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly character involvement

The most important cause of fluctuating viewer interest identified by the market researcher, is involvement with a specific character. When key characters disappear, interest and loyalty fluctuates. She mentions examples of Cherel, Vusi and Derek, but emphasises Cherel.

She also believed that when lapsed viewers[8] try to recommit to Isidingo, they find it difficult to become used to new characters and form relationships with new characters. And they are subsequently lost again easily.

I wanted to see what was going to happen with Refilwe – the lady that had a baby with Matabane – and she disappeared (market researcher field notes, interview with a black, female lapsed viewer, aged 45 yrs).

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[8] Lapsed viewers were not part of the academic study's sample but were included in the larger study and are therefore mentioned by the market researcher. Please refer to the introduction of Chapter 6.

2.8.1. Sub-theme 8.1: Character involvement vs. interest in storylines.

There is a difference between viewers who watch regularly and those who watch less regularly. As regular viewership increases, so does the closeness of the engagement with the characters and storylines.

Despite knowledge, they (young occasional viewers) don't seem to have any poignant relationship with any of the characters, with the exception of Cherel, for whom they have admiration because of her potency and determination (market researcher field notes, mixed race female group, aged 18-24 yrs).

Inevitably they get involved with the storylines and develop a kind of spectator fascination rather than getting too involved with the characters (market researcher field notes, Indian male group, aged 30-39 yrs).

Younger occasional viewers are less involved in the characters and storylines than older more regular viewers. Their irregular viewing patterns are due to lifestyle factors, such as social commitments and the general low priority of television in their lives. They reject the younger characters in Isidingo, thus indicating that character identification is not such a prominent part of their interpretation of the lived reality of soap opera viewership than would be the case for older females. They accept the typical characters portrayed, such as the bitch, the father, the tycoon etc. and have no need to find role models in the soap. Some of them do, however, have a stronger affinity towards Backstage, a soap that is broadcast in the same timeslot on another station that has a predominately younger cast.

Male viewers in general are believed to be more passive viewers than their female counterparts. Their viewership is motivated more by the social dynamic of being with their spouses, than necessarily a personal interest in watching. They also seem to be more involved in storylines than in characters and are subsequently easily lost if a compelling storyline is resolved. For them viewership is simply not a priority, as tasks around the house could easily take precedence over viewership. The market researcher described their viewership as 'superficial, uncomplicated, and their expectations low.'

2.8.2. Sub-theme 8.2: Competing soaps.

Afrikaans-speaking occasional viewers, including the white and coloured audiences balance watching 7de Laan and Isidingo. The soaps are broadcast in the same timeslot every day. 7de Laan is a more colloquial setting with a focus on family-oriented, family friendly storylines and characters. It lacks the irreverence of Isidingo and it also offers more lighthearted entertainment. Although no groups with only Coloured research participants were included in the academic study's sample, the market

researcher singled out their responses while observing the groups and mentions that they find it easier to relate to the small-town nature of the soap, as well as identifying with the predominately coloured cast of 7de Laan.

2.8.3. Sub-theme 8.3: Alternative viewing opportunities.

Occasional viewers, who do not watch every weekday episode, are not truly lost to Isidingo. Occasional viewers make use of the myriad of alternative viewing opportunities, including a 09:30 repeat on SABC 1, a 15:00 repeat on SABC 3, as well as the omnibus on Saturdays. Although the soap faces considerable competition from Backstage for the younger black viewer and 7de Laan for the white and coloured viewer, no single satisfactory substitute emerged during the deprivation exercise. For the market researcher, this was proof of Isidingo's unique role in the soap repertoire of the viewers who watch more than one soap.

2.8.4. Sub-theme 8.4: Production quality.

The market researcher also believes that production quality cannot be blamed for occasional viewership. She explained that there are usually tell-tale signs of production problems, such as viewers expressing that the soap "just looks local" or "that it is not as good as international soaps". Comments like these were absent from her understanding of occasional viewers' experience of the soap, and viewers' perception of the production quality of Isidingo is therefore an unlikely cause of occasional viewership.

2.9. Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre

Four main local soaps emerged to make up the competitive environment for Isidingo. Although not all are broadcast within the same timeslot, these soaps shape viewers' expectations of what a local soap operas should be. Isidingo viewers also watch a variety of other soaps, indicating that the genre in itself is appealing. Figure 6.5 is an extract from the market research presentation. It represents a segmentation the market researcher made of the soap operas on air at the time of the research.

Figure 6.5. Soap segmentation (from market research presentation).

The market researcher segmented the soaps on offer on local television at the time of the research into three distinct groups (Figure 6.6): aspirational soaps, commercial soaps and realistic soaps, and defined them as follows:

Aspirational soaps: based on wealth, sophistication, corporate themes and physical beauty ("the beautiful people"). These include the soaps Egoli, Days of Our Lives and The Bold and The Beautiful.

Commercial soaps: based on more approachable everyday characters, sometimes underscored with bizarre themes and romance ("Commercial" as in supplying the "popular"/ mass ingredients). Included in this group is Generations, 7de Laan, Days of our lives and The Bold and the Beautiful.

Realistic soaps: based on common, everyday people. Attempt to mirror society and the mores of the common people within an often colloquial and familiar setting. This group, the largest on local television, includes Isidingo, Egoli, Muvhango and Backstage.

Generations is likely to be the most popular soap amongst black viewers, it being extremely aspirational, and full of high profile, powerful characters. 7de Laan has a malleable and uncomplicated approach that results in high appeal amongst Afrikaans-speaking audiences, in particular viewers with young children. Egoli has similar values as 7de Laan, but more intrigue and aspirational value. Backstage has the advantage of a narrowed, young character cast which allows for strong peer identification, as well as an intense portrayal of interracial relationships.

Each soap has a unique style and appeal, and interestingly enough, viewers adapt to each soap's style. The market researcher explained, for instance, that coloured and white females watch both the contrasting Isidingo and 7de Laan, and when watching the latter, they accept the soap's softer, humorous style. They would not expect 7de Laan to come up with the same challenging storylines (dealing with serious, difficult issues) as Isidingo.

And this is true for the larger soap genre as well. Each soap is enjoyed for its unique mix of characters, storylines and settings. The current study provides an in-depth explanation of this dynamic for Isidingo, however, future research may examine how this differs for South African viewers when watching the wide variety of other soaps available.

2.9.1. Sub-theme 9.1: International soaps are more unrealistic than local soaps.

The notion that international soaps are more unrealistic than local soaps is confirmed in the second hermeneutic. The market researcher made a clear distinction between realistic and fantasy soaps, and includes international soaps in the latter category. Figure 6.6 is an extract from the research report in which the researcher plotted the soaps on a continuum with fantasy and realism as the two contrasting extremities.

Figure 6.6. How soaps compare in terms of realism (from market research presentation).

International soaps are placed on the fantasy side of the continuum, while Isidingo is placed on the realism side. This is largely because of Isidingo's portrayal of hard-hitting social issues, as well as having some characters that are undoubtedly recognised as being realistic. However, the malevolent characters – most notably Barker and Cherel – add a fantasy element to Isidingo. Since local viewers have an appetite for the real and fantastical, Isidingo succeeds very well with its mix of realism and entertaining fantasy-like, malevolent characters.

In the final interpretation, the current theme could therefore not be seen as a sub-theme to Theme 4 of the first hermeneutic, i.e. a preference for all things real. Although international soaps are clearly perceived to be more unrealistic than local soaps, this cannot purely imply a preference for realism, seeing that international soaps are still watched by loyal viewers of local soaps, and even Isidingo contains elements of fantasy.

2.10. Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism

This theme is not addressed in the second hermeneutic. It is likely that the market researcher did not regard this sub-theme as salient in the original market research within the context of the larger, more pervasive themes.

2.11. Theme 11: The importance of the setting of the soap

The setting of the soap is another less important determinant of viewer interest, as it provides the backdrop to the type of characters and stories one could expect to find there (e.g. a soap with a corporate setting would have corporate characters and corporate storylines). A soap, such as Backstage for instance, appeals to younger viewers because of its portrayal of a student community, while 7de Laan offers a small-town charm where everyone knows each other. Egoli and Isidingo are both corporate settings interspersed with family and home environments.

Isidingo started out in the mining industry and a few years ago substituted this setting for the current television environment. The market researcher believes that viewers experienced this transition as natural and that viewers who were familiar with the mining heritage are also comfortable with the new setting.

3. The movement in interpretation from the first to the second hermeneutic

As discussed in Chapter 3, a complete understanding can never be achieved within a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, because all consciousness is already interpretation (Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). It is, however, possible to reach reasonable understanding, even though it cannot be absolute (Debesay et al., 2008).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the epistemology (what can be known about reality) of hermeneutic phenomenology is that any knowledge represents what has been accumulated about a certain topic thus far, not what is ultimately and objectively available to be known about the topic. Interpretations in the current chapter were made on the basis of the interpretations in the previous chapter. Added to these is the background knowledge of the second interpreter (for this reason the hermeneutic circle becomes a spiral that enlarges as it moves outward). The second hermeneutic therefore represents a more complete or larger interpretation of what is ultimately real, but this interpretation cannot be separated from the interpretations that have already been made.

Table 6.1 below summarises how the first and second hermeneutics build on each other. This table will be revisited again in the third hermeneutic and will then include a column indicating if information relating to each theme was found in literature. Table 6.1 therefore represents the themes as identified in the first hermeneutic and the new names for the themes which are more apt at describing the full meaning of the themes that have just been elaborated on or are not present.

Table 6.1 *The reinterpretation of themes from the first hermeneutic*

Chapter 5 The soap opera viewer	Chapter 6 Market researcher
Themes from the first hermeneutic	**Themes rephrased in the second hermeneutic**
Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters.	Renamed to: **Theme 2:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as <u>involvement</u> with characters.
Sub-theme 2.1: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 2.2: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.

Sub-theme 2.3: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters and viewers relate to these two types of characters differently.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme 2.3:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer in terms of an <u>emotional reaction</u> to the character.
-	Additional sub-theme: **Sub-theme 2.4**: Representation as agent of identification.
Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 3.1: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?	Not present in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 3.2: Anticipation of what will happen next.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 3.3: Types of storylines preferred.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme 3.3:** Types of storylines that contribute more to loyalty.
Theme 4: A preference for all things real.	Renamed to: **Theme 4:** The importance of fantasy and realism.
Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 5.1: Isidingo's characters are real.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme 5.1:** Most of Isidingo's characters are real.
Sub-theme 5.2: Isidingo's storylines are real.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Sub-theme 5.3: Isidingo is educational	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas are broadcast.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.
Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour	Renamed to: **Theme 8:** The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly character involvement
Theme 9: Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre.	**Theme 9:** Interest in soaps is interpreted as an interest in the soap genre.
Sub-theme 9.1: Local and international soaps represent two sub-genres that are distinct because of the difference in realism between them.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.

Theme 10: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism.	Not present in the second hermeneutic.
Not present in the first hermeneutic.	Additional Theme: **Theme 11:** The importance of the setting of the soap.

4. Conclusion

In Chapter 6, the researcher revisited the interpretive framework of Chapter 5 from within the second hermeneutic. The second hermeneutic largely elaborated on the interpretations of the first hermeneutic. There were, however, a few unique contributions to the interpretation. Most notably, the second hermeneutic repositions *interest in characters* as a determinant of loyalty to an *identification with characters*. This identification with characters is supported by the soap's ability to provide representation of a number of attributes through which the viewer can form a relationship; viewers' emotional reaction to characters and the soaps' accurate portrayal of reality. The second hermeneutic also introduces the importance of the setting of a soap in creating a backdrop from within which the larger soap is experienced. Lastly, the second hermeneutic includes the importance of the broader genre in the interpretation of the lived reality.

In the next two chapters, the researcher will be presenting the third hermeneutic. The third hermeneutic is primarily a reflection on the movement of interpretation from the first to the second hermeneutic. Once this is established, the researcher will add her own interpretation by consolidating the second hermeneutic with existing knowledge on the subject as set out in the literature review and theoretical framework.

Chapter 7 – The third hermeneutic: interpretation

1. Introduction

Chapter 7 is a discussion of the research findings within the context of the literature review and theoretical framework. It takes place on the outer edge of the hermeneutic spiral and therefore represents the third hermeneutic.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the interpretive framework, the reciprocal interpretation of the hermeneutic process ends when the researcher reaches a temporary place of sensible meaning that is free of inner contradictions. It involves a series of interpretations and reinterpretations that constantly build on each other. This chapter is therefore structured in a way that allows the reader to follow how the researcher's interpretation is built up over the course of her reading of the first and second hermeneutic and the literature.

Figure 7.1. Graphical representation of the contents of Chapter 7.

As Figure 7.1 illustrates, the chapter is structured around four parts. In part 1, the researcher summarises her understanding of the first and second hermeneutic on an overall level. This section is built around three main graphical summations of her understanding of the main hermeneutics and acts as an introduction to her engagement in the hermeneutic spiral.

In part 2 – the most substantial part of the chapter – the researcher applies the different approaches offered in the literature review to the first and second hermeneutic to arrive at a more complete interpretation of the lived reality. Since this chapter represents the third hermeneutic, the judgement of what constitutes a more complete interpretation, is her (the academic researcher's) own.

Part 1: Reinterpreting earlier interpretations

This section is a summary of the academic researcher's understanding of the earlier interpretations. Each hermeneutic is summarised in a graphical model and then discussed. This section acts as an introduction to the third hermeneutic.

2.   The academic researcher's understanding of the first hermeneutic

The academic researcher understood the first hermeneutic as portraying several aspects that contribute to loyalty to a soap opera. Figures 7.2 and 7.3 summarise how she understood the first hermeneutic. The former is a preliminary conceptual model of the lived reality of the participants and the latter is a visual representation of the process through which a viewer develops loyalty to a soap opera. Arrows in the model indicate the process through which the viewer's interpretation takes place.

Figure 7.2. The first hermeneutic: conceptual model of the factors that impact loyalty.

The main factors that influence loyalty to Isidingo are: an interest in characters, interest in storylines, a need for realism, interest in the genre, the social aspect of viewership, and the timeslot in which soap operas are aired on television. Most of these consist of a number of sub-factors. An interest in characters is interpreted as a combination of viewer knowledge of a character, pseudo-social relationships formed with the characters, as well as the difference between hate and normal characters. The interest in storylines consists of an anticipation of what will happen when the characters find out what has already been revealed to the viewer, an anticipation of what will happen

next, as well as the contribution of different types of storylines. A preference for realism is another aspect that contributes to the interpretation of loyalty and relates strongly to the specific appeal of Isidingo. Isidingo's realism is a result of realistic character portrayals, realistic storylines and viewers' belief that Isidingo is educational. Viewers also have an interest in the genre as a whole and they identify two sub-genres available in South Africa, namely international and local soap operas. In this respect, the unrealistic nature of international soaps is contrasted to Isidingo's realism. The social aspect of viewing Isidingo and the timeslot in which the soap is aired are the last two factors which do not consist of any sub-themes.

Another aspect to the first hermeneutic is identified as the difference between loyal and occasional viewers (indicated in a free-standing circle in Figure 7.2). The difference between loyal and occasional viewers cannot be defined clearly in the process that is illustrated in Figure 7.2. It can, however, be explored further in explaining the process through which loyalty is developed. Figure 7.3 below summarises the development of loyal viewership by emphasising different aspects of the soap opera at different stages of developing loyalty.

Figure 7.3. First hermeneutic: conceptual model of the development of loyalty.

The academic researcher's understanding of the first and second hermeneutic is that non-viewers of Isidingo are usually introduced to the soap by family members or friends or by browsing through the channels in a particular timeslot. The motivation for viewership at this early stage is primarily social influence and the convenience of the timeslot. Occasional viewership develops when the viewer becomes slightly more familiar with the soap opera. It is clear from the first hermeneutic that the motivation for viewership during this stage is mostly an interest in specific storylines. The last stage during which a viewer becomes loyal to the soap is characterised by regular, uninterrupted viewership. During this stage, viewership is primarily motivated by an interest in characters, but supported by the timeslot, social aspect as well as an interest in storylines.

3. The academic researcher's understanding of the second hermeneutic

The market researcher's reading of the second hermeneutic mainly contributed a re-understanding of the flow of the interpretive processes portrayed in the two conceptual models of the first hermeneutic. By juxtaposing the two processes, she began to understand how the aspects contributing to the experience of the lived reality, fit into the viewer's evolution from Isidingo novice to loyal viewer.

The second hermeneutic presents the interpretation of the lived reality in four distinct sections: openness to the genre of soap operas, storyline involvement, character involvement, and subsequent loyalty to Isidingo. A conceptual model of the lived reality is presented in Figure 7.4 below and discussed in the sections that follow.

Figure 7.4. The second hermeneutic: conceptual model of the lived reality.

The genre becomes available to the viewer through the facilitating roles of the timeslot and the social aspect of viewership, but also through the lifestyle, values and interests of the specific viewer. Lifestyle, values and interests determine the meaning a viewer attaches to the genre. For male viewers it may be a subtle submission to the viewing preference of the female members of the household, although it could also be the other way around. For children, it represents an opportunity to be with the adult caretakers in their homes. For mothers it may offer an opportunity for the family to spend time together. Depending on the routines and viewing preferences of the family members, the timeslot lends itself to soap opera viewing. The social aspect of viewership relates to the notion that

soap operas are sometimes watched by more than one family member and also includes the function of discussing the soap with friends and colleagues.

All of these – an interest in soap operas, the availability of the timeslot, as well as possible social influences – contribute to an openness to the genre. The viewer then makes a selection between a few soap operas that are on air in the same timeslot. This choice is based on the attractiveness of the setting of the soap, as well as the types of storylines. The first and second hermeneutic concurs that a new viewer is, at first, enticed to begin watching a soap opera on a regular basis because of an involvement in storylines. The involvement in storylines depends on the type of storylines, the realism of the storylines, as well as an anticipation that the viewer develops in seeing the resolution of the plots. Storyline involvement is supported by the timeslot and social influences, and as the viewer's knowledge and interest in the soap increases, he/she might become involved with the characters.

The second hermeneutic argues that a viewer's knowledge of the different characters, the degree to which the viewer is able to relate to the character representations, as well as the realism of the characters, contribute to the viewer's ability to become involved with characters. Character involvement translates to regular viewership and salient loyalty to the soap opera, as the interest in seeing a storyline get resolved develops into an interest in the fate of different characters.

Becoming loyal to the soap opera has several consequences. The viewer is more likely to form pseudo-social relationships with characters, have an emotional reaction to the characters, and an opportunity for education is created. Education is facilitated through storylines that address social issues and familiar problems that viewers are faced with in real life. Pseudo-social relationships with – and emotional reactions to – characters in turn, has a positive impact on viewer involvement with characters.

Part 2: The application of literature to the first and second hermeneutic

Attempting to interpret any part of the lived reality on its own would mean removing it from the circle of interpretation and its relation to other parts of the whole, and thus essentially stripping it of its meaning (Laverty, 2003; Thompson, 1997). While some media theories discussed in Chapter 2 deal with only one aspect of the lived reality, others attempt to describe the lived reality by including all of the factors that play a role. Buselle's and Bilandzic's (2008) narrative comprehension and engagement model seems to be the model of audience interpretation that comes closest to this ideal.

Busselle's and Bilandzic's (2008) work represents the most contemporary theory that includes all elements recognised by the body of knowledge (media theory) to date. For this study to add to the academic body of knowledge, it will have to acknowledge and either contribute or invalidate their model for the South African context. For this reason, their model is used as a general structure for this part of the chapter.

4. Introduction – bringing literature and the interpretation of the lived reality together

The model incorporates the viewer's use of real-world knowledge and genre, the viewer's interpretation of characters, storyline and setting, as well as the concepts of realism, transportation and enjoyment, and proposes an integrated understanding of the lived reality. Figure 7.5 indicates how some of the theories discussed in Chapter 2 fit into the Buselle and Bilandzic (2008) model.

Figure 7.5. Fit between theories and Buselle's and Bilandzic's (2008) model of narrative comprehension and engagement.

All the models, concepts and authors mentioned in the following paragraphs have been discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The purpose of this section is to illustrate how the concepts in the different theories fit together, rather than to repeat a discussion on their meaning. Concepts will therefore be used with only a brief reminder of what they refer to. For further information on these theories, please refer to Chapter 2.

Figure 7.5 shows that Livingstone's (1998) discussion on narrative interpretation that includes selective remembering of the narrative structure and characters involved in storylines, is useful in understanding how the text influences the creation of the situation model (the primary mental model which acts as the mechanism through which the rest of the story is interpreted) and its underlying story world and character models. Her analysis of character representations in Dallas, EastEnders and Coronation Street (Livingstone, 1998) combined with Hoorn and Konijn's (2003, 2005) encoding phase, further explains the character models that viewers form. The notion suggested by Buselle and Bilandzic (2008) that real world knowledge and genre schemas are used to fill in gaps that are present in the story, reiterates Livingstone's (1998) argument for the resourceful viewer and importance of genre. Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) diversification of the genre also informs the role of genre schemas in the formation of the situation model.

The deictic shift (experientially placing oneself inside the story) and the unawareness of self and the natural world, show parallels with Cohen (2001) and Green et al. (2004), while the flow sensation (the experience when making the deictic shift) and identification (seeing yourself as one of the characters) are supported by Cohen (2001) and Green et al. (2004) respectively. Hoorn and Konijn's (2003, 2005) compare phase (in which the story is judged on similarity, relevance and valence) resonates with Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) real-time realism evaluation (where the viewer compares mental models with pre-existing information and judges the story in terms of its relevance and realism), as well as with Nabi and Krcmar's (2004) cognitive enjoyment (in which the viewer comes to conscious conclusions about the story). The outcomes phase in Figure 7.5 above (where the result and effect of viewing is summarised) also corresponds with Hoorn and Konijn's (2003, 2005) respond phase (where the balance between involvement and distance results in high or low appreciation) and the behavioural enjoyment (intent to watch again) of Nabi and Krcmar (2004). Enjoyment as a whole, which fits into the outcomes phase above, is discussed at length by Green et al. (2004) and Nabi and Krcmar (2004).

Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) model emerges as the one model that encapsulates most of the facets discussed by other authors. For this reason, it was used as a general structure within which to apply the literature to the findings in the first and second hermeneutic.

5. Comprehension

Comprehension is the first phase in Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) three phase model. During the comprehension phase, the viewer cognitively engages with the text to form three mental models, namely character models, story world models and the situation model. To form these, the viewer interprets the text within the context of knowledge obtained from the real world (for example knowledge of how people would react in the situations that the characters find themselves in) and genre schemas. Each of these will now be discussed within the context of the first and second hermeneutic.

5.1. Genre schemas

Genre schemas are a collection of knowledge that the viewer has of the genre conventions of the specific programming genre they are watching. Soap operas as a genre, have certain conventions that inform the possibilities within the narrative. Viewers' knowledge of these allows them to predict what might happen and what is unlikely to happen. Isidingo's allegiance to the characteristics of the genre will now be discussed and it will then be illustrated how Isidingo diverges from the genre to create a unique South African sub-genre.

5.1.1. Isidingo's allegiance to the characteristics of the genre.

Isidingo is true to most of the conventions that are unique to the soap genre. Although it started as a fictional drama, at the time of the research, it was a continuous serial transmitted daily. It has a new

episode every evening at 18:30, with two repeat slots during the course of the next day and a full omnibus (a collection of all the episodes of the week) over the weekend. All in all, five unique episodes are broadcast every week. The first genre convention that Isidingo is aligned with is therefore its characteristic as daily serial. Secondly, Isidingo has no distinct hero or heroin with which viewers are invited to form a relationship. Isidingo is rather a collection of a community of characters. Thirdly, Isidingo's storylines are a mix of longer running and shorter storylines, which interweave and are resolved with new intrigues being introduced regularly. The fourth way in which Isidingo aligns with the genre conventions of soap opera is the fact that it has no definite end. At the time of writing, Isidingo had aired more than 2600 episodes (N.C. Chauke, personal communication, July, 30, 2009) and no end had been announced.

A fifth convention which Isidingo is true to is the socially significant themes inherent to its storylines. Isidingo addresses socially significant themes, such as HIV/AIDS, interracial relationships, homosexuality, corruption, gender, the role of the community and tradition. Sixth, contrasting views on these issues are represented by characters that debate and struggle with the issues. Interracial relationships are addressed, for instance, through conflict between Zeb – representing the conservative, traditional view, and Letti – who represents the progressive, modern view. Lastly, Isidingo is a dialogue-heavy production. The narrative is communicated and resolved through the dialogues of the characters.

One convention that Isidingo is not true to is the centrality of the female world. Like Dallas, Isidingo moves away from this convention of the genre by not having female characters and their domestic concerns as its central focus. With a cast of strong male and female characters, and a proportionate number of male characters that are central to the main intrigues, the soap is not true to the genre convention of the centrality of feminine concerns.

The character portrayals in Isidingo also represent three tenets of femininity: matriarchal femininity, of which Agnes is the prime example (female characters who are mature, warm and central to the soap community), counter-stereotypical femininity portrayed by Cherel (female characters who resemble the strong, immoral male characters) and patriarchal femininity, of which Maggie and Nandipha are examples (female characters who are submissive, passive or irrational).

The character Harriet is worth mentioning. The encoding placed in the text for Harriet is that she is very loyal to Barker and is slightly scared of him (www.isidingo.co.za). In contrast to the powerless encoding (meaning placed in the text by the writers), viewers express an anticipation that she will betray Barker with a secret that she knows from his past, which is clearly a position of power (Sub-theme 2.3).

5.1.2. Isidingo's genre sub-type.

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) identified sub-types within the soap genre, which are: the community soap, the dynastic soap and the dyadic soap. Isidingo does not fit clearly into any one of the genre sub-types, but it is closest to a dynastic soap. Table 7.1 below summarises the three genre sub-types identified by Liebes and Livingstone and provides a South African example for each. Liebes and Livingstone identified the three sub-genres by analysing the kinship structures (romantic and family ties between characters) for a number of European soap operas. The academic researcher replicated their analysis and evaluated the kinship structures of Isidingo to determine which sub-type of genre it represents (this analysis is presented and discussed towards the end of this section). Due to the limitations of the scope of the current study, the researcher did not conduct a similar analysis for each of the local soap operas mentioned in Table 7.1, but rather made an estimate of their genre sub-type based on her general background knowledge of the kinship structures in the soap operas. (Please refer to Chapter 4 for a discussion on the researcher's background knowledge; to Chapter 7 for a discussion on how this background knowledge influenced her interpretation and the end of Chapter 7 for suggestions on how further research should analyse the kinship structures of all local soap operas through Liebes and Livingstone's methodology to corroborate the emergence of a unique South African genre sub-type.)

Table 7.1 *Genre sub-types in South Africa*

Genre sub-type	Definition	South African example
Dynastic soap	One powerful family.	Isidingo and Egoli
Community soap	A number of equal, multi-generational families.	7de Laan and Isidingo
Dyadic soap	A destabilised network of uni-generational, interchanging couples.	Rhythm City and Isidingo

Dynastic soaps have the most traditional patriarchal structures of power and gender. There are two examples of dynastic soaps in Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) work: the godfather example of the Greek and Italian soap operas and the honourable patriarch example of the Swedish soap opera. Isidingo has one of each of these two types of patriarchs: Barker Haines is the godfather patriarch, while Zeb Matabane is the honourable patriarch.

The dramatic tension in the honourable patriarch dynastic soap operas evolves in the negotiation of power with the most crucial question being if the father will be able to impose his will on the rest of the family (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998). This typifies Zeb's interactions with his family in Isidingo. He is in constant conflict with his family – trying to impose his will on his children and standing in contrast to his wife Agnes, who has empathy with her children. His son Parsons married Nandipha, an HIV-positive woman, despite his strong disapproval, while his daughter Letti's interracial relationship with Joe goes against his will. All the conflict this character is involved in is about him imposing his will on the family.

In the godfather example, the patriarch is less honourable and is often excused for immoral behaviour because of the society he lives in that requires devious actions to survive, or he is admired for being successful. The godfather family has enough power to manipulate people and things around them (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998). Barker Haines is clearly the godfather patriarch, as he is typified as the powerful, immoral tycoon. He has numerous business interests which he navigates with, more often than not, depraved business dealings. His position, wealth and power afford him the ability to manipulate a variety of characters around him, most notably his daughter Lee. He is notorious for being unbreakable and admired, yet hated by characters and viewers alike.

Isidingo departs from the conventions of the genre by introducing elements of another sub-genre. Although the strong patriarchs identify the soap as dynastic, it also has clear elements of a dyadic soap: Isidingo has a large number of single characters. Figure 7.6 is an analysis of the romantic and family ties in Isidingo, based on the methodology of Liebes and Livingstone (1998). Due to space limitations and to provide a focused view, only characters that were relevant to the story at the time of the market research were included in the diagram. Apart from the Matabane family, no complete families are present. The soap is rather built on a community of unattached characters, most of whom are single. Romantic and business storylines get equal representation.

Figure 7.6. Romantic and family ties in Isidingo at the time of the market research.
<u>Note:</u> *Cherel was raped by her father, after which she became pregnant with Tanya. The relationship between Cherel and her father is therefore not classified as a past romantic liaison.*

Isidingo is, however, not a pure mix of the dynastic and dyadic soaps in Liebes and Livingstone's (1998) definition, as the single characters in Isidingo are not uni-generational (compare the older

characters, such as Georgie and Harriet with the younger characters Paul and Lolly), and do not truly move around in romantic relationships. It also stands in contrast to Liebes and Livingstone's dyadic soaps, since Isidingo includes social issues.

It is also not a clear community soap that romanticises working class life (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998), as many of Isidingo's characters are working as professionals. Although most of these characters have ties with the original mining community Horizon Deep, within the new ON!TV environment, most characters could be seen as middle class.

The soap also has a middle-class community feel with Maggie's commune, while the relationships in the commune, as well as at ON!TV could qualify it as being dyadic. Other locally produced soap operas on South African television fit more easily into these categories. Egoli is a dynastic soap, with the prominent Edwards family as the focus. 7de Laan is clearly a community soap, with its mix of young and old acquaintances on "The Laan". Backstage is a dyadic soap, with its mix of young characters that continuously renegotiate their relationships.

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) argue that both America and Europe sustain versions of the dynastic model because the patriarchal and primordial themes which structure social relations in these soap operas draw on common and fundamental themes in western culture. South Africa, however, is a multi-cultural society in which the western and African value systems are a source of conflict between certain characters.

From reading the Isidingo narrative of the month immediately prior to the collection of the first hermeneutic, it almost seems as if Isidingo is three soaps in one . There is the Matabanes, the Bullers (the boarding house) and the Corporate world of ON!TV. Each of these is only loosely connected with the others. Nandipha is a member of the Matabane family who works at ON!TV, together with some of the residents of the boarding house. The Matabanes are also only informally connected to the Bullers, with them sharing the local bar and some friendship ties between Agnes and Maggie. The soap therefore represents both the dynastic (the Matabanes and the Haines), the dyadic (the Bullers) and the community soap (the Bullers).

It is the researcher's conclusion that Isidingo is a unique soap within the genre that combines elements from each of the sub-genres. It has the patriarchs of the dynastic soaps, the single characters of the dyadic soaps, and the equal community of the community soaps. These elements combine in a soap opera that viewers judge (in the first hermeneutic) as consistent with their experience of South African society.

5.2. Real-world knowledge – the resourceful viewer

During Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) comprehend phase, the viewer interprets the text by using two sets of resources (Livingstone, 1998). The section above deals with the first set, which is the

knowledge the viewer has of the genre. The second set of resources that the viewer uses to interpret the text is real-world knowledge, which will now be discussed.

The storyline in a soap opera is mostly communicated through dialogue between characters (Creswell, 2001; Livingstone, 1998) that represent opposing views on an issue. Characters are communicated through a series of fragmented pieces of information that the viewer strings together to interpret the character. For this interpretation, the viewer uses the two sets of resources mentioned above.

The first set of resources used is knowledge built up from real-life experience. An example of how real-life skills are used in the interpretation of soap opera characters, is the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error is a social cognitive theory that suggests that an individual would interpret the behaviour of another individual as dispositional (i.e. telling you something about his/her character) while explaining his/her own behaviour (or the behaviour of a character that they know well) as situational (i.e. telling you something about the situation in which the behaviour took place) (Livingstone, 1998). Rajesh is a well known character who is betrayed by Barker. As he is a well known character, the viewer tries to understand what happened between Barker and Rajesh that motivated Barker to set him up. If Rajesh was a new character introduced in this storyline, the fact that Barker set him up would tell us something about his character. The inverse happens with Joe, who is a relatively unknown character. His reaction to Zeb's antagonising behaviour tells the viewer something about Joe's character. Viewers decide which type of character Joe portrays based on the fact that they saw him survive all Zeb's challenges and treat Letti with respect.

The first and second hermeneutic also illustrate how social knowledge is a relevant resource in interpreting Isidingo. It has been argued in both of the first two hermeneutics that loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming pseudo-social relationships with characters (Sub-theme 2.2 in the first and second hermeneutics). Viewers spend time with the Isidingo characters every day, more than is spent with many other people in their lives. As viewers come to know the characters, their continued viewership is positively influenced by the prospect of seeing the characters again. Viewers build a relationship with characters that resemble real-life relationships. As will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, Isidingo viewers' relationships with the soap characters resemble para-social relationships, as described by Cohen (2001).

The second set of resources used in interpreting new information is the accumulated knowledge of what certain characters have done in the past and can be expected to do in the future. When a viewer starts viewing a soap opera for the first time, he/she can be expected to struggle to understand all the storylines, because so much relies on his/her knowledge of the characters. This piece of literature is supported by Sub-theme 2.1 in the first and second hermeneutic: loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters. Knowing a character allows the viewer to quickly assume which standpoint a character is likely to take on an issue (traditional vs. modern; self-

serving vs. altruistic, etc.), allows the viewer to side with one of the arguments and anticipate what is likely to happen, who is likely to have power and who not. When Zeb and Agnes are having an argument, the viewer could assume from past arguments that they are fighting about their children, that Zeb is trying to assert a traditional view, while Agnes has an understanding of the children's side of the story, and that Zeb is likely to win the argument.

Theme 5 in the first and second hermeneutics – the specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality – also confirms the relevance of the viewer's social and soap knowledge. To judge the external realism of the soap, the viewer has to apply real-world knowledge to what is known about the soap (is what I see on the soap consistent with the conventions of social life?[9]). To judge the internal realism of a soap, the viewer applies knowledge of what has happened in the soap before, to what is happening now (is what I am seeing now, consistent with what has happened in the past?).

Comparing people's social knowledge to that of the text will reveal what kind of expectations the viewer may develop. It allows the writer to predict whether the story will be congruent or incongruent with the viewer's social and story knowledge. Cherel and Barker are, for instance, described by viewers as unpredictable characters. If the writer can predict how the viewer would expect them to act from within their social or soap knowledge, it is relatively simple to create surprise or intrigue.

5.3. Text

Isidingo's text will now be discussed. This section begins with a summary of the narrative as retold by the viewers and is discussed with reference to the meaning that viewers make of the narrative and the narrative elements that contribute more to loyalty than others.

5.3.1. Narrative Summary.

The discussion of Isidingo's narrative begins with a comparison of the narrative as provided by the writers, with the narrative as retold by viewers in the first hermeneutic. Chapters 5 and 6 include a summary of the story fragments viewers found salient. In this section the academic researcher compares these two accounts, searching for instances of selective interpretation in the first and second hermeneutic as an indication of what viewers find more and less salient in the lived reality of Isidingo viewership.

Livingstone (1998) introduced two types of selective interpretation in the recallection of storylines. The first type is where viewers leave out the middle of the stories and only retell the beginning and the

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[9] It is relevant to note that soap operas that are not related to reality at all, will have a low external realism and that viewers will not be able to use real-life social knowledge to interpret the soap opera. This does not mean, however, that the viewer will not be able to enjoy the soap. As discussed in Chapter 2, transportation and salient enjoyment is not dependant on external realism. Transportation (and subsequent enjoyment) is, however, dependant on internal realism. Viewers of a soap opera with a high internal realism and low external realism will rely more on soap world knowledge than social knowledge to interpret the soap opera (Green, et al. 2004).

end. The second type of selective interpretation is where viewers leave out certain characters when retelling a storyline, whilst including others.

The comparison between the plots as provided by the writers (www.isidingo.co.za) and as recalled by the participants is presented graphically in figures. I discuss each of the significant plots that took place in the month prior to the market research with a graphical representation of the characters included in the plots (Figures 7.7 to 7.13). In each instance, the figure on the left represents the story as provided in the writers' summary and the diagram on the right, the narrative as recalled by the viewers during the focus groups. Lines represent interaction and communication between characters. Where a character's name is excluded in the second figure, viewers do not include the character in their retelling of the plot. Where a line is excluded, viewers do not include the interaction between the respective characters in their retelling of the plot.

The narrative structure discussed in Chapter 2 includes the following five phases: introduction (setting and orientation), disruption of equilibrium (norms of social order are challenged), guilt (the social problem is personified, responsibility and blame allocated), restitution (the equilibrium is resolved), redemption (the moral implications of the restitution is assimilated into the social domain). For each plot line, the researcher discusses which of these phases are included and excluded in viewers' retelling of the narrative.

Figure 7.7. The love intrigues of Zeb and Agnes.

The first plot (Figure 7.7) is that of the love intrigues between Zeb and Agnes. Zeb and Agnes have been married for many years. Zeb had an affair with Refiloe and had a child with her. Agnes had a potential suitor called Pule. Pule was introduced to Agnes because of Zeb's interference in their daughter's love life. He wanted to orchestrate a meeting between Letti and Pule and because of unforeseen circumstances, Letti was unable to attend the arranged meeting. Agnes was in the meeting place (the Rec) at that time. Pule noticed Agnes and started to pursue her by inviting her to various events and giving her gifts. One evening at another arranged meeting, Pule asked Zeb about Agnes, not knowing that they are married. Zeb misunderstood and gave Pule Maggie's number. The characters recalled by the viewers resemble the intended storyline relatively closely, the only omissions being the misunderstanding that brought Maggie into the storyline and the fact that Zeb

interacted with Pule and unknowingly provided the opportunity for the relationship. When discussing this plotline, viewers tend to side with either Zeb or Agnes, and regardless of which character they have empathy for, mention that Zeb did not notice Agnes's makeover. When retelling the story, viewers include: the context and orientation (Zeb and Agnes is married and Zeb has had an affair) and the disruption of equilibrium (Pule showed interest in Agnes and she got a makeover). Viewers do not include the guilt phase (in which Zeb's misunderstanding is identified and Agnes puts a stop to Pule's advances) or restitution phases (Zeb and Agnes rekindle their love, remembering the reasons why they got married in the first place) that are included in the actual narrative.

Figure 7.8. Letti and Joe's relationship.

The second plot (Figure 7.8) is the intrigue surrounding Joe and Letti's relationship. Letti and Joe (a white man) started their relationship towards the end of the year. Over Christmas time, while Zeb and Agnes were out of town, Letti introduced Joe to her brother and sister-in-law, Parsons and Nandipha. Through a series of events Letti introduces her new boyfriend to her parents. Most of the tension deals with how Zeb will react to her boyfriend. Agnes, Parsons and Nandipha are present in all these interactions and play a central role in mediating the situation: Parsons coaches Joe on how to react to their father. He also prepares Zeb by asking him about racism and telling him that Letti's new boyfriend is a Pirates (Orlando Pirates, a local soccer team) fan. Nandipha supports Letti and encourages her to tell her parents about Joe. Agnes tries to appease Zeb's anger after meeting Joe by pointing out that Letti never lied about his race. Towards the end of the plot, Zeb tries to introduce a new romantic interest to Letti, i.e. Pule.

This storyline was by far the most prevalent in viewers' recollection of interesting storylines. All retold the story by including Joe, Lettie, and Zeb as the central players. Some mentioned the mediating role of Agnes in a general sense (always supporting her children when Zeb is angry with them). Pule – although he was central to the love intrigues of Zeb and Agnes - is not mentioned as part of this plot, neither are Parsons nor Nandipha, although they are present in all the interactions where Zeb antagonises Joe. Before redemption can be reached in the story (where the moral implications of the restitution is assimilated into the social domain), Zeb creates more disruption to the equilibrium by trying to introduce Letti to Pule.

When retelling the story, viewers sketch the context and orientation (Zeb is very traditional, he is always interfering in his children's lives), the disruption of the equilibrium (Letti introduces her white boyfriend) and the guilt phase (the chicken incident in which Joe proves that he can stand up for himself). At the time of the market research, this storyline had not yet reached the restitution phase in which the equilibrium is restored (either Zeb makes peace with the relationship or Letti and Joe break up). Although viewers cannot retell an existing restitution, they offer opinions on possible endings. Those viewers who empathise with Zeb would prefer that the guilt phase (Zeb torturing Joe until either of them throws in the towel) continues. Those who empathise with Letti would like to see restitution in her either settling further in the relationship with Joe, or breaking up and reuniting with an old boyfriend Vusi.

Figure 7.9. The Lee, Rajesh and Erin love triangle.

An important love triangle is represented in the next plot (Figure 7.9). Rajesh and Lee used to be a couple until Barker framed Rajesh with photographs of a prostitute. Neither of them knew that Barker was the one responsible for the ruse. Rajesh and Lee still work closely together and have a good working relationship. Rajesh is in a relationship with Erin, who moves back in with Rajesh over New Year's Day. Erin has a drinking problem that her friend Paul tries to help her with.

Viewers were very aware of Lee and Rajesh's relationship history and the fact that Barker manipulated them into ending their relationship. None of the groups in the current sample mentioned Erin however. Most interest in this storyline was aimed at seeing Barker be exposed and Lee realising the true nature of her father. Viewers provide the context and orientation (Rajesh and Lee was in a relationship) and the disruption of the equilibrium (Barker set Rajesh up. Barker betrays his daughter). Viewers want to see the guilt phase unroll and have Barker brought to justice so that Lee can see him for who he really is.

Figure 7.10. Conflict between Frank and Siyanda in the office.

In the office environment, a plot plays out where Siyanda – Barker's new confidant – and ON!TV's new CFO joins forces against Frank (Figure 7.10). Frank gets suspicious of Siyanda and Barker's relationship and asks Georgie to investigate Siyanda. Barker later does the same and asks Georgie to investigate Frank. Siyanda and Frank are in constant conflict and as fellow executives, Lee and Rajesh are called in to attempt to resolve these conflict situations. Harriet, Barker's trusted secretary, knows of his deal with Siyanda and holds the potential to expose them. Other characters are also drawn into the plot to illustrate the conflict between the two enemies. Frank disapproves of Erin, while Siyanda supports her. Frank cancels a programme on which Nandipha and Paul is working, while Siyanda reinstates it.

This specific plot was largely ignored by viewers in their recollection of intriguing storylines. The only interactions mentioned in a general sense were that Harriet could be antagonistic towards Barker in the future and that Frank is a worthy adversary to Barker.

Figure 7.11 The investigation into Barker's involvement in framing Rajesh.

Frank's investigation into Barker's involvement in the Rajesh set-up is another important storyline (Figure 7.11). Cherel approaches Frank and offers him information that Barker was responsible for setting up Rajesh. In return, she demands a position as producer at ON!TV. Frank agrees and asks Lolly and Vernon to conduct an investigation into the link between Barker and Mad Dog, who was directly responsible. The trail leads them to Angelique, the prostitute who was coerced into taking part

in the set up. Barker realises that something is wrong and approaches both Mad Dog and Georgie to help him uncover what Cherel and Frank are up to. Georgie takes Cherel's side and repeatedly warns her about Barker's interest in their plot. Angelique agrees to testify against Mad Dog. When Mad Dog comes out of hiding to visit Barker at his home, Lee calls the police and Mad Dog is arrested. Lee confronts her father and breaks the news to Rajesh, who funded the investigation but never knew that Barker was suspected.

Viewers retell this storyline only featuring Barker, Rajesh and Lee. And the retelling only includes the context (Lee and Rajesh was a couple), the disruption of equilibrium (Barker framed Rajesh with a prostitute) and restitution (Barker is guilty). The restitution is included because the viewer knows with Frank and Cherel that Barker is guilty. The redemption (Lee sees her father's real nature for the first time) is not always included in the retelling, but most express the wish that it would happen in a general sense. The guilt phase, which involves the most characters, takes the most time and sets out the process in which restitution is reached, is left out.

Figure 7.12. The aftermath of Tanya's suicide.

The next plot involves Cherel's daughter Tanya (Figure 7.12). Tanya is married to Leon du Plessis. She had a past relationship with Len. Tanya commits suicide, but immediately prior to this, Len asks her to elope with him. Tanya makes contact with her mother prior to her death. After the suicide, Du Plessis confronts both Barker and Cherel, both of whom blame the other. Maggie takes Du Plessis under her wing and takes him into the Bullers for a short while until he decides to leave The Deep. Maggie has a farewell party and asks Len to be there. Len approaches Du Plessis and asks for his forgiveness on what transpired between him and Tanya before she died. He also contacts Cherel and tells her what happened. When retelling this story, viewers only mention Tanya, Du Plessis and Cherel and Barker who blame each other. They do not mention Len's involvement or Maggie's role in the process after the death. Viewers neglect to include the full context and orientation (by not including the fact that Len and Tanya had a relationship), include the disruption of equilibrium (that Tanya commits suicide and that Du Plessis is crushed), include parts of the guilt phase (that Barker and Cherel blame each other), but exclude others (the farewell party where Du Plessis tells everyone what he really thinks of them) and exclude the restitution and redemption in which Len apologises to Du Plessis.

Stella   Robert Turner

Maggie   Maggie

Figure 7.13. Stella introduces Maggie to Robert Turner.

One storyline in the Bullers' boarding house can be mentioned (Figure 7.13). Stella introduces Maggie to the new underground mine manager Robert Turner and Maggie is instantly attracted to him. He needs a place to stay for the next month. Maggie organises a dinner party for Robert to see the boarding house and meet the other residents. Stella finds out that she is not invited and Maggie invites her out of guilt. The dinner is a disaster because of Stella's behaviour. Later Stella apologises to Maggie who accepts her apology. Other storylines which introduces disequilibrium to the Bullers are every time a resident moves out and Maggie has an open room to fill. Despite anecdotal mentions that Maggie should get a romantic interest, no storylines within the Bullers setting are retold by viewers as being significant.

5.3.2.   The exclusion of some phases in the narrative structure.

In a text with a large community of characters of relatively equal importance such as a soap opera, the guilt phase of the narrative structure is very important. It is necessary for the community to negotiate and find the character who is to blame for the disruption to equilibrium, because there are no pure protagonists and antagonists (Livingstone, 1998). The guilt phase in Isidingo plots is where the most substance of the story lies. Between the dramatic disruption and resolutions of equilibrium lies a vast playing field of smaller obstacles and resolutions. Yet, the viewers do not include these details in their summation of stories in a research context.

In her analysis of the retellings of Coronation Street plots by regular viewers, Livingstone (1998) found the same tendency. Viewers underplay the middle stages of the narrative, or summarise it as uninteresting "and I can't remember how, but they proved he was guilty". Viewers favour the disruption and restitution phases since these phases have the most dramatic events, and have the most implications for future storylines. While watching how a storyline evolves, it is the promise of a disruption or resolution that entices the viewer to come back to the soap again. As the following quote from a viewer in the current study illustrates, the anticipation of a resolution is a strong motivator to watch:

> I tell you, you end up living for 18h30 and the following days to see what happened.
> (Group 2, line 69)

5.3.3. Exclusion of some characters in viewers' retellings.

In each of the retellings discussed above, viewers exclude some characters that were part of the story. In the Letti and Joe story that affects the whole of the Matabane family, viewers reduce it to conflict between the couple and Zeb alone. Characters such as Vernon and Erin are completely absent from viewers' retellings of other storylines. When viewers leave out some characters in their retelling of a soap narrative, they undermine one of its genre conventions, namely interconnected, equal characters. It seems that although peripheral characters are often important to the story (such as Lolly in the investigation), they are not central to the viewers' experience of it. Since the largest implications that will result from the resolution of the storyline affect Barker, Rajesh and Lee in the investigation story, viewers focus on these characters in their interpretation thereof. Despite the genre's reliance on a plethora of equal characters, Isidingo viewers do prioritise certain characters over others, and their interpretation of storylines are coloured by the relationship they have with these characters.

5.3.4. Semiotic choice points.

Semiotic choice points are when two or more narrative possibilities exist in a certain moment in a text. Something happens on screen and by using interpretive resources of in-soap and real-life knowledge, the viewer is aware of diverging possible outcomes. The viewer's realisation of these choice points creates tension (Livingstone, 1998).

There are numerous examples where Isidingo uses such semiotic choice points to create tension. Siyanda goes into Frank's office to probe what Frank and Cherel are investigating. She is discovered in the office and accounts for her presence by saying that she is dropping off paper work. While she was in the office, two narrative possibilities existed, she would either succeed in finding proof against Frank and Cherel, or she would be caught.

Another instance where this technique was used was in the process through which Letti prepares to introduce Joe to her father. The two narrative possibilities are that Zeb will like Joe and accept his daughter's interracial relationship, or that he will reject Joe and disapprove strongly.

In Pule's courtship of Agnes another use of semiotic choice points is visible. Agnes will either remain true to her high moral values, put her family first and not return his affection, or she will pursue an extra marital relationship and get back at Zeb for being unfaithful to her. In each of these instances, the viewer's knowledge of the two possible outcomes is what creates tension.

This is also confirmed in the outcomes that viewers long for in the storylines. By wishing that Agnes goes one route rather than the other, the viewer acknowledges that there is more than one possible narrative outcome. A preference for either of the two storylines is based on a viewer's allegiance to a specific character's goals (I wish Harriet would betray Barker for her own gain), or based on the

repercussions that the behaviour will have on other characters and stories (I would love to see how Zeb reacts if his wife has an affair).

This technique is successfully employed in Isidingo and contributes to its appeal to viewers. As the viewer matures into a loyal viewer, he/she accumulates more knowledge about the characters and their histories. These result in a rich reserve of implications that viewers can consider for each semiotic choice point, increasing the tension in and pleasure of watching.

5.3.5. The privileged viewer.

Another way in which tension is introduced in soap operas is the selective provision of information to the viewer. The viewer often receives key information before the characters do. While information in other genres is often withheld at the end of an episode, information is provided in cliffhanger moments in soap operas, and the tension is related not to what will happen, but rather in what will happen when the others find out what I already know.

Tension in Isidingo works in much the same way. Sub-theme 3.1 in the first hermeneutic reveals how viewers speculate about what will happen when certain characters find out what they already know. For instance, when will Zeb realise that Agnes has had a make-over; what will happen when he realises that she has a potential suitor; when will Lee see her father for what they (the viewers) see him and what will happen when she does; what will happen when Cherel and Barker find out that Georgie is using both of them.

5.3.6. Levels of meaning.

Narratives have implications that reach beyond the immediate characters involved. Each incident has different levels of meaning that include consequences on an individual, social and ideological level (Livingstone, 1998).

This is relevant to Isidingo especially with the soap's inclusion of social issues. When Nandipha was diagnosed as being HIV positive, this had varied implications for the soap. On an individual level she undergoes changes in her lifestyle. She changes her job and starts a relationship with Parsons. On a social level it causes conflict in the Matabane family, where Zeb disapproves of his son's choice of a life partner. It also results in conflict between Agnes and Zeb when Agnes takes her son's side. On an ideological level, the storyline introduces the implications of HIV on infected people's personal lives, as well as how it affects the people around them. It also addresses how HIV-positive people are treated by others.

Changes on a denotative level to one character have implications on a connotative level for the whole soap. When Agnes changes her appearance by having a make-over (denotative change) it introduces a new meaning of sexuality and availability (connotative level). Since all characters are connected, it also reshuffles the other characters on a social level. Agnes's change in appearance reemphasises

the lack of romance in her marriage, and Zeb is condemned for not noticing the change. Pule's interest in Agnes challenges Zeb to see his wife with renewed attraction. On an ideological level Agnes' change in appearance following Pule's interest in her, defies her inherent moral priorities in which she is first and foremost a mother and wife who places her family first. The possibility of pursuing a relationship is introduced and, as a whole, the story addresses relationships, faithfulness and sexuality.

5.4. Situation model.

The situation model is the mechanism within which the viewer assembles fragmented pieces of information into an interpretive whole (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). It is the dynamic location of viewer interpretation and consists of the story-world model and the character models which will now be discussed.

5.4.1. Story-world model.

The story-world model is a relatively fixed model that represents the physical and temporal setting of the soap and the story-world logic that governs the soap opera. The story-world model starts with the viewer's use of the real world as heuristic, which is then adapted, if necessary, as the story unfolds (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

Isidingo is produced in real time and its temporal location is therefore contemporary South Africa (Theme 5). Physically, the soap was originally set in a small mining town *Horizon Deep* east of Johannesburg. With the introduction of ON!TV, many of the Isidingo scenes have moved into Johannesburg itself. The whole soap has, however, not moved out of *Horizon Deep,* as many characters still have physical and relationship ties to it.

Based on this temporal and physical setting, the story-world logic of Isidingo is therefore equal to contemporary South African life in a city and its surrounds. Overall, the soap is seen by viewers as having a very high external realism and can therefore be expected to successfully sustain transportation, which is a necessary condition for enjoyment. It is also relevant for viewers to use their real-world knowledge as heuristic in this world, as the story-world logic and the narrative rules are very close to that of the real world.

The set of the soap opera is also part of the story world. If it is not realistic and detailed, it could be expected to be less efficient in creating the necessary conditions for transportation to occur. Green et al. (2004) found that stories that included detail on the physical surroundings of the stories had more success in facilitating transportation, and that readers were more likely to identify with the character. They conclude that detail about the setting of a story makes viewers or readers feel closer to the narrative, and make them feel more knowledgeable about the narrative and the characters.

5.4.2. Character models.

The character models are conclusions viewers form of characters, based on their interpretations of fragments of the character's behaviour over time. Hoorn and Konijn (2003, 2005) and Livingstone (1998) provide valuable models for understanding viewer interpretations of characters. Following is an evaluation of Isidingo's characters within each of these models.

5.4.2.1. How viewer portrayals of characters are formed.

When a soap opera viewer encounters a new character, he/she is presented with fragmented pieces of information about the character. The viewer then uses social knowledge to infer traits for the character from disjointed incidents. The viewer interprets the new information within the context of past interpretations made of the soap and its characters, as well as of people in real life.

This is why it is easier for some viewers to relate to characters that they have a wealth of knowledge about. A character such as Letti, who has been part of the soap for a long time, has been represented by a larger volume of fragmented incidents from which viewers can infer traits. It is therefore also easier for viewers to relate to realistic characters, because what they infer about the character (based on bits and pieces of information) is easily assimilated into existing real-life schemas of what people are like.

5.4.2.2. Viewer portrayals of Isidingo characters based on Livingstone's (1998) typology.

Viewers interpret characters based on their personal social knowledge and their knowledge of the soap, and their expectations of future events are based on their knowledge of the characters involved (Livingstone, 1998). Livingstone found that characters are mostly judged according to three dimensions, namely morality, potency (power) and gender, and that characters representing contrasting poles of these dimensions are more likely to interact.

Table 7.2 is a summary of Isidingo characters in terms of these dimensions. The researcher inferred these judgements from the character descriptions provided in the first and second hermeneutic. Therefore only characters that formed part of viewer's descriptions and therefore lived reality, were included.

Table 7.2 Viewer *portrayals of Isidingo characters based on Livingstone (1998)*

	Morality	**Power**	**Gender**
Barker	Immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Cherel	Immoral	Powerful	Androgynous
Agnes	Moral	Powerful in her own world. Powerless in relation to her husband.	Matriarchal. Mother, but strong and determined.

Letti	Moral	Powerful	Feminine, but not submissive. Challenges.
Parsons	Moral	Powerless	Matriarchal
Nandipha	Moral	Powerless	Patriarchal
Zeb	Moral and immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Georgie	Moral and immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Lee	Moral	Powerless in relation to Barker only. Powerful in other relationships.	Androgynous
Rajesh	Moral	Powerless	Patriarchal
Joe	Moral	Negotiating power.	Patriarchal
Maggie	Moral	Powerless	Patriarchal
Harriet	Unsure	Powerless, but has potential power.	Patriarchal
Frank	Moral and immoral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Vusi	Moral	Powerful	Patriarchal
Len	Immoral and moral	Powerful	Androgynous

So some extent, gender relations in Isidingo have traditional patriarchal, strong male characters that are concerned with the business world and business dealings, and submissive female characters that are more concerned with family and relationships. Mostly, however, Isidingo offers counter-stereotypical female characters that conquer the business world and challenge their male counterparts. These counter stereotypical female characters include Cherel, who is Barker's most pervasive rival, Lee, who resembles her father's strength in the business world although she is submissive to him in their personal relationship, Letti, who strongly challenges her very patriarchal father, and Harriet, who although a powerless secretary, is devoutly loyal to Barker and she holds the potential power to bring him to justice because of the information she holds. Agnes is also powerful in a matriarchal way. She builds a business from the ground up, resulting in the financial success of the family.

Morality and power are not strongly correlated in Isidingo. While all the immoral characters are powerful, there are sufficient powerful, moral characters to balance the power between good and bad.

Characters of opposing poles are more likely to interact (Livingstone, 1998). This is true for Isidingo to a large extent. For example, conservative Zeb and modern Letti and Parsons interact regularly, while Frank, who is an experienced business man, has many storylines that involve Lolly, who is

inexperienced in business. Frank and Barker often interact and they oppose each other in terms of morality, while being equal in power. Lastly, Lee and Barker (father and daughter) share many storylines and they are opposed on both morality and power (Lee is powerless and moral and Barker is powerful and immoral).

There are, however, exclusions to the rule. Cherel and Barker are similar and represent the same pole on each of the three dimensions (both are immoral, powerful and masculine), but are in constant conflict. Their interaction is based almost exclusively on mutual revenge.

The most important contribution of this analysis, based on Livingstone's typology, is that it allows a view of how Isidingo deals with gender and power. How power relates to gender structures is of historical significance to the genre. The most pervasive feminist criticism of the genre over the years has been that women are portrayed as powerless, and only concerned with the domestic and relationship issues (Marx, 2008)[10]. Isidingo makes a clear divergence from this historical genre convention by combining traditional femininity with atypical pseudo-masculine femininity. Nandipha and Maggie are the only two feminine characters that are powerless. The other purely feminine characters, such as Letti, Harriet and Agnes all have either existing or potential power. The soap also includes Cherel and Lee, both of whom have been able to conquer the male dominated business world. The second hermeneutic identifies this trait of Isidingo as a key part of the soap's appeal and success.

5.4.2.3. Analysis of Isidingo characters based on the process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters of Hoorn and Konijn (2003) and Konijn and Hoorn (2005).

In order to gain an even better understanding of the character portrayals that viewers construct of the Isidingo characters, the academic researcher analysed the Isidingo characters based on Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters. The unique contribution of Hoorn and Konijn's process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters is that they acknowledge the contribution of both positive and negative elements in the achievement of an optimal level of appreciation of a character.

Their process consists of three phases: encode, compare and respond. During the encoding phase, viewers create character representations based on the dimensions aesthetics (beauty), ethics (morality) and epistemics (realism). During the comparison phase, they conclude on the relevance of the character, their own similarity with the character and the character's outcome valence (what should happen to the character). Each of these dimensions contributes a degree of either attraction (involvement) or resistance (distance) which, if both reach an optimum point, translates to appreciation. Generally the positive poles contribute to involvement and the negative poles to

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[10] For an in-depth discussion on gender in South African soap operas, see Marx (2008).

distance, but Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) unique contribution is that they acknowledge the positive of negative traits and the negative effect of positive traits.

The researcher conducted an analysis of the Isidingo characters that viewers find salient, based on this model, in an attempt to determine which character traits – whether positive or negative – contribute to appreciation. Due to the limitations of the research design, it was not possible for the viewers to explicitly rate characters on these dimensions. The researcher therefore operationalised each of the dimensions in a way that is relevant to the current study:

- Aesthetics is a judgement of the physical appearance of a character. Where possible, the researcher used spontaneous appreciation of the physical appearance of characters by viewers as an indication of aesthetics. Where this is not available, she made her own subjective judgements on the aesthetics of the character from photographs on the Isidingo website (Figure 7.14). Where this is the case, the indication is presented in italics.

Figure 7.14. Photographs of the characters of Isidingo to allow a subjective judgement of their aesthetics (www.isidingo.co.za).

- Ethics is a judgement of the morality of a character. The researcher used spontaneous mentions by viewers of a character's morality as an indication of its ethics. Where this is not available, she made her own subjective judgements on the ethics of the character from the

official character summaries obtained from the Isidingo website. Where this is the case, the indication is presented in italics.

- Epistemics is a realism measure. The researcher used spontaneous mentions in the first hermeneutic of a character's realism as an indication of this measure.

- Relevance is the potential impact, whether positive or negative, a character may have on an individual's goals. It is operationalised within the constraints of the current methodology by means of three measures: whether viewers spontaneously indicated that the character has an impact on other characters' goals, its placement on the horizontal access (connected to other characters) in the character segmentation in chapter 6 (Figure 6.2) and lastly, whether the character is perceived as teaching valuable lessons that are applicable to the real world, which is part of Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) original understanding of the concept.

- Valence refers to whether viewers want the character to fail or succeed. The researcher judged valence subjectively as being either positive or negative from the future storylines that are indicated for the character by the viewers in the first and second hermeneutics.

- Similarity is the extent to which the viewer feels that the character is comparable to them in terms of character traits, physical appearance, age, role, etc. The researcher used any evidence from the first and second hermeneutic where specific viewer groups judge a character as comparable to themselves, as an indication of similarity.

- Engagement is the degree to which viewers feel attracted or deterred by the character. This is essentially the the emotional distance they feel to the character. In the current methodology, the researcher used the viewer relationship column in Table 3, Chapter 5 as an indication of emotional distance.

- Appreciation is the extent to which viewers find characters interesting or boring. The researcher judges it in this analysis with three measures: the number of groups that identified the character as essential in the first hermeneutic, its placement in the four quadrants (Figure 6.3, Chapter 6) in the second hermeneutic, and whether the character was included or left out of the retelling exercise in the current chapter.

In all cases, where text is in italics in Table 7.3, no direct indication of this dimension was found in the first or second hermeneutic and the value is based on the researcher's own judgement from her overall interpretation of the first and second hermeneutic.

Table 7.3 *Character analysis based on Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters*

Name	Encode			Compare			Respond	Appreciation
	Ethics (Good or bad)	Aesthetics (Beautiful or ugly)	Epistemics (Real or unreal)	Similarity (Similar or dissimilar)	Relevance (Relevant or irrelevant)	Valence (Positive or negative)	Engagement (Involvement or distance)	Priority
Barker	Bad (D)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Unreal (D)*	Dissimilar Aspiration (D)	*Relevant (I)*	Negative and positive (D, I)	Involvement and distance	10 groups
Cherel	Bad (D)	Beautiful (I)	*Unreal (D)*	Dissimilar Aspiration (D)	*Relevant (I)*	Negative and positive (D, I)	Involvement and distance	10 groups
Agnes	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	*Relevant (I)*	Positive (I)	Pure involvement	8 groups
Georgie	Good and bad (D,I)	*Ugly(D)*	Real (I)	Dissimilar (D)	*Relevant (I)*	*Positive (I)*	Involvement and distance	7 groups
Lee	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (I)*	Positive and negative (D, I)	Biased to involvement	6 groups
Letti	Good and bad (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Relevant (I)*	Positive (I) and negative (D)	Biased to involvement	6 groups
Maggie	Good (I)	*Ugly(D)*	Real (I)	Similar (I)	*Irrelevant (D)*	Positive (I)	Biased involvement	5 groups
Nandipha	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	Real (I)	Similar (I)	*Relevant (I)*	Positive and negative (I, D)	Biased involvement	5 groups
Zeb	Good and Bad (D,I)	*Ugly (D)*	Real (I)	Similar (I)	*Relevant (I)*	Negative (D)	Involvement and distance	5 groups
Rajesh	Good (I)	Beautiful (I)	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	*Positive (I)*	Biased to involvement	3 groups
Frank	Good and bad (D,I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Dissimilar (D)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	*Positive (I)*	Involvement and distance	0 groups

Joe	Good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Negative (D)	Biased to involvement	0 groups
Parsons	Good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Positive (I)	Biased to involvement	0 groups
Harriet	Good and potentially bad (I,D)	*Ugly (D)*	*Unreal (D)*	*Dissimilar (D)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Negative (D)	Biased to distance	0 groups
Vusi	Good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Real (I)*	*Similar (I)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	Positive (I)	Biased to involvement	0 groups
Len	Bad (D) and good (I)	*Beautiful (I)*	*Unreal (D)*	*Dissimilar (D)*	*Irrelevant (D)*	-	Biased to distance	0 groups

5.4.2.4. An integrated view of character portrayals based on Livingstone (1998), Hoorn and Konijn (2003) and Konijn and Hoorn (2005).

There is only one character in Isidingo, namely Agnes, who is rated exclusively on the positive poles of each of the dimensions. She only evokes involvement for the viewer. There are also seven other characters that are skewed to involvement. The two most appreciated characters, namely Barker and Cherel, are characters that evoke both positive and negative poles of the dimensions and therefore represent a combination of involvement and distance. One other character, namely Georgie, is also a combination of distance and involvement. For these three characters (Cherel, Barker and Georgie), Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) theory, that most appreciated characters are complex and represent a combination between distance and involvement, holds true. It does, however, not explain the popularity of the characters like Agnes, Lee or Letti.

While both Hoorn and Konijn's and Livingstone's models of character analysis provide valuable insight into viewer's portrayals of characters, neither encapsulates all dimensions. Livingstone's model does not allocate the contribution of any of the dimensions to potential viewer interest in the soap. While Hoorn and Konijn's model does not include the notion of power or gender, both are important elements of the Isidingo story world. Both include morality, but a combination of the two models would be ideal.

In Table 7.4, the researcher tried to use Livingstone's dimension of gender and power as added traits in the encoding phase of Hoorn and Konijn. She defined the poles of the scales to be powerful and powerless, and traditional gender and non-traditional gender. In keeping with Hoorn and Konijn's belief that the positive pole of the scales usually increases involvement, while the negative pole increases distance, she assumed that potency contributes to involvement and powerlessness to distance, while a traditional gender position contributes to involvement and non-traditional gender to distance.

Table 7.4 *Livingstone's (1998) dimensions of power and gender as additional dimensions in the involvement and distance analysis*

	Revised: Encode		Revised: Respond	
	Potency	**Gender**	**Engagement**	**Appreciation**
	Powerful or powerless	*Traditional or non-traditional*	*Involvement or distance*	*Priority*
Barker	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	10 groups
Cherel	Powerful (I)	Non-traditional (D)	Involvement and distance.	10 groups
Agnes	Powerful in her own world (I), powerless in relation to her husband	Traditional (I)	Strong bias to involvement.	8 groups

	(D).			
Georgie	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	7 groups
Lee	Powerless (D) and powerful (I)	Non-traditional (D)	Involvement and distance.	6 groups
Letti	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Pure involvement.	6 groups
Maggie	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	5 groups
Nandipha	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	5 groups
Zeb	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	5 groups
Rajesh	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	3 groups
Frank	Powerful (I)	Traditional (I)	Involvement and distance.	0 groups
Harriet	Powerless, but has potential power (I,D).	Traditional (I)	Biased to distance.	0 groups
Joe	Negotiating power (I,D).	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	0 groups
Len	Powerful (I)	Non-traditional (I)	Biased to distance.	0 groups
Parsons	Powerless (D)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	0 groups
Vusi	Powerful(I)	Traditional (I)	Biased to involvement.	0 groups

Combining the dimensions *gender* and *power* to the encoding phase of Hoorn and Konijn allows a fuller picture to emerge for each character. It now offers a better explanation on the popularity of Lee, as she is also now a combination of distance and involvement. It also introduces an – albeit small – degree of distance for Agnes. A few characters will now be discussed in detail.

5.4.2.4.1. Barker and Cherel.

Barker and Cherel are immoral characters. Viewers have seen both of them involved in murder, corruption and countless plots against each other and other rivals. They are both physically attractive characters. Barker dresses well and Cherel is described as classy and fashionable. They both have a high relevance, as they are connected to a large number of other characters and have the potential to impact the lives of most of the characters through their financial investments, influence and inside information. Viewers also believe they can learn from them. Cherel teaches the viewer how to persevere, while viewers believe they can learn from Barker not to be a bad father. Each of them has

both a positive and negative valence. Viewers want to see Barker get punished for what he has done, but they believe he will prevail and survive whichever ill fate comes his way. They also want to see Cherel at least get punished for the murder of Duncan, but they wish her happiness in her personal life. Both of them are essentially love-to-hate characters. Both are admired by viewers for their ability to survive any obstacle and their constant ability to surprise viewers, but it is this same ability (to elude the law for countless murders and wrongful acts) that makes them unrealistic.

Another interesting element about Barker and Cherel is that they are archrivals while they used to be a couple. When prompted on whether they could ever rekindle their love, viewers are divided. The possibility of romantic reconciliation is another way in which involvement and distance in combined in one character set.

They are both powerful (contributing more involvement) and Barker has a traditional gender positioning, while Cherel's atypical gender position adds distance to her character. All of this translates into a very high appreciation of the duo. All groups unanimously identify them as priority characters, neither of them is excluded from storylines in which they appear in the retelling exercises and both were placed in the upper right-hand corner of the character segmentation by the market researcher. This high appeal implies that they are assets in terms of securing repeat viewership and loyalty from viewers.

5.4.2.4.2. Nandipha.

Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) process of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters asserts that viewers should feel a degree of discomfort and comfort with a character to have a high appreciation of the character. This theory explains why viewers made suggestions that Nandipha should become ill eventhough they generally report liking her. Nandipha is a good, beautiful, realistic character and because these are all positive poles of the dimensions on which Hoorn and Konijn report that viewers judge a character, she elicits too much involvement and too little distance. Despite the fact that she is powerless, her a-symptomatic, HIV status is not challenging enough to result in high appreciation. For her character, distance could be obtained in a negative outcome valence which will balance the high degree of involvement felt, and consequently achieve an overall higher character appreciation.

6. Engagement

The second phase in Busselle and Bilandsic's (2008) model is called engagement. When moving from the first phase (comprehension) to the second phase (engagement) the viewer judges the realism of the story, and if this realism is optimal, the viewer is able to be transported into the story (and experiences flow sensations). After being transported, the viewer engages with characters in one (or more) of four distinct ways. The flow sensations viewers experience when watching Isidingo and the ways that viewers engage with Isidingo's characters will now be discussed.

6.1. Flow sensations in Isidingo

One of Busselle and Bilandsic's (2008) most important contributions is an explanation of realism judgements in narrative experiences. They believe that the first realism judgement takes place between the comprehension and engagement stage. Viewers compare their mental models with new information that the soap offers. If this information is consistent with existing mental models, the viewer is able to experience a deictic shift. If not, transportation is hindered until the viewer adjusts the mental model (whether it is part of the story-world logic or character models). If the viewer's interpretation is cleared of perceived inconsistencies, transportation can occur.

Escapism or deictic shift is essential for identification to take place since the viewer has to experience the soap from within, i.e. as if he/he is character him/herself. Transportation is also important overall in creating enjoyable viewing. Transportation is exclusive to narrative genres. These narrative genres can be fictional or factual, as long as they offer an alternative world for the viewer to be transported into. Green et al. (2004) found a correlation between transportation and enjoyment, and subsequent recommendation of the programme to others.

The first hermeneutic provides strong evidence that one of the motivations for soap viewership is what viewers call *escapism*. Escapism is explained by Isidingo viewers as becoming engrossed in the story, and for the duration of the narrative, forgetting one's day-to-day concerns. This process is associated with a pleasant feeling of being physically and mentally relaxed. As the following quote from a viewer reiterates: "I like switching off and watch some soapies. It is just like sitting there and becoming a vegetable and watching other people's drama" (group 2, line 29).

The viewer remains conscious of the TV set and the notion that it is fiction and that he/she can never truly abandon the real life for the TV world. But for a brief time while watching the story, viewers get engrossed in the story and the conscious realisation of the television moves to the background.

Transportation is inhibited by any element that reminds the viewer of the external reality and which emphasises an awareness of the self. One such element may be when the viewer is directly addressed or when the viewing experience is interrupted by a telephone call. Every Isidingo viewer is interrupted several times during an episode with a commercial break. One difference between the loyal and occasional Isidingo viewers who contributed to the first hermeneutic is that the occasional viewer migrates to a different channel during the commercial break, taking a few minutes to watch a competing soap opera. Future research should explore the possibility that loyal viewers experience a higher degree of transportation into Isidingo because a second soap is not watched concurrently.

6.2. Relationships with characters

Busselle and Bilandsic's (2008) model indicates that viewers identify with characters if they successfully make a deictic shift and are transported into the narrative. Although citing Cohen's

(2001) work, they do not distinguish between different possible types of engagement viewers may feel towards the characters.

Although the first and second hermeneutic clearly acknowledged that viewers engage with characters (Theme 2), it also does not explicitly distinguish between different types of involvement. With the exception of pseudo-social relationships, it uses different terms to describe the nature of the relation that the viewer has with the character interchangeably. When reviewing an early draft of Chapter 6, one of the researcher's academic supervisors questioned, for example, if there was a difference between *involvement* and *identification* with characters since the researcher used these two terms interchangeably.

Cohen (2001, 2004) identified four types of engagement viewers may have with characters: identification, imitation, parasocial interaction and affinity. In preparation for the current chapter, the researcher revisited the first hermeneutic in search of evidence for Cohen's four types of engagement with characters. Each of the types of engagement has distinct characteristics and enabling conditions. In the absence of an opportunity to ask viewers to self identify these types of engagement, the researcher searched for these characteristics and enabling conditions as evidence of the types of engagement, and from this established whether Cohen's (2001) typology is relevant to the lived reality of Isidingo viewership.

6.2.1. Identification.

Identification is a process through which a viewer assumes the perspective of a character and feels *with,* rather than *for* a character. For identification to be present, a viewer should share the perspective of the character (understand the character), share the feelings of the character (experiencing the same emotions as the character), share the motives of the character (wishing the character would succeed), and report feeling less self aware and experiencing the narrative as if being the character (Cohen, 2001). Identification is enhanced by regularity and length of exposure to the character, realism, affinity and similarity with the character, and is more likely for narrative genres overall.

There is evidence in the first and second hermeneutic that suggests that viewers identify with characters. In the second hermeneutic, the market researcher explains that viewers "live vicariously" through soap characters. To live vicariously through a character necessitates that the viewer empathizes with the character, shares the motives of the character and experiences the same emotions as the character.

6.2.2. Imitation.

Imitation is the process through which a viewer sees behaviour or values portrayed by a character and tries to emulate it in his/her own life. In contrast to identification, which only lasts as long as the narrative experience, imitation reaches beyond the duration of the narrative into real life. It is

encouraged by affinity and similarity, as well as the admiration of other characters. Characters that are praised and admired by other characters, characters with whom the viewer develops an affinity and characters that the viewer perceives as similar to him/her are more likely to invite imitation.

A few characters are singled out for their ability to teach viewers certain values. Since this is linked to specific characters, imitation of Isidingo characters relate to its educational value. Viewers believe, for instance, that Nandipha and Parsons show the viewer how to cope with HIV infection and how to act towards people living with HIV/AIDS. The also feel that Cherel teaches one how to be resilient. Overall, however, there is no compelling evidence that Isidingo viewers imitate characters' behaviour in real life. Since imitation implies a degree of learning, this type of engagement with a character could possibly only be regarded as an outcome of the engagement with - and interpretation of - a narrative.

6.2.3.   Para-social interaction.

As discussed in Chapter 2, para-social interaction occurs when viewers imagine interacting with characters as if they are real. It differs from the process of identification in that the viewer retains an awareness of the self. The viewer remains conscious of his/her own identity and behaviourally interacts with the characters by, for example, verbally addressing the character. The viewer also thinks about the character like he/she would about a real person, e.g. weighing up whether the person could be a friend. Para-social interaction is more prevalent in non-narrative genres where the media figure directly addresses the viewer. It is also positively influenced by television dependency, long exposure to a character and exposure to the character in different contexts, such as television, talk shows and soap opera magazines. Lastly, it is enabled by realism and authenticity in the characters (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Eyal & Rubin 2003; Giles, 2002; Green et al., 2004).

Of the four types of relationships with characters there is most evidence in the first and second hermeneutic of para-social interaction taking place between Isidingo viewers and characters. From the first hermeneutic it is clear that viewers imagine interacting with characters, they discuss characters with fellow viewers as if discussing real people, if unable to watch the soap, they miss characters as if missing a friend or family member (Cohen, 2004), they refer to characters as "people" and when a character dies, they experience feelings of sadness and loss. In the second hermeneutic, the market researcher cites research by Dunbar (2003) to explain how soap characters can replace real social relationships and argues that Isidingo viewers form pseudo-social relationships with characters.

Parasocial relationships with characters are more important in viewing motivation than the programme content itself (Giles, 2002). There is clear evidence from the first and second hermeneutic that parasocial relationships are a viewing motivation for Isidingo viewers.

6.2.4. Affinity/ liking/ similarity.

The last type of engagement with a character is the value judgement – affinity, liking or similarity. In this type of relationship with the character, the viewer remains conscious of him/herself and judges the character as appealing. Affinity is based on character traits, such as appearance, behaviour and emotional reaction, the celebrity status of the actor playing the part and textual factors that include how other characters interpret the character. Viewers are also more likely to choose a character that is on air at the time of the research as a favourite character (rather than characters that used to be on the programme and have no current storylines). Lastly, viewers will more likely choose narrative characters (rather than factual characters) as their favourites (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002).

The second hermeneutic introduces the theme that viewers form relationships with characters that are similar to themselves in some way. This includes race, age, gender, values, life stage and goals. The characters with which each segment has stronger relationships were identified based on attributes that viewers share.

The researcher believes this type of engagement should be sub-divided into similarity and affinity/ liking. In Isidingo a viewer may feel similar to a specific character based on a variety of characteristics and like the character as well (e.g. middle-aged female viewers who are also mothers, liking Agnes). However, the inverse could also be true where a viewer may not be similar to a character, but still like him/her (in Isidingo young female viewers might like Barker or Georgie, for instance). Hoorn and Konijn's theory also separates the two concepts. A distinction will therefore be made between similarity and affinity/ liking in the academic researcher's new model (see Chapter 8).

7. Outcomes

The last phase in Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) model is called outcomes. The outcomes phase includes the effects the viewing experience has on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of viewers, viewers' reflective realism judgement of the programme and the enjoyment viewers experience while watching the programme. Each of these aspects will now be discussed within the context of the findings from the first and second hermeneutic.

7.1. Knowledge, attitude and behavioural effects

A number of studies (Ex, Janssens & Korzilius, 2002; Haferkamp, 1999; O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Wyer & Adaval, 2004) have identified the impact of watching soap operas on the interpretation of new information. Information becomes readily available in memory as a result of regular viewing, and subsequently influences the interpretation of new information. This effect can be positive in the case of Isidingo's large representation of social issues shaping how viewers think about these issues.

The ritualised viewing of one specific soap as opposed to occasional viewing of different soaps has a more pronounced effect on the relational schemas of soap viewers. This also points to the importance of considering the temporal location of the soap as the competing soaps in the same timeslot could lure viewers away. Indications from the first hermeneutic (Theme 9) are that occasional viewers are more likely to channel hop during advertisements and less likely to watch every episode of Isidingo with undivided attention. They were more concerned with following storylines and less concerned with watching every minute of every episode. This stands in contrast to loyal viewers who make an effort to watch every episode to the full – mostly at the same time every day (i.e. a ritualistic viewing of a specific soap opera). Any effects the viewing of Isidingo may have can therefore be expected to be more pronounced for regular viewers.

There are a few beliefs about characters that were ommited from the occasional viewers' accounts but that were present in the accounts of regular viewers. The researcher does not believe the fact that these beliefs were omitted from occasional viewers' accounts indicate that their interpretation of the characters necessarily differs from that of loyal viewers. It is more likely that this relates to the availability heuristic (Shrum, 1996), which states that viewers, who are exposed to stimuli on a regular basis will have it more readily available in memory. As a result of exposure to the soap on a regular basis, the information about characters in Isidingo becomes more readily available to regular viewers (compared to the availability of the same information to occasional viewers). It is therefore more likely that regular viewers' interpretation of new information will be influenced by the information they see on a regular basis in Isidingo.

7.2. Reflective realism

Early in Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) model – between comprehension and engagement – an online realism judgement takes place (this is online because it happens as the viewer watches the soap), which has an important impact on the possibility of transportation. The second realism judgement in Busselle and Bilandzic's model takes place after the conclusion of the narrative experience and is called reflective realism.

7.2.1.   Contrasting loyal and occasional viewers.

Regular viewers are sensitive to realism cues that occasional viewers do not mention. They report disliking unrealistic storylines, disliking when an actor is replaced, and appreciate Isidingo as a soap with storylines that are resolved quickly. They also prefer shorter storylines over long storylines, although they appreciate the need for the latter. This is not counter intuitive to the understanding that regular viewers are able to follow the resolution of shorter storylines, while occasional viewers may only be able to follow longer storylines because of their sporadic viewing. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), a theme is prioritised based on the occurrence of the theme and also by the reaction when the theme is violated. Both regular and occasional viewers report that they like realistic storylines. This theme is, however, more of a priority for regular viewers than occasional viewers, since the former also reacts negatively to the violation of the theme.

7.2.2. Local vs. international soaps.

Busselle and Bilandzic's (2008) differentiation between internal and external realism sheds light on the hermeneutic turn identified at the end of Chapter 5. The researcher noticed in viewers' accounts of the realism in soap operas that they criticise international soaps for being unrealistic, whilst praising Isidingo for being a much more realistic soap, eventhough they still have international soaps in their soap viewing repertoire. Realism seems to be an important contributing factor to the appeal of Isidingo, yet they still watch seemingly unrealistic international soaps.

It is clear from Buselle and Bilandzic's (2008) definition of the two types of realism that Isidingo has a high degree of external realism. When viewers explain the realism of Isidingo, they include mentions of the characters being identifiable as people in real life (Sub-theme 5.1), that Isidingo's storylines are things that can happen in real life (Sub-theme 5.2) and that Isidingo simulates reality (Theme 5) by, for example, being in time with real life (when there's a big soccer match in real life, the characters also refer to it).

Viewers clearly do not believe that international soaps have a high degree of external realism (i.e. not realistic judged according to the rule of reality in real life). Their characters and storylines are believed to be unrealistic, and the timeline in the soap does not correspond to the timeline of real life (Sub-theme 4.1). It is, however, possible that viewers are able to make such conclusions about international soaps because unrealistic themes are consistently reoccurring in these soaps, and that it gives them an acceptable level of internal realism (i.e. realistic when judged on the rules of reality of the soap). Both internal and external realism is part of the viewer's interpretation of the soap. It seems therefore that internal realism is the only type of realism necessary for transportation to occur.

The absence of a theme's opposite can also indicate the existence of a theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). No viewers reported interpreting Isidingo as having low internal realism. This, combined with the fact that Isidingo viewers experience transportation (a natural consequence of internal realism), suggests that Isidingo has a sufficient degree of internal realism together with its external realism.

7.3. Enjoyment and loyalty

Green et al. (2004) believe that transportation theory provides insight into how media enjoyment is experienced through the absorption into a media world, and how enjoyment is the result of the consequences of such absorption. Enjoyment is defined as a subjective evaluation of a viewing experience as amusing and interesting, and is based on the benefits viewers gain from transportation.

Firstly, the viewer experiences enjoyment by escaping the self. When transported into a narrative world the viewer is able to temporarily leave real-life concerns and worries behind. Self-focused

attention, especially when there are discrepancies between the real and ideal self, can result in a negative emotional effect. Transportation can provide relief from such an affect by allowing the viewer to focus on the media stimulus rather than the self. There is evidence in the first hermeneutic that viewers do, in fact, experience such a relief from everyday concerns when watching soap operas and that they look forward to watching a daily soap opera for this particular reason. Enjoyment through the escaping of the self is relevant to the positive viewer experience of watching Isidingo.

Another enjoyment benefit of transportation is that it allows a viewer to experiment with possible alternatives for the self. The repertoire of selves (the different ways in which the individual can possibly understand or see him/herself) available to the individual comes from personal experiences in social contexts. Within a narrative world the viewer can experiment with different occupations and lifestyles without any risk. Self expansion is associated with positive affect and therefore this benefit of transportation translates into enjoyment. There are anecdotal mentions of this benefit in the first hermeneutic.

> Cherel is a great woman. She is a crook, but she's good. She is strong, she can fight
> her own battles. I like a woman like that. I would like to be like that.
> (Group 1, line 72)

Self expansion can also include a viewer gaining knowledge and learning from the narrative experience, as well as gaining resources that can be applied in life. As the above discussion on the educational value of Isidingo illustrates, self expansion by means of learning is relevant to Isidingo.

Another benefit is the enjoyment through connections with characters. Transportation is a necessary requirement for both identification and para-social interaction to occur. Identification results in enjoyment because it allows the viewer to understand his/her own life through the situations in which the characters find themselves. On re-entering the real world, the viewer is transformed through his/her association with the character.

Para-social interaction occurs because the viewer experiences a false sense of intimacy with the character, as he/she has privileged access to the character's thoughts, motives and feelings. Achieving para-social interaction leaves the viewer with a sense of enjoyment because it delivers on the fundamental human need of companionship and belonging to a mediated social group. Viewers report experiencing both identification and para-social relationships with Isidingo characters.

The importance of these and other connections with characters in viewers' enjoyment of television is apparent in disposition theory. Disposition theory states that viewers react emotionally to the morality of characters. Viewers like and empathise with good characters and feel antagonistic towards bad characters (Green et al., 2004). This aspect of enjoyment does not ring true for Isidingo. Isidingo viewers report high levels of enjoyment of what they call *hate characters* that are all of immoral fibre.

Disposition theory does not explain the enjoyment viewers experience from the most popular characters in Isidingo at the time of the research. Hoorn's and Konijn's (2003) and Konijn's and Hoorn's (2005) theory is more explanatory in this regard, seeing that it explains how viewers could have positive relationships with bad characters.

8. Additional issues relevant to Isidingo

8.1. Soap time

The temporal location of soap operas within the household routine is an important part of the lived reality which warrants attention in any discussion of soap opera viewership. The time at which a soap opera is aired, has an influence on the family members who potentially have access to the soap and the degree of attention that can be afforded to the soap. Pitout (1998) found that the time in which the soap opera is broadcast is regarded by loyal viewers as a daily ritual that may not be interrupted by visitors, telephone calls or family members. Warth (1994) demonstrates that watching a complete episode of a soap opera with undivided attention, is a luxury that housewives plan for or pay for with harder work before or after the episode.

The new episode of Isidingo broadcast at 18h30 every weekday evening, creates a lead-in audience for the 19:00 news. In contrast to American day-time soap operas, it airs in a time that most family members are home and most household chores are completed – although household chores do sometimes compete with soap viewership. It represents a very structured time in the household, which is planned to the minute by the woman of the house (Theme 6, second hermeneutic). Husbands and children often watch the soap together with the female viewer in the home (Theme 7, first hermeneutic). For many soap time is regarded as a time for physical and mental relaxation (Theme 6, first hermeneutic).

Occasional viewers tend to channel hop during the soap, indicating that they access competing soaps during the Isidingo timeslot and the possibility exists that they can become intrigued by storylines in competing soaps. This is another reason why it is important to understand the temporal location of a soap opera. Loyal viewers report that they do not channel hop while Isidingo airs. Although they do watch other soap operas during other timeslots, it appears that their viewing of Isidingo is relatively attentive.

8.2. Discussing Isidingo with other viewers

There is a social aspect to watching soap operas that has a significant effect on the meaning viewers allocate to them. Soaps are watched with other people in the same household and discussed with fellow viewers either after the episode or the following day at work. Through this process, viewers supplement each other's knowledge gaps on happenings in the soap, experiment with different viewpoints on social issues and are able to discuss abstract social issues in a tangible context (Giles, 2002; Hobson, 1994; Livingstone, 1998; Riegel, 1996; Tager, 1997).

Isidingo viewers discuss the soap with fellow viewers. Viewers debate on the motives and actions of characters, as well as the validity thereof. Although this is more true for regular viewers than occasional viewers, there are some occasional viewers who also report discussing the soap with other viewers. Discussing the soap with other viewers is therefore not a distinguishing trait of regular viewers. For Isidingo at least, discussing the soap with other viewers is a consequence of viewership for both loyal and occasional viewers. This trend, combined with the large prevalence of social issues in Isidingo, puts Isidingo in a unique position to shape public opinion.

Talking about soaps allows viewers the opportunity to test out viewpoints on social norms (Riegel, 1996). If the social norms portrayed in a soap contain many positive messages, personified in characters with which viewers can identify, as is the case in Isidingo, the researcher believes soap operas can have a positive effect on public opinion and that the effect can be expected to stretch beyond loyal viewers.

9. Loyalty

None of the media theories used in this study makes the link to loyalty. Although some go as far as concluding what contribution certain dynamics make to enjoyment, none demonstrate clearly how any of it translates to loyalty. The current study includes loyal and occasional viewers. For this reason, it is possible to identify the differences in loyal and occasional viewers' interpretation of the lived reality and arrive at some understanding on the processes that culminate in loyalty. The lived experience of the loyal and occasional viewer will now be compared.

One technique in which tension is introduced into a soap (as discussed above) is by semiotic choice points. A semiotic choice point is a moment in a narrative where there is more than one possible narrative outcome at any given time in a text. Knowing that there is more than one narrative outcome (Zeb can either accept Letti's boyfriend or reject him aggressively) creates tension for the viewer, and the resolution of this tension is enjoyable.

The possibility of more than one narrative outcome is based on soap-world knowledge and real-world knowledge. In a soap with such high external realism as Isidingo, real-world knowledge is exceptionally relevant and gaps in a viewer's soap-world knowledge could possibly be supplemented by real-world knowledge.

Occasional viewers would share all the real-world knowledge that loyal viewers have to apply to their interpretation of Isidingo. They would, however, have less knowledge of the soap, and the total number of narrative possibilities available at semiotic choice points might be less for an occasional viewer. Since enjoyment is derived from the anticipation and resolution of the choice points, the occasional viewer might therefore experience less enjoyment.

Green et al. (2004) identified a causal relationship between transportation and narrative enjoyment. One difference between loyal and occasional viewers is that occasional viewers change channels during advertising breaks and watch a few minutes of another soap before going back to Isidingo. It is possible that the degree of transportation that occasional viewers experience may be affected by them accessing another narrative.

The formation of para-social relationships with characters is positively influenced by the length of exposure to the character, as well as the frequency of exposure (Cohen, 2001). Although many occasional viewers have also been following Isidingo for a long time, they did not at the time of the research have a regular exposure to the characters, seeing that they did not watch every episode. It is possible that loyal viewers experience higher degrees of para-social interaction because of the regular exposure to characters.

10. Drawing the map

In this chapter the researcher used the literature review to explicate the first and second hermeneutic in order to arrive at a fuller understanding than the interpretations of the viewers' lived reality and the market researcher's interpretations alone would have produced. Before presenting her model of the psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and loyalty to a soap opera in the next chapter, the researcher makes a final comparison between the themes identified in the first and second hermeneutic and the literature. She also indicates how her own conclusions built on the earlier interpretations, and lastly, provides a summary of two main processes she believes are integral to the research question.

10.1. Building on the earlier interpretation in the hermeneutic spiral - revisiting the themes of the first and second hermeneutic and the literature

Table 7.5 is a comparison of the themes in the first hermeneutic with the literature review and the researcher's own conclusions from the third hermeneutic. Where relevant, the themes in table 5 are incorporated into the models that will be discussed in the next section.

Table 7.5 Comparing the three hermeneutics

Chapter 5 The soap opera viewer	Chapter 6 Market Researcher	Chapter 2 Literature	Chapter 7 Conclusion
Themes from the first hermeneutic	Themes re-phrased in the second hermeneutic	Literature that explicates the theme	Final themes – Consolidation in the third hermeneutic
Theme 1: The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience is regular	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Nabi and Krcmar (2004).	**Conclusion 1:** The outcome of viewers' interpretation of their viewing experience

viewing behaviour.			is regular viewing behaviour.
Theme 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an interest in characters.	Renamed to: **Theme 2:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as involvement with characters.	Cohen (2001); Hoorn and Konijn (2003); Konijn and Hoorn (2005); Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 2:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an appreciation of characters. **Conclusion 2.1:** Viewers interpret characters using two sets of resources, namely soap knowledge and real-world knowledge.
-	Additional sub-theme: Representation as agent of identification.	Cohen (2001).	
Sub-theme: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers' knowledge of respective characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 2.2:** Viewers form a complex schema of who the character is and this schema underlies the expectation viewers have of the character's future behaviour and interactions with other characters.
Sub-theme: Loyalty to soap operas is positively influenced by viewers forming para-social relationships with characters.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Cohen (2001).	
Sub-theme: There are two types of characters, normal and hate characters, and viewers relate to these two types of characters differently.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme:** Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer in terms of an emotional reaction to the character.	Cohen (2001); Hoorn and Konijn (2003); Konijn and Hoorn (2005); Livingstone, (1998); Nabi and Krcmar (2004).	**Conclusion 2.3:** Viewers relate to characters in a variety of ways, each of which makes a unique contribution to the overall appeal of and loyalty to a soap opera.

Theme 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 3:** Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines.
Sub-theme: How will characters react when they find out what I already know?	Not present in the second hermeneutic.	Tulloch (2000).	**Conclusion 3.1:** Viewer's interpretations of storylines are influenced by their relationship with characters.
Sub-theme: Anticipation of what will happen next.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Livingstone (1998).	
Sub-theme: Types of storylines preferred.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme:** Types of storylines that contribute more to loyalty.	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 3.2:** Isidingo is partly true to genre conventions in the types of storylines portrayed.
Theme 4: A preference for all things real.	Renamed to: **Theme 4:** The importance of fantasy and realism	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 4:** Realism is an important determinant of viewers' judgement of characters.
Sub-theme: International soaps are more unrealistic than local soaps.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 4.1:** There are different types of realism. Isidingo's strength is external realism combined with internal realism.
Theme 5: The specific appeal of Isidingo is interpreted by the viewer as its ability to simulate reality.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	
Sub-theme: Isidingo's characters are real.	Renamed to: **Sub-theme:** Most of Isidingo's characters are real.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 4.2:** External realism is not a necessary determinant of loyalty to all soap operas.
Sub-theme: Isidingo's storylines are real.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	

Sub-theme: Isidingo is educational.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Ex, Janssens and Korzilius (2002); O'Guinn and Shrum (1997); Wyer and Adaval (2004).	**Conclusion 5:** The effect of loyal viewership of Isidingo is education or learning. **Conclusion 5.1:** Isidingo has the potential of shaping public opinion on key social issues.
Theme 6: Loyalty to all soap operas is also interpreted by viewers as a function of the timeslot in which soap operas play.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Tager (1997); Warth (1994).	**Conclusion 6:** The temporal location of the soap opera within the household routine is a determining factor to loyalty.
Theme 7: Loyalty to soaps is also interpreted as a function of the social aspect of viewership.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Giles (2002); Hobson (1994); Kreutzner and Warth (1994); Riegel (1996); Tager (1997); Tulloch (2000).	**Conclusion 7:** Social influence is an important psychological process that instigates and sustains soap opera viewership.
Theme 8: The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly viewing behaviour.	Renamed to: **Theme 8:** The difference between occasional and regular viewers is mainly character involvement.	Cohen (2001).	**Conclusion 8:** Character involvement is positively influenced by a regular exposure to the characters.
-	Additional Theme: **Theme 9:** The importance of the setting of the soap.	Busselle and Bilandzic (2008).	**Conclusion 9:** The spatial setting of a soap forms part of its situation model.
-	Additional Theme: **Theme 10:** The	Livingstone (1998).	**Conclusion 10:** Isidingo viewers

appeal of the soap genre in general.			have an appeal for the genre in general. **Conclusion 10.1:** Soap opera viewers are familiar with soap opera genre conventions and these influence their expectations of characters and storylines.
Theme 11: Loyalty is interpreted by viewers as an appreciation of escapism.	Elaborated on in the second hermeneutic.	Green et al. (2004).	**Conclusion 11:** Transportation is a necessary determinant of loyalty.

10.2. Two important processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences

Two distinct processes emerge that culminate in positive viewing experiences: The process through which viewers come to enjoy narrative progressions in the soap opera and the process through which viewers experience enjoyment as the result of engagement with soap opera characters.

Viewers use two sets of resources when interpreting a soap opera – real-world knowledge and soap-world knowledge. Both of the processes that will now be discussed are based on the assumption (pictured in Figure 7.15) that as a viewer is transformed from novice to occasional viewer to loyal viewer, his/her soap-world knowledge increases, with important implications for the viewer's enjoyment.

Figure 7.15. The transition from novice to loyal viewer

The first process that has important enjoyment benefits, is the process through which viewers experience enjoyment from interpreting the narrative. This model is an application of Livingstone's (1998) theory to the first and second hermeneutic. Figure 7.16 depicts how viewers derive enjoyment from interpreting the narrative.

Figure 7.16. Enjoyment from interpreting the narrative.

A viewer develops an interpretive framework by means of the two sets of interpretive resources, namely real-world knowledge and soap-world knowledge. From this collective whole, a viewer has certain expectations of what could potentially happen at each semiotic choice point in the narrative. The semiotic choice point is a moment in the narrative at which new information is revealed and the viewer, interpreting this new information from within the interpretive framework, generates a range of potential outcomes at that point. These expectations might include anything from the specific characters that could be expected to be involved, to the potential outcome. The extent of the viewer's narrative insight - interpretive framework - or his/her narrative insight, determines the number of possible outcomes and implications he/she will be aware of. If the range is large, the viewer experiences a higher degree of tension prior to the outcome being made known. Enjoyment is experienced when this variable level of tension is resolved. The narrative insight (extent of narrative

possibility the viewer is aware of) is directly correlated to the possible enjoyment he/she may experience from the narrative experience.

The second process through which the viewer experiences enjoyment from watching a soap opera, is through engagement with characters. This model is an integration of Busselle and Bilandzic (2008), Cohen (2001), Green et al. (2004), Hoorn and Konijn (2003), Konijn and Hoorn (2005), and Livingstone (1998), as well as the first and second hermeneutic and is depicted in figure 7.17 below.

Figure 7.17. Enjoyment through engagement with characters

Prior to engagement with a character, the viewer forms mental models of the characters through an interpretation of fragmented pieces of information. Viewers deduct character traits from characters' behaviour in different contexts and gain access to their motives and values through discussions that characters have with others. During the encoding phase these traits are assembled into coherent mental models that consist of several dimensions, each of which has either a positive or negative pole. The dimensions include gender, power, aesthetics and morality. During the judgement phase, viewers measure the degree of similarity between themselves and the characters and conclude on a level of appreciation for the character (where combinations of both positive and negative traits usually – but not exclusively – culminate in a high appreciation of respective characters). During this phase, viewers also judge the realism of characters. Realism positively influences the viewer's ability to experience transportation, identification and para-social interactions and increases the likelihood that a viewer may judge the character as similar to themselves.

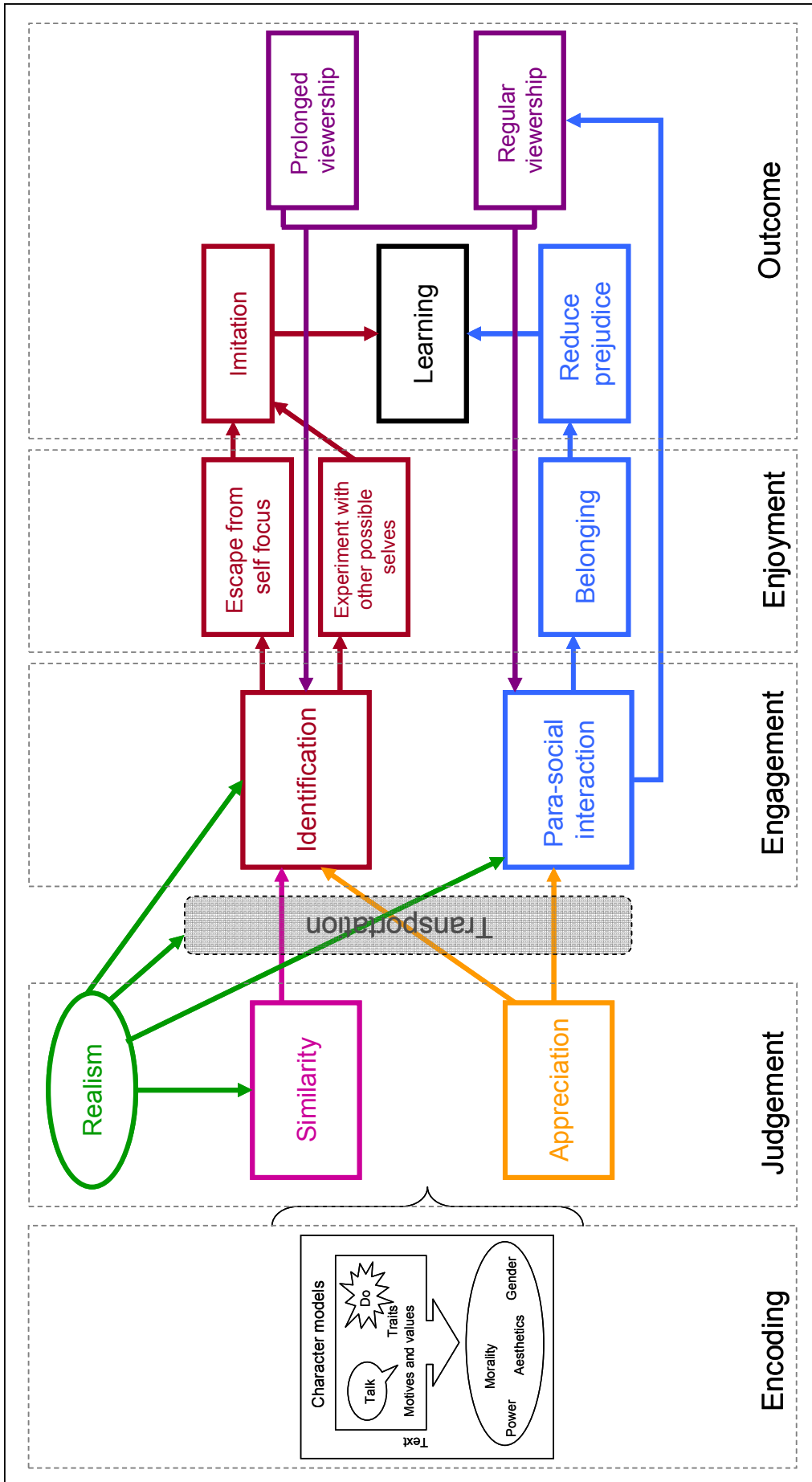Viewers experience transportation and if a character is judged as similar to the viewer, he or she may identify with the character. Identification with a character leads to the enjoyable consequences of escaping self-focus and exploring alternative identities. With prolonged exposure this also leads to imitation where identification is extending outside of the soap opera into the real world. Although imitation could not be established in this study, imitation – if with a positive character that exhibits positive traits or life skills, the viewer experiences learning and could potentially benefit from the viewing experience in real life. The possibility of identification is increased by prolonged exposure to the soap opera as well as through frequent exposure to the character.

When a viewer does not identify with a character but still holds a high appreciation for the character, the viewer potentially develops a para-social relationship with the character. The enjoyable benefit of para-social interaction is that the viewer gains a sense of belonging to a group. Since para-social interaction resembles real-life interaction, a positive outcome of this type of engagement is a reduction in prejudice and subsequent learning. Para-social interaction is also positively influenced by prolonged and frequent exposure to the character. Interestingly, para-social interaction is also a motivation for viewing and therefore increases the likelihood of continued viewership.

11. Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher presented her understanding of the first and second hermeneutic and applied learnings from the literature review and theoretical framework to it. It was found that positive viewing experiences are a combination of enjoyment derived from interpreting the narrative and enjoyment derived from interpretation of the characters. The role of realism, transportation, soap time and social influences were also identified. In the next chapter she will present her final integration of the first and second hermeneutic with the literature review by presenting a new model of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty to a soap opera. After presenting the new model, the chapter concludes with a reflection on the research process.

Chapter 8: The third hermeneutic – a new model

1. Introduction

Chapter 8 is the culmination of the interpretive journey. Like Chapter 7, it takes place on the outer edge of the hermeneutic spiral and therefore represents the last steps of the third hermeneutic.

As Figure 8.1 illustrates, the chapter is structured around two parts. The first part is the result of the total enquiry in the psychological processes that culminate in pleasant viewing experiences and viewer loyalty. In this section, the researcher summarises her understanding, set out in the preceding sections of the chapter, in a new model from which to understand soap opera viewership. The model is presented with reference to the quality of mental models that viewers form of the soap opera, the enjoyment viewers experience from viewing and lastly, loyalty to the soap opera.

Figure 8.1. Graphical representation of the contents of chapter 8.

The second part of this chapter is a reflection on the study. Firstly, the academic and market research processes are contrasted on various methodological and conceptual dimensions. Then a discussion on the contributions and limitations of the study inform suggestions for future research before the chapter concludes by revisiting the research questions.

Part 1: Drawing the map

A new model of the interpretation, enjoyment and loyalty of watching a soap opera is presented in this section. After a short overview and introduction to the model, the quality of the mental models, enjoyment and loyalty are discussed. The third hermeneutic is then concluded by positioning the model within the hermeneutic phenomenological framework.

2. A new model

Figure 8.2 is a new model of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty to a soap opera. The model illustrates how the interpretation of characters and narratives respectively contribute to positive viewing experiences. The enjoyment derived from interpreting characters and narratives are dependant on the quality of the mental models the viewers have of each of these aspects. The quality of mental models is dependant on the quality and quantity of viewership, which is a function of loyal viewing behaviour. Each of these aspects will be discussed in detail in the section that follows.

Figure 8.2. A new model: the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera.

2.1. Quality of the mental models

A viewer forms mental models that represent the soap opera by interpreting fragments of information obtained from watching the soap opera. The richness of these mental models is primarily dependant on two factors, namely the frequency and longevity of viewership. Longevity of viewership influences the total number of episodes watched (and therefore the total number of narrative incidents exposed to), while frequency of viewership determines the recency and relevance of the narrative incidents the viewer is exposed to. The larger the number of narrative encounters and the more recent these encounters, the richer the mental models will be. Recency is important to ensure that a viewer's mental model of both the characters and story-world logic is current to the narrative incidents at the

time of viewership. A history of watching a large number of episodes with an interruption in viewership (although more valuable than no history of viewership) is less valuable than a recent history of viewership, because of its applicability to current happenings. The quantity of episodes watched is an important determinant of quality, as it implies that a viewer will have had more unique, fragmented incidents to interpret. An impression formed of a character based on his/her behaviour in one incident will be less comprehensive (i.e. will encapsulate less of his/her total character) than an impression formed based on his/her behaviour in several incidents.

The richness of mental models is also determined by several other factors. It is firstly determined by the relevance of the real-world knowledge of the viewer to the interpretation of the narrative. The relevance of real-world knowledge to the interpretation of the soap opera is dependant on its realism. If a soap opera has a high degree of external realism (for example, congruence between the way people behave in the soap opera and the way real people do), any resources the viewer has for interpreting the real world is directly applicable to the viewer's interpretation of the soap opera. This can then counteract the lack of frequency and recency in exposure to the narrative to some extent.

Another factor that influences the richness of the mental models formed is the quality of the viewing experience. If the viewing of an episode is not complete (if the viewer does not watch the entire episode as is the case with occasional viewers who migrate to competing soap operas during the same timeslot), the viewer is not exposed to all the incidents in the episode and does not exhaust the interpretive potential of the viewing experience. The quality of the viewing experience is also influenced by the degree to which transportation is able to take place. If transportation is interrupted by factors external (if the telephone rings, for example) or internal (perhaps a lack of internal realism that triggers viewer reflection and makes him/her aware of the self and the soap opera), the episode is watched primarily from a deictic position outside of the soap rather than within, which subsequently hinders the engagement with characters.

The richness of mental models is lastly influenced by the viewer's access to other sources of interpretation of the soap opera. The primary source of information from which to form mental models is viewership itself but this can be supplemented by, most notably, discussions with other viewers. Other sources could also include soap opera magazines or on-line viewer forums where other viewers discuss the soap opera (which the viewer can choose to participate in or read as an outsider).

2.2. Enjoyment

Rich mental models result in enjoyment for the viewer through two avenues: the progression of the narrative and engagement with characters. Every incident in a soap opera represents a semiotic choice point with different possible outcomes. A viewer who has a rich mental model for the soap opera, recognises a large array of narrative possibilities (a cognitive dimension to enjoyment). The range and the extent of the implications that the viewer is aware of, determines the tension he/she will experience in anticipation of a resolution of the semiotic choice point (an affective dimension of

enjoyment). If the range and extent of the narrative possibilities the viewer is aware of is vast, he/she will experience a high degree of tension and subsequent enjoyment from the resolution of the narrative incident. This enjoyment will, in turn, make a contribution to the viewer's intrinsic motivation to watch another episode (a behavioural reaction to enjoyment).

Rich mental models also determine the potential quality of the engagement the viewer could have with characters. When a viewer first watches a soap opera, he/she meets the characters in a way comparable to meeting people in real life. At this early stage of the engagement, the viewer relies on stereotypes to interpret any new characters and is limited to whatever small amount of information has been presented by the limited number of narrative encounters (the cognitive dimension of enjoyment). On this small amount of information, the viewer is less able to judge and engage with the character than a viewer who has been exposed to a large number of narrative incidents. If the viewer is unable to judge the appeal and similarity of a character, he/she will not be able to identify with a character or form para-social relationships with characters, which in turn, negatively affects enjoyment. The viewer derives specific gratifications from either identifying with a character or having para-social interaction with a character (affective dimension of enjoyment), which makes a contribution to the intrinsic motivation to continue watching on a regular basis (behavioural dimension of enjoyment).

Viewers selectively recall only the elements of a storyline that relates to the characters they have a high appreciation for. The nature of the viewer's engagement with characters therefore also influences the range of narrative possibilities the viewer is aware of at semiotic choice points.

Realism is also an important determinant of the quality of engagement with characters. Realism positively influences transportation, which is a necessary condition for engaging with characters and also influences engagement with characters directly, as it is easier for a viewer to identify with or have para-social interactions with realistic characters.

2.3. Loyalty

The enjoyment derived from engaging with characters and the enjoyment derived from the anticipation of the resolution of storylines combine into an internal motivation to watch another episode. This internal motivation is supplemented by social influence that encourages a viewer to watch an episode together with significant others. It is also positively influenced by the convenience of the timeslot in which the soap opera airs. Watching more episodes (i.e. becoming a more regular viewer) repeats this process and results in richer mental models, more enjoyment and an increased internal motivation to watch.

If a soap opera has a high degree of external realism (as in Isidingo) an occasional viewer, who has a smaller total number of episodes viewed and a less recent exposure to the soap opera, may be able to follow and anticipate much of what transpires because his/her real-world knowledge (his/her bias)

is applicable to the interpretation of the soap opera. The occasional viewer will, however, be limited to the real world as heuristic and will not be privy to idiosyncratic character and narrative histories, which will limit the range of narrative possibilities available at semiotic choice points and his/her subsequent enjoyment from anticipating narrative resolutions. Without frequent and lengthy exposure (and a fusion of horizons in which the occasional viewer's bias and knowledge on the soap opera is broadened), the occasional viewer will also not be able to sustain identification with any particular character or para-social relationships with a range of characters, which limits his/her enjoyment gained from engagement with characters. If the total enjoyment derived from the viewing experience is low, the inherent motivation to continue to watch will consequently be low. This lack of inherent motivation may, however, be supplemented by other factors that constitute the total facticity (the inseperability of our own being with that of others) and historicity (the temporal location of the viewing experience and the interpretations that preceded it), such as the timeslot in which the soap opera is on air or social pressure from spouses for the occasional viewer to watch. As the frequency and longevity of the occasional viewer's exposure to the soap increases over time, so does the richness of the mental models formed and the possible enjoyment that can be derived from viewing. In this cyclical manner, a lived reality of loyal viewership is formed.

Part 2: Reflection

The following section is a reflection on various aspects of the research. Researcher reflection is necessary for the reader to judge the quality of the research (Rolfe, 2006). This reflection should not only include a detailed account of methodological decisions, but should also include self-critique and self-appraisal (Rolfe). This whole section contains a reflection on methodological decisions. Self-critique and self-appraisal is dealt with in the section on researcher bias.

A detailed account of the methodology used in this research was provided in Chapter 4. In this last section of Chapter 8, the researcher reflects on how the study juxtaposed academic and market research; the contributions of the study, as well as the limitations of the study. Suggestions for future research are made based on this reflection and the chapter concludes by revisiting the research questions.

3. **Reflection on the research process by juxtaposing academic and market research**

This academic study was a secondary analysis of market research data. For this reason, the study provides a natural comparison of two very different applications of qualitative research. The following is a comparison of these approaches based on the nature of their respective aims, analysis, interpretation, research outputs, time frames, the positioning of the research participant, language and researcher bias.

This reflection illustrates the researcher's sensitivity for the differences and convergences between these two approaches. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter it also contributes insights on how market research can gain a lot by applying principles of academic research.

3.1. Research aims

The first difference between academic and market research, as illustrated in this study, is the nature of the research aims and subsequent research questions. The overall research aim of the market research study was to conduct an evaluation of the soap opera Isidingo. Research questions[11] salient from this research aim included an evaluation of various aspects of the soap opera, including amongst others, the characters and storylines. The questions included in the discussion guide were general in nature. It covered a variety of topics regarding viewing behaviour, beliefs about soap operas, soap operas competing with Isidingo, Isidingo's characters and storylines, and production issues, as well as specific narrative directions the producers wanted to test with viewers. The nature of the discussion guide is typical of a market research study in which a large amount of content is addressed in a short time available. It is also focused on the strategic direction expressed in the market research brief and its major concern is the solution of a specific business objective.

The research aim and the salient research questions of the academic study are vastly different. These aims and questions are defined in Chapter 1 and the research questions are revisited at the conclusion of the current chapter. They are formulated to make a contribution to three fields of science, namely: media psychology, media studies and research methodology. Where the aim and research questions of the market research study are pragmatic in nature and focused on addressing a specific business problem, the aim and research questions of the academic study are epistemic and focused on scientific knowledge (Mouton, 2001). The academic study took place after the market research study was completed and was dependant on the data that had already been collected to address the practical business problem. The implication is that the academic researcher had no control over the nature of the data collected in the market research study. A divergence between the research aims and questions of the market research and academic research underlie certain limitations which are identified elsewhere in this chapter.

3.2. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation are two distinct functions in the research process. Data analysis is the process through which data is fragmented into manageable pieces and the relationships between the pieces are examined. During analysis the researcher breaks up the data into manageable meaning units and looks for relationships between the meaning units that constitute themes. During the process of interpretation, the researcher creates a theory that explains the relationships identified between themes during the analysis (Gummesson, 2005; Mouton, 2001).

As will be illustrated in the sections to follow, the processes of analysis and interpretation in academic research differ substantially from those in market research. This is not to say that the market research analysis and interpretation process is inferior to the academic method (Catterall, 1998). It rather

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[11] The specific research questions of the market research study are not mentioned in order to protect the SABC's proprietary information. Please refer to the discussion on ethical concerns at the end of Chapter 4.

illustrates how each is a function of the unique research aim and timelines within its context (refer elsewhere in this chapter for a discussion on how aims and timelines differ between these two approaches.)

3.2.1.   Data analysis.

Data analysis in the market research process begins while the data is being collected. The focus group or interview is observed by a market researcher who begins to define themes as the focus group progresses. This collection of themes is then influence the nature of the analysis process. Analysis is often more of a search for detail to underlie the themes that are identified during the initial interpretation. After the completion of the data collection, the focus groups are recorded and transcribed. The market researcher, using the initial themes identified while the focus groups were being conducted, reviews the transcripts in search for additional information on the overall themes. All tactical issues (such as which programmes were watched or image descriptions of characters) are then collated into summaries that are used in the report documentation.

The process of data analysis used in the academic context is described in detail in Chapter 4 and captured in Chapters 5 and 6. It involved a rigorous analysis process in which the researcher read the first and second hermeneutics (preserved in transcripts of the focus groups and the market research presentation respectively), paraphrased the data to make all implicit meanings explicit, and identified meaning units and themes through a systematic process of qualitative analysis. These themes were then interpreted in context of a thorough literature study and the researcher's background knowledge.

3.2.2.   Interpretation.

When focus groups are conducted in the market research process, one market researcher facilitates the focus group and another follows the group from behind a one-way mirror. The market researcher in the viewing room is a senior market research executive who is tasked with immediate meaning making. Rather than making verbatim notes, she interprets the discussion of the group and makes interpretive notes, identifying and elaborating on themes. These interpretive notes form the backbone of the analysis process and provide a framework within which further analysis is conducted. Once all the detail has been collated (during analysis of the transcripts), the full collection of data is reviewed before final interpretations are made that informs the research conclusions and recommendations that will be presented to the client. During this final process of interpretation, data about the topic is interpreted from the researchers' conceptual background and not necessarily on academic literature reviewed about the topic.

Interpretation in the academic study was an extended process through which the researcher moved between the first and second hermeneutics and literature review to arrive at the third hermeneutic as presented in the previous chapter. Sufficient time to develop, contemplate on and revise themes was available (a number of months compared to days or weeks in market research) and the result was the new model of the psychological processes that culminate in audience loyalty to a soap opera as

presented in this chapter. Interpretation is made from within the context of a thorough review of the most pertinent literature, within a sensitivity to the chosen interpretive framework and by use of the researcher's background knowledge.

3.2.3. Illustrating the difference between interpretation in the academic and market research contexts.

The following example from the findings illustrates how the interpretive processes of the two approaches differ. As part of the second hermeneutic, the market researcher explains that because viewers are so emotionally involved with characters, they find it difficult to conduct an objective character evaluation. The market researcher warns the production team before presenting her feedback on the characters that they should keep the viewer's inability to distance him/herself from the emotional experience of the characters in mind, and realise that it is part and parcel of the appeal of the soap. Negative feedback should therefore not be understood as necessitating intervention, but rather as an indication of the emotions that are evoked by the character. The academic researcher agrees with this recommendation, but the following will illustrate how the motivation for the recommendation from the academic process differs from that of the market research process.

The market researcher makes the recommendation based on a long history of conducting similar research studies. Over the years she has noticed that when writers follow the advice of viewers in these instances, the viewers often lose interest. She therefore warns writers and production houses not to regard viewer's comments as actionable recommendations, but rather as an indication of the emotional tension they experience in relation to the characters (which is what increases the appeal of the characters). The academic researcher would make the same recommendation, but the recommendation would, in contrast, be motivated by the theory of Hoorn and Konijn (2003) and Konijn and Hoorn (2005) (that a character is most appealing when an optimum level of involvement and distance is achieved) and by a practical application of the interpretive framework of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Relating to characters is part of the automatic processes through which viewers interpret the lived reality of soap opera viewership. Asking viewers to relate to characters in an objective way or removing their emotional experience of the character from their interpretation of the soap is – according to the market researcher - impossible. The academic researcher agrees that viewers would find it exceptionally difficult to remove their own experience from their interpretation of the soap opera. The academic researcher's conclusion would be based on the application of Heidegger's theory to the problem. Heidegger asserts that people live in the ready-to-hand mode of engagement in which interpretation is automatic and unconscious. It requires great effort to think about the world actively and engage with it in the unready-to-hand mode of engagement. For a viewer to remove his/her emotional experience of the character from his/her interpretation of the soap, would require that the viewer assumes the unready-to-hand mode of engagement which is rare, strenuous and not reflective

of their lived reality (in which the emotional experience of the character is inherent to their experience of the soap).

The academic researcher agrees with the market researcher that the suggestions viewers have on characters are more indicative of their emotional reactions to the characters than representing interventions that should be made by the production team. If all suggestions are followed – such as sending Barker to jail, having Zeb treat Agnes better and seeing Lee stand up to her father – it would remove all tension and discomfort that the viewer feels. Removing all tension would reduce the enjoyment experienced from interpreting the characters and their storylines.

Hoorn and Konijn's theory that fictional characters should evoke a healthy degree of both distance and involvement provides a theoretical motivation for this conclusion. As explained in Chapter 7, in the analysis of the character world, complex characters that have a balance between distance and involvement are more engaging than one-dimensional characters that are only good or bad. Hoorn and Konijn argue that complex characters that are not perceived as either purely positive or negative during the encoding stage, challenge the viewer more and result in higher appreciation. Beauty, goodness and realism have optimum levels where the ideal combination of distance and involvement equates to appreciation. The conclusion from the academic and market research contexts converged in this instance, although it was based on different interpretive processes.

3.3. Research output

The final product of the market research study was a PowerPoint presentation that focused on answering the commissioning client's research question and addressing the business problem in a concise, yet comprehensive way. Typically, the findings are presented to the commissioning editor and his/her team, the research department and the production house responsible for the programme. The presentation includes a brief introduction to the business problem that initiated the research, followed by an introduction to the methodology used in the study. This introduction to the methodology used in the study includes brief notes on the research approach, the method used to collect data, the defined universe and the sample structure. The bulk of the presentation is structured around the research findings, which build to a coherent conclusion. The research presentation is concluded with specific recommendations, according to which changes should be made to the programme to achieve the desired business objectives.

Although a literature review of sources, such as industry journals and peer forums[12] is conducted during the conceptual planning of the research, it is not reported on in great detail during the research presentation. It will rather be used to substantiate a specific finding that the market researcher deems significant to the overall objective or as a general guide within which the findings are structured. The

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[12] These would include publications and electronic peer discussion forums of organisations, such as the QRCA (the American Qualitative Research Consultants Association) and AQR (a similar body based in the United Kingdom).

presentation is often accompanied by a written report. Market research data often contain proprietary information and will not always be submitted to a journal or international conference for publication.

This differs vastly from the output in an academic research process which entails a detailed outlay of the literature review, the theoretical framework, the methodology, the data and the integration thereof written in academic language. The literature and theory are fundamental to the process of interpretation. As discussed in Chapter 3, the theory provides a theoretical framework within which the researcher engages and interprets the data. As illustrated in Chapters 2 and 7, the literature review in academic research allows the researcher to regard the data in a different way, attempting to fit the new findings into existing models or redefining models to accommodate new insights. Academic research will also often be published in academic journals and presented at conferences.

3.4. Positioning of the research participant

The research participant in a market research study is positioned as the end user or client for whom the programme should be tailored. The research is framed as an attempt to cater the programme to the viewer's needs and revisions to the end product is almost a guaranteed outcome.

The research participant in the current academic study represents an interpretive window into the lived reality. The purpose is to understand the lived reality of viewership and to make a contribution to media psychology. Academic research does not hold the promise of an immediate augmentation of the on-screen product the viewer is exposed to.

3.5. Timeframe

The timeframe of academic and market research studies are also dissimilar. Depending on the size of the sample, the duration of a market research study should be no longer than four to eight weeks. Findings should be shared with the client as soon as possible after the conclusion of the fieldwork, since it ages promptly. Feedback on the storylines of a soap opera from the research, for example, is redundant if the storyline is allowed to evolve and conclude before the research findings are shared. It would still contribute an overall understanding that includes principles applicable to future endeavours, but the immediate practical application thereof diminishes.

An academic study is less time conscious than market research, as the fruit of the labour are principles and understandings that contribute to a larger body of scientific knowledge. It is not always immediately applied practically. An important time consideration salient from this, however, is that the literature review should be updated continuously in the academic study to ensure that the latest theoretical understanding of the lived reality is consolidated with the research findings. More than two years elapsed from the time that the academic researcher conducted the initial literature review and the conclusion of the current document. The academic researcher continuously updated the literature review to ensure that new additions to the scientific body of knowledge – such as Busselle's and

Bilandsic's (2008); Debesay et al.'s (2008); Marx's (2008) and Phillips's (2008) work – were included in the final interpretation.

3.6. Language use

Another apparent divergence is the language used in each context. Language used in the market research report include business phrases such as "strategic", "operational" and "tactical", and include many phrases and expressions that are inappropriate in a formal academic writing context. The statements quoted below illustrate how many phrases typically used in market research were reformulated for inclusion in the academic study.

In an early draft a sentence was phrased as follows: *"Papa G, Georgie, Barker, Cherel and Zeb were amongst those sorely missed for their personalities, their idiosyncrasies, their scheming and conniving."* This was later rephrased to: *"Feelings of loss reported by the viewers were focused on characters. Specific characters mentioned included Papa G, Barker, Cherel and Zeb for their personalities, idiosyncrasies and underhanded deals."*

The two approaches do, however, converge in their preference for qualitative language. Both the market researcher and the academic research would, for instance, favour the phrase "research participant" over "respondent", as it implies an inherent co-operation between researcher and researched in arriving at an understanding.

To remain consistent with the interpretive framework of the study, the academic researcher would also attempt to use language that remains within hermeneutic phenomenology. This would, for instance, include using phrases such as: "re-interpretation", "lived reality" and "historicity of meaning."

3.7. Researcher bias

Positivist approaches attempt to exclude researcher bias from the interpretation of research data (Laverty, 2003). Researcher bias is, however, used as an integral part of the interpretation process in both the qualitative market research study and the academic study.

In the market research study, the market researcher relied heavily on her experience from past studies on soap operas and television in general. The nature of the market researcher's bias was discussed in Chapter 6, and the prominence of it in the interpretation process was illustrated in the section above dealing with analysis and interpretation.

The academic study, in its allegiance to the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway, also acknowledged and actively used the researcher's background knowledge. The academic researcher's bias was described in detail in Chapter 4. It includes a history of personal soap opera viewership, incidents in her academic career and readings of various articles in print and electronic media. Table

8.1 summarises how each of the aspects of the researcher's bias relates to some aspect of the conclusions made in Chapter 7.

Table 8.1 *How researcher bias informed the interpretations made in the third hermeneutic*

Chapter 7 Conclusion	The influence of researcher bias in the interpretation of the data
Final themes – consolidation in the third hermeneutic	*How the researcher bias summarised in Chapter 4 relates to the conclusions*
Conclusion 1: The outcome of viewer's interpretation of their viewing experience is regular viewing behaviour.	-
Conclusion 2: Motivation for loyalty to soap operas is primarily interpreted by the viewer as an appreciation of characters. **Conclusion 2.1:** Viewers interpret characters using two sets of resources, namely soap knowledge and real-world knowledge. **Conclusion 2.2:** Viewers form a complex schema of who the character is and this schema underlies the expectation viewers have of the character's future behaviour and interactions with other characters. **Conclusion 2.3:** Viewers relate to characters in a variety of ways, each of which makes a unique contribution to the overall appeal of and loyalty to a soap opera.	• Viewer response to the death of Ashley Callie, the actress who played Lee Haines in Isidingo. • Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research.
Conclusion 3: Loyalty to soap operas is interpreted by viewers as an interest in storylines. **Conclusion 3.1:** Viewers' interpretations of storylines are influenced by their relationship with characters. **Conclusion 3.2:** Isidingo is partly true to genre conventions in the types of storylines portrayed.	• Researcher's early memories of her mother teaching her about plot lines and how the resolution of conflict makes the reader want to read the complete the story. • Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research

Conclusion 4: Realism is an important determinant of viewer's judgement of characters. **Conclusion 4.1:** There are different types of realism. Isidingo's strength is external realism combined with internal realism. **Conclusion 4.2:** External realism is not a necessary determinant of loyalty to all soap operas.	• Early memories of watching Santa Barbara and Egoli. • Early memories of her mother teaching her of the importance of using realistic costumes, sets and props in theatre.
Conclusion 5: The effect of loyal viewership of Isidingo is education or learning. **Conclusion 5.1:** Isidingo has the potential of shaping public opinion on key social issues.	• Interview with Michelle Botes in Sarie. • Story about the female character going to university on a soap opera in India.
Conclusion 6: The temporal location of the soap opera within the household routine is a determining factor to loyalty.	• April fools joke about Isidingo moving to the afternoon to save electricity.
Conclusion 7: Social influence is an important psychological process that instigates and sustains soap opera viewership.	• Watching Santa Barbara and Egoli with mother.
Conclusion 8: Character involvement is positively influenced by regular exposure to the characters.	-
Conclusion 9: The spatial setting of a soap forms part of its situation model.	-
Conclusion 10: Isidingo viewers have an appeal for the genre in general. **Conclusion 10.1:** Soap opera viewers are familiar with soap opera genre conventions and these influence their expectations of characters and storylines.	• Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research.
Conclusion 11: Transportation is a necessary determinant of loyalty.	• Career in market research at a company that specialises in broadcast media research.

3.8. Conclusion

Table 8.2 compares the academic and market research processes. It summarises the similarities and differences between the two research approaches on the dimensions discussed above.

Table 8.2 *Comparing market research with the current academic research*

	Market research study	The current academic study
Data source	Primary data	Secondary data
Interpretive position	Core and inner parts of the hermeneutic spiral.	Outer part of the hermeneutic spiral.
Main objective and output	Addressing a specific business objective.	A contribution to the scientific body of knowledge.
Interpretation	Immediate and concurrent to the data being collected. Substantiated by additional analysis after fieldwork.	Rigorous, based on a detailed research pathway that adheres to strict hermeneutic phenomenological principles.
Timeframe	6-8 weeks	Two years
Positioning of the research participant	As the end-user or client.	Interpretive window into the nature of the lived reality.
Language use	Formal, using business terminology (market research 'speak'). Qualitative	Formal and academic. Qualitative Hermeneutic phenomenological
Researcher bias	Specifically utilised	Specifically utilised

4. Contributions of the study

This study makes a contribution to media studies, to the specialist field of media psychology, as well as to the subject of research methodology. As will be discussed in the following section, both media studies and media psychology benefit from interdisciplinary convergence. Although the study's main contribution is to psychology, implications for media studies also emerge as a natural by-product at this interdisciplinary junction.

Any comments made in this section and elsewhere that relate to the body of knowledge potentially benefiting from the current and further research, should not be understood as an attempt to arrive at an objective conclusion. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that any researcher brings with him/her a fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background, which influences any interpretations made in the research (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). The contributions to the body of knowledge should be understood as an elaboration of this fore-grounding.

4.1. Contribution to the specialist field of media psychology

Media psychology is a relatively young scientific field (Fischoff, 2005) and much of the work in it has been done by communication and media specialists (Giles, 2003). It exists in a conceptual intersection between media studies and psychology, and criticism from outside of this intersection comes from both sides. Communication scholars are concerned that psychologists disregard the

complexity of the media and its importance outside of its psychological significance, while psychologists are concerned that media specialists use processing concepts (perception, interpretation, memory) incorrectly (Reeves & Anderson, 1991).

The psychology community clearly recognises the value of research that brings media and psychology together in an attempt to enrich the understanding of both. Division 46 of the American Psychological Association (the Division for Media Psychology):

> Seeks to promote research into the impact of media on human behaviour; to facilitate interaction between psychology and media representatives; to enrich the teaching, training, and practice of media psychology; and to prepare psychologists to interpret psychological research to the lay public and to other professionals (http://www.apa.org/divisions/div46/ para.1).

The question on whether psychology enriches the study of media is less pertinent to the current study. It is, however, of interest to the current study that the study of media enriches psychology. The study of media enriches psychology in much the same way as the study of the psychology of reading has influenced general theories of cognition. Understanding the interaction of people with media allows the study of cognition, attention and perception - all important psychological concepts - in the context of real-life, complex and dynamic contexts (Giles, 2003; Reeves & Anderson, 1991).

This study showed that the psychological processes through which loyalty to a soap opera develops are psychological. Social psychological processes of influence introduce the viewer to the soap opera and sustain viewership before the viewer develops an inherent motivation to watch the soap opera. Cognitive psychological processes take place through which the viewer selectively attends to the most relevant and interesting information about characters and storylines, and by using background information, interprets them with specific affective implications. This interpretation process is also grounded in the psychological processes of memory, as it shows how viewers favour memories of past story elements that are emotionally charged in their interpretation of new incidents. The study also showed how the appeal of a soap opera lies mostly in how characters are perceived and interpreted by viewers in a way that is similar to how they interpret people in real life, and social psychological skills (combined with soap-world knowledge) become important viewer resources.

As will be discussed in 6.2.1 below, most research in this field is from cognitive theory. The contribution of the current study is the addition of a hermeneutic phenomenological path.

4.2. Contribution to the field of media studies

The study also makes a contribution to media studies and in particular to an understanding of the soap opera genre. It identifies Isidingo as a soap opera that is unique within the genre. Although adhering to many genre conventions, Isidingo contributes important possibilities for the diversification

of the genre internationally. The study also begins to address loyalty as an outcome of enjoyment of a soap opera.

4.3. Contribution to research methodology

The current study provided a practical application of a hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. It made a distinction between Heideggerian and Husserlian phenomenology and argued for the former approach for understanding loyal soap opera viewership. The study illustrated the successful use of - rather than strict exclusion of - researcher bias in interpreting data. It also successfully opened the hermeneutic circle of interpretation into a spiral, in which the later stages of interpretation build on those preceding it. The lived reality of soap opera is situated in an individual, historical, physical and social context. The hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway is able to incorporate these contexts into the research design.

As a secondary analysis of commercial market research data, the study also provides a methodological guide in leveraging commercial data for a contribution to academic knowledge. It begins to address the gap between academic research and practical application in industry as it identifies areas of convergence and divergence between the two fields. Most notably, applying the HP principles for research (set out at the end of Chapter 3) to qualitative market research methodologies would provide a practical means of allowing market research to benefit from the robustness of academic research (Catterall, 1998).

Market research methodologies that rely primarily on data collection techniques that require research participants to talk about their lived realities, are often criticised for not being able to produce valid findings. Validity in this case can be defined as the extent to which research findings represent the lived reality. It is argued that research participants' memories of their experiences as conveyed in a focus group or interview environment, is often different from their actual experiences (Abrams, 2000).

Triangulation of narrative and ethnographic methodologies is one way of addressing this apparent contradiction in research findings. Another is to assert that human beings necessarily function within a Heidegger undifferentiated mode of being, in which rational explanations for actions would require the individual to make conscious decisions on every detail of his/her life, which is not possible. All actions are bound to the context and culture in which they take place and all accounts given in research have an internal logic of their own. This study is a practical illustration of how social research could benefit from such an application of an abstract theoretical framework.

5. Limitations of the study

In this section a distinction is made between the methodological and conceptual limitations of the study. Both the conceptual and methodological limitations could be addressed in future research (see section 6).

5.1. Methodological limitations

Methodological limitations relate to the manner in which the research was conducted. Although the limitations mentioned here could not have been addressed in this research, due to the specific circumstances of the study, they could be addressed in future studies that follow a different methodological route.

5.1.1. Analysing the soap opera in a manner that is inconsistent with its genre conventions.

The analysis of Isidingo in Chapter 7 was limited to the storylines and characters immediately relevant to the soap prior to the collection of the first hermeneutic. Although this allowed the researcher to conduct a time delimited analysis, it goes against the conventions of the soap genre that has no definitive end. It also limited the soap's inherently complex multiplicity of characters to only a relatively small cast. Ideally, any analysis of a soap opera should acknowledge the role that the extended character ensemble and lack of narrative conclusion has on viewers' experience of the genre.

5.1.2. Not allowing for the reinterpretation of lived experiences.

The credibility or truth value of research within the hermeneutic phenomenological framework refers to how close the interpretation conforms to what the participants are trying to say. One way of increasing the truth value of research is to allow research participants to review interpretations made in the second and third hermeneutic (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Due to the research design of a secondary analysis of existing market research data, the original participants were unknown to the academic researcher and were not available to reinterpret interpretations made in the second and third hermeneutics. Ideally, hermeneutic phenomenological research pathways should incorporate a step in which individuals closest to the lived reality, are able to reinterpret their own lived experiences, based on the interpretations of researchers. Apart from being a methodological tool to enhance the overall quality of the research findings, the absence of such a step (allowing research participants to comment on researcher interpretations) also has conceptual implications (see section 5.2).

5.1.3. Lack of generalisability.

Lastly, it could be argued that another limitation of the study is that its sample is not representative of the South African soap opera viewing population and that the findings are therefore not generalisable (Marshall, 1996). This was, however, a qualitative study and generalisability is not the focus in qualitative research (Rolfe, 2006). Sampling in qualitative research is more focused on including participants who are good at interpreting the experience that relates to the research question (in this case soap opera viewership). This would not necessarily be the case in a representative sample, because the experience (soap opera viewership) cannot be assumed to be normally distributed in the population (Marshall, 1996). An attempt to arrive at a representative sample and therefore to generate generalisable results would also be in conflict with the chosen interpretive framework.

5.2. Conceptual limitations

Conceptual limitations are limitations that relate to the theoretical value of the findings of the research. They flow from the methodological limitations and could therefore not have been addressed in the current study. They can, however, inform future studies (see section 6).

5.2.1. The inability of the literature study to inform the nature of the primary data collected.

Chapter 1 includes a detailed description of the order in which the research phases unfolded. As explained in Chapter 1, the academic literature study (contained in Chapter 2) was conducted at the beginning of the academic research process. By the time the academic research process had commenced, however, the market research data had already been collected, interpreted and presented to the client. This implies that the theories encountered in the literature study could have no impact on the nature of the questions asked to soap opera viewers in the first hermeneutic or the nature of the interpretations made by the market researcher in the second hermeneutic.

Research suggestions emanating from this study are therefore of relevance to future studies, as it will ensure that the insights gained from the literature review (combined with the other insights of this study) be explored in primary research. Formulating research questions based on the suggestions made from this study will ensure that the interpretations made in the third hermeneutic are reinterpreted by soap opera viewers who are closest to the lived reality, overall making a more comprehensive contribution to the body of scientific knowledge. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges that any researcher brings with him/her a fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background which influences any interpretations made in the research (Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Wilcke, 2002). In the following, the current suggestion will elaborate this fore-grounding or taken-for-granted background knowledge by ensuring that any new research to stem from this study will be grounded in literature.

5.2.2. Differences between the lived reality of Isidingo viewership in 2005 and the lived reality of Isidingo viewership in 2009.

The first and second hermeneutics on which this study is based were collected in 2005. Although the third hermeneutic is contemporary, seeing that it includes the most recent literature, it is still interpreting a snapshot of the lived reality that is three years old.

The Isidingo on air at the time of writing, has key differences with the Isidingo on air in 2005. Most notably, three of the strong female characters are no longer part of the soap. The character Cherel is no longer present, as the actress Michelle Botes has taken a role in the soap Binnelanders. The character Lee Haines is no longer part of the soap because of the tragic death of actress Ashley Callie in a car accident in 2008, and most recently, the character Letti has been written out of the story.

The study still makes a worthwhile contribution to the field of media psychology and will be valuable to the production company (Endemol) and broadcaster (SABC) by setting down general principles of Isidingo viewership. Suggestions for future research should, however, include that the current model be applied to the soap on a regular basis.

6. Suggestions for future research

Suggestions for future research can also be made on a methodological and conceptual level. Methodological suggestions would increase the quality of future studies that follow a similar methodology and interpretive framework. Conceptual suggestions relate to the findings of the research and would benefit the overall understanding of the lived reality.

6.1. Methodological suggestions for future research

The first set of suggestions for future research is methodological. The methodological suggestions for future research relate to the manner in which a soap opera is analysed, allowing research participants to revisit interpretations made and the positioning of the research within an interpretive framework.

6.1.1. Analysing the soap opera in a manner that is consistent with its genre conventions.

As discussed above, the first methodological constraint of the study is that the analysis of Isidingo was limited to the characters and storylines in the soap immediately prior to the collection of the first hermeneutic. A suggestion for future research to address this limitation is a study in which viewers that have an extensive knowledge of the soap are asked to interpret the soap as a whole, rather than focusing on only the immediate storylines and characters. Since the current study was limited to a snapshot of the soap opera for the sake of economy, a study that looks at the characters and storylines of the soap over time would be valuable.

6.1.2. Allowing the reinterpretation of lived experiences.

The second methodological limitation discussed above, is the inability of the research process of the current study to allow research participants to reinterpret their lived reality based on the interpretations made by researchers. This will always be a limitation of studies that are the secondary analysis of existing data. An important suggestion for future research flows from this limitation: hermeneutic phenomenological research pathways (that are not secondary analyses of existing data) should include a step in the research process in which those closest to the lived reality under study be allowed to reinterpret their interpretations. In future studies that follow a secondary analysis like the current study, this limitation can be addressed partially by allowing the market researcher (or first academic researcher if it is a secondary analysis of academic research) to review the interpretation of the second hermeneutic, as well as the third hermeneutic.

6.1.3.   Increasing generalisability.

Future researchers may be tempted to verify the model for the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera in a quantitative study with a representative sample. Verifying the model in a quantitative study would not be consistent with the interpretive framework within which this study was conducted as hermeneutic phenomenology – an interprevitist approach - is not concerned with reaching an objective (statistically verified) conclusion. It is rather concerned with lived realities and would argue that even a model produced through quantitative means would be subject to reinterpretation by subsequent researchers and soap opera viewers. Any future research should therefore remain within the hermeneutic phenomenological worldview.

6.2. Conceptual suggestions for future research

Various suggestions for future research can be made on a conceptual level. Conceptual suggestions can inform the research aims and research questions of future studies on Isidingo, soap operas, television or the new media environment.

6.2.1.   Contradiction between social cognitive theory and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Although the theoretical and methodological frameworks for this study are hermeneutic phenomenological, much of the interpretation and discussion is based on concepts from social psychology which is orientated towards social cognitive theory (mental models, using real-world knowledge to interpret new characters etc.) (Livingstone, 1998). This contradiction is a function of the prevailing literature on media psychology and the nature of the interpretations made in the first and second hermeneutic, which was outside of the academic researcher's control (for reasons discussed above).

The market research study was not based on cognitive theory by design, however, the responses of participants in the market research study resemble notions that Livingstone relates to social cognitive theory. Whether this is a function of the way in which questions were phrased in the market research or viewers' actual interpretation of their lived reality, is unclear. A suggestion is to develop an interviewing technique that will allow viewers in future studies of a similar nature to talk about their lived reality in an interpretive way, that would be consistent with a hermeneutic phenomenological framework.

6.2.2.   Understanding viewer involvement with characters.

Much of what has been written in the three hermeneutics and the literature review is concerned with how viewers become involved with characters. Viewers can be involved with characters in different ways (Cohen, 2001) and distinct character traits influence how viewers relate to characters (Hoorn & Konijn, (2003); Konijn & Hoorn, 2005).

As discussed in Chapter 7, the first and second hermeneutic provided evidence that viewers relate to Isidingo characters in the following ways: 1) through identification, 2) by forming para-social relationships with them, 3) feeling similar to the character, and 4) liking the character. Imitation was the one type of involvement with characters identified by Cohen (2001) that neither the first nor second hermeneutic provided evidence of. Although the viewers who participated in this study identified many characters as being educational in Isidingo, no concrete evidence exists in the first or second hermeneutic that viewers imitate Isidingo characters. To provide a clear theoretical link between the potential impact of South African soap operas in addressing social issues, a study that identifies instances where viewers imitate positive behaviour of a soap opera character in real life would be of great value.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 7, Hoorn and Konijn argue that characters are judged by viewers in terms of their beauty, goodness and realism, and that viewers experience degrees of distance or involvement with a character based on these dimensions. They believe that for a viewer to really appreciate a character, optimum levels of both distance and involvement need to be present. In operationalising Hoorn and Konijn's dimensions for the South African soap opera, it is necessary to establish the relationships between involvement, distance and appreciation. Although this study provides a qualitative indication that their original theory is relevant to the current lived reality, the body of knowledge would benefit from a study in which viewers are asked to subjectively evaluate characters on dimensions that could contribute either distance or involvement and its subsequent impact on character appreciation.

6.2.3.   Understanding the importance of realism.

Green et al. (2004) make a distinction between internal and external realism, and argue that internal realism is important for transportation into a narrative. The researcher deducted from the evidence in the earlier hermeneutics that Isidingo has a sufficient degree of internal realism. This interpretation was based on the fact that viewers report experiencing transportation (which is only possible if there is internal realism) and that fact that no viewers noticed an absence of internal realism. A suggestion for future research is to confirm whether viewers believe Isidingo has a high degree of internal realism.

When a programme has a high degree of external realism, occasional viewers will find it easier to follow than they would a programme with low external realism. This is because they will be able to apply real-world knowledge to their interpretation of the programme (Green et al. 2004; Livingstone, 1998). In this study Isidingo was found to have a high degree of external realism and occasional viewers were able to understand the stories and people in it with relative ease. A suggestion for future research would be to explore the external realism of other soap operas and to compare the ability of occasional viewers of these soaps to follow the soaps with the same ease that occasional viewers follow Isidingo.

6.2.4. The emergence of a unique South African sub-genre.

Liebes and Livingstone (1998) analysed the kinship structures in various European soap operas and identified three sub-genres to the soap opera. A similar analysis of Isidingo (in Chapter 7) revealed the emergence of a unique South African sub-genre that falls outside of Liebes and Livingstone's original groups. A suggestion for further research is to analyse the kinship structures in all local soap operas with Liebes and Livingstone's methodology, to corroborate the emergence of a unique South African genre sub-type and add to the model on kinship structures.

6.2.5. Further applications of the model of psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera.

As stated earlier, Isidingo is a soap opera with a high degree of external realism. A suggestion for future research is that the model developed in this study of the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to a soap opera, be tested and possibly revised to apply to soap operas in one of the other sub-genres (a dynastic soap with a low degree of external realism, for example) as well as other narrative, fictional genres, such as series, sitcoms and movies.

The current model is only applicable to narrative genres because it requires a viewer to form relationships with characters and to be transported into a narrative. Although viewers can form relationships with media figures in non-narrative genres (it is for instance easier for a viewer to engage para-socially with a media figure, such as a talk show host or newscaster who addresses the audience directly), viewers are not likely to be transported into non-narrative genres, seeing that transportation requires an alternative narrative world (Cohen, 2001; Green et al. 2004). A suggestion for future research is to explore the possibilities of understanding viewer loyalty to non-narrative genres through an amended version of the model of psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty.

A last suggestion for further research is to test the application of the model of the psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to the new media environment. Developments in media, such as view-on-demand content, PVRs, DVB-H technology (live television on a cellphone or other mobile devices) and, most importantly, the internet, hold vast implications for the lived reality of viewership. It also has implications for the repositioning of traditional views on how audiences should be understood and studied (Livingstone, 1999). The model of psychological processes culminating in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty should be adapted to the unique characteristics of the new media environment.

7. Revisiting the research questions

To conclude this thesis, the three research questions posed in Chapter 1 will now be revisited. The content that addresses each question has been addressed at length elsewhere in this chapter and in

Chapter 7. This section serves only as summary and confirmation that the research questions have been attended to.

The first research question enquired whether it is possible to identify psychological processes that culminate in positive viewing experiences and audience loyalty to soap operas. A detailed model of these psychological processes is discussed at length at the beginning of this chapter. The first research question is therefore answered affirmatively.

The second research question relates to the possibility that a unique sub-genre of soap opera can be identified for South Africa. An analysis of the kinship structure of Isidingo in Chapter 7 revealed that the soap opera is unique to the genre, suggesting that a distinctive sub-type to the genre does exist. A suggestion for further research is made, however, to conduct a similar analysis of all South African soap operas to confirm the emergence of a South African sub-genre.

The last research question is concerned with the possibility that market research can be explicated for academic gain. In a reflection on the research process earlier in this chapter the similarities and differences between academic and market research were contrasted. A conclusion can be made that it is possible to explicate market research for academic gain and that market research could benefit from applying selected principles from the academic research process.

8. Closing the hermeneutic spiral

In this chapter, a model that illustrates how psychological processes culminate in positive viewing experiences and viewer loyalty to the soap opera was presented. The researcher then finally reflected on the research process and specifically the convergence and divergence between academic and market research and set out the limitations and contributions of the study with salient recommendations for further research. This concludes the research pathway and in the words of Debesay et al. (2008, p.65): "This closes the circle of understanding, if only for now."

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