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ABSTRACT

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*Mareledi: An Audience-Reception Study of an HIV/AIDS Entertainment-Education Serial Television Drama in Botswana*

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The purpose of this study is to understand how audience members of ‘Mareledi,’ an entertainment-education serial television drama in Botswana, create meaning of HIV/AIDS messages communicated through the serial television drama. More specifically, the present study considers how audience members of Mareledi make sense of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages through their involvement with the Mareledi narrative.

Two qualitative methodologies—focus groups and semi-structured, in-depth interviews—were used to understand how audience members make sense of entertainment-education programs through their involvement with narratives. The narrative paradigm is used as a theoretical framework for the study. The theory suggests that people experience and understand life as a series of ongoing narratives.

The study revealed that audience members understand and interpret the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in the drama through a humanistic perspective. While they recognize the sociocultural beliefs and practices that continue to influence the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana, audience members try to negotiate their lives within these limitations. More specifically, female audience members were vocal about some of the social and cultural beliefs and practices they do not agree with.
However, older men still adhere to these sociocultural beliefs that suppress and disempower women in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Nevertheless, Mareledi presents a predominantly negative depiction of male characters. In this way, the drama fails its charge by negatively stereotyping men. Mareledi needs to include more positive male role models.

Audience members identified HIV/AIDS message fatigue as an important factor to consider when discussing entertainment interventions in Botswana. They believe HIV/AIDS message fatigue has contributed to a lower risk perception of HIV/AIDS. Therefore entertainment educations in Botswana should widen and vary the scope of the underlying messages from being exclusively about HIV/AIDS to integrate other important health and sociocultural issues.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family
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I thank God for his grace throughout this journey. The completion of this dissertation is proof of his faithfulness. My heartfelt appreciation goes out to my committee chair Dr. Howard. Thank you for your support, patience and encouragement. I appreciate your prompt feedback and constructive criticism that have helped me towards completing this dissertation. Words are not enough to express my gratitude. I am thankful to my committee members Dr. Cooper, Dr. Younge and Dr. Chawla. Your scholarly input is highly appreciated. Tasha Attaway, thank you for sacrificing time from your busy schedule to edit my work. I appreciate your unwavering labor of love. Mom and Dad thank you for believing in me when I doubted myself. To my siblings Lydia, Reo and Rebi, thank you for making sure I have a reason to laugh and smile, even during the most stressful times. Pinkie Sedigeng, you have stood with me through thick and thin. I appreciate your prayers and support. Dr. Childs thank you for giving me a place to call home during my studies. Pastor Leon Forte I am indebted to you for the many times you encouraged me to keep going when I felt weary. To all my colleagues who helped me during this journey, I am forever grateful. Finally, to my lovely wife Dr. Bonolo and my son Caleb, thank you for allowing me to spend months away from home in pursuit of my dream. I love and appreciate you.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies are on the rise worldwide, becoming one of the most important health issues for adolescents and young adults (Hoque, Ntsipe, & Mokgatle-Nthabu, 2012). This high-risk group, with ages ranging from 15 to 24 years, comprises about 20% of the world’s population and accounts for 60% of all new HIV/AIDS infections annually (Tagoe & Aggor, 2009). In particular, HIV/AIDS has had devastating effects on the development of sub-Saharan Africa (Tagoe & Aggor, 2009).

The nation of Botswana has the second-highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the world (Hoque, Ntsipe, & Mokgatle-Nthabu, 2012) and the HIV/AIDS pandemic is the leading cause of death among people aged 15-49 in Botswana (Papas-DeLuca, et al., 2008). The total number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Botswana in December 2009 was 316,363 and 57% (179,151) of these were females and 43% were males (NACA, 2012). A total of 16,216 new HIV infections were recorded in 2009, 95% of which were among adults aged 15 years and older while 9,214 HIV/AIDS-related deaths occurred in 2009 (NACA, 2012). These figures are alarming considering the fact that Botswana has a population of about two million people. Urban Botswana has consistently suffered higher HIV-prevalence rates than rural areas (Letamo, 2003). In Botswana, HIV/AIDS is mainly transmitted through heterosexual intercourse (Letamo, 2003, NACA, 2012).

In response to this problem, the government of Botswana has in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, spent millions of dollars to increase awareness and reduce infection and transmission at all levels of the society through extensive media messaging. However, current research has suggested that in spite of these efforts,
Botswana continues to be challenged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Perlson, 2013). While some scholars suggest cultural norms and attitudes play a major role in how people respond to health communication messages (Seloilwe et al., 2001, MacDonald, 1996 and Teitelman, Seloilwe, and Campbell, 2009), audience identification with the narratives and their decoding process is equally important for the successful implementation of HIV/AIDS media intervention programs. While this issue is very important, very few studies have investigated how audience involvement (audience members’ personal experience) with the narratives in entertainment-education programs in Botswana is shaping audience members’ interpretation process and response to the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages (Pierce and Bates, 2012). This study attempted to respond to this gap.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The impact of HIV/AIDS on mortality and socio-economic development threatens to reverse the developmental gains made by Botswana. The high levels of HIV/AIDS infection have resulted in the nation’s life expectancy decreasing from 65 years in 1990 to 35 years in 2005 (NACA, 2012). Additionally, the largest proportion of new infections (about 57%) is expected to occur among low-risk, heterosexual populations that include married couples and those who are cohabiting. Individuals engaged in casual heterosexual sex will contribute to about 29% of new infections (NACA, 2012).

Current statistics in the country shows that new HIV/AIDS infections and prevalence remain at very high levels despite government efforts (Botswana Country Report, 2010). However, several studies conducted in Botswana have suggested that
entertainment-education has been effective in creating awareness and promoting behavior change. For example, several studies have examined the effectiveness of entertainment education (E-E) programs like *Makgabaneng*, a radio serial program, in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Previous research has shown that apart from its broad listenership, the program has been successful in helping people reduce their risky sexual behaviors (Mooki et al., 2004). In another study, Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) examined the association between exposure to the *Makgabaneng* serial radio drama and outcomes related to HIV/AIDS testing among 555 sexually active participants.

Findings of the study show that increased duration of listening was associated with more positive outcomes. However, Mahoney and Bates (2013) found that while the drama met some of the President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) goals of helping people to minimize their risky sexual behaviors it failed to promote PEPFAR goals of abstinence from sex until marriage, and individual empowerment. They suggest that in order to build on its successes, *Makgabaneng* “would require a more holistic audience reception research study” (p.363). This kind of study will allow for a more audience-centered approach that will move the analysis from the dominant media effects evaluation of entertainment-education programs.

The current study responded to this issue by examining how audience members in Botswana are creating meaning of HIV/AIDS messages communicated through the media. Specifically, the study investigated the audience of *Mareledi*, a popular entertainment-education serial television drama in Botswana in order to understand how audience members make sense of the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages
through their involvement with the Mareledi narrative. The study also examined how these narratives are shaping the way the audience members are responding to the HIV/AIDS messages.

This study was framed using the narrative paradigm theory. The narrative paradigm theory suggests that narratives are the basis of all human communication, and people experience and understand life as a series of ongoing narratives. The way people justify their behavior, whether past or future, has more in common with telling a credible story than it does with generating evidence. All forms of communication that appeal to our reason are best understood as stories that are shaped by experience, culture, and character (Fisher, 1987).

This qualitative study relied on focus groups and semi-structured, in-depth interviews to understand how audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages through their involvement with the Mareledi narrative. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups are appropriate because they enable audience members, their surroundings and social structures, their involvement with Mareledi narratives to be studied, and how a combination of all these factors helped them to create meaning and make sense of the HIV/AIDS messages that are being addressed in the serial television drama.

In order to understand how audience members of entertainment education interventions in Botswana make sense of HIV/AIDS transmission and preventions messages through their involvement with the narrative, the study responded to the following research questions:
1. How do audience members of *Mareledi* understand and interpret HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in the *Mareledi* serial television drama based on their assessment of narrative probability and narrative fidelity?

2. How do audience members of *Mareledi* identify with the characters in the drama in relation to the health behaviors being addressed?

*Significance of this Research Study*

Little research has been conducted to understand or explain the complexities of the behavior-change process in entertainment-education productions in Botswana (Mahoney and Bates, 2013). Entertainment-education strategies in Botswana and beyond would benefit from more audience-centered reception studies that focus on audience sense-making through their interaction with narratives (Pappas-DeLuca et al. 2008; Mahoney and Bates, 2013). Such studies can help entertainment-education communication professionals better understand the components that influence listeners and viewers to change their attitudes and behaviors (Pappas-DeLuca et al., 2008). Audience-reception studies are crucial for entertainment-education interventions (Petraglia, 2007).

Even though programs cannot, as a matter of practice, and should not, as a matter of morality, completely control audience reactions, programs can—and should—be designed to encourage audience members to voice their own experiences and alter their own perceptions in ways that will promote healthier behaviors. After all, the outcomes of entertainment-education intervention programs are more dependent on how audience
members understand them than on the intentions of the producers. Overall, this audience-reception study attempts to provide insight into how and why some audience members of entertainment-education productions in Botswana develop misconceptions and low-risk perceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention as documented by Letamo (2011), Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2005), and Cockcroft et al. (2010).

The study will also provide a foundation upon which future scholars can expand the investigation of how audience members make sense of entertainment-education programs through interacting with narratives. The study will also provide a foundation upon which entertainment education producers can know how to best design intervention programs that inspire positive health behavior change.

**Definition of Terms**

Botswana: Name of the country

Motswana: A citizen of Botswana

Batswana: Citizens of Botswana

Setswana: native language

HIV/AIDS in Botswana

There is a need to provide a perspective in this study by understanding the HIV/AIDS pandemic and factors that influence the spread of the disease in Botswana. There are five key drivers of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that present major obstacles to preventing new HIV/AIDS infections in Botswana (NACA, 2012). These are multiple and concurrent sexual partners, intergenerational sex, alcohol and high-risk sex, stigma and discrimination, and gender violence and sexual abuse (NACA, 2012).
Factors Influencing the Spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana

Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partners

Multiple concurrent sexual partnerships have been recognized as a primary driver of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Botswana (Botswana Country Report, 2010). Concurrent sexual partnerships are described as the overlapping of one or more sexual partnerships for a period of one month or longer (Mah & Halperin, 2008). A study by Carter et al. (2007) investigating concurrent sexual partnerships in Botswana revealed that 23% of Batswana men and women aged 15-49 years who had sexual relations within 12 months prior to the study reported a concurrent sexual partnership while in a relationship with their most recent sexual partner(s). The study also revealed that 24% reported having more than one partner within the 12 months preceding the study. Multiple concurrent sexual relationships continue to contribute significantly to the number of new HIV/AIDS infections in Botswana. According to the Botswana HIV/AIDS Impact Survey III (BAIS III, 2008), people who reported having multiple concurrent partners contributed a total of 28% new infections though they account for only 22% of the population in Botswana.

Intergenerational Sex

Cockcroft et al. (2010) note that intergenerational sex is one of the important drivers of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa, contributing to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among young women. Sexual relationships between older men and younger women have been offered as a probable explanation for the disproportionate rates of HIV/AIDS infection between men and young women in Botswana (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008). Luke (2003) argues that intergenerational sex increases the risks of
HIV/AIDS because it is more often unsafe. Findings from a study among more than 8,000 men in Botswana indicate that for every increase in the age difference between partners, there is a 28% increase in the odds of having unprotected sex (Langeni, 2007). Cockcroft et al. (2010) assert that intergenerational sexual relationships between young women and older men provide an entryway for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among young women and youth in Botswana.

Alcohol and High-Risk Sex

Obot (2000) and Parry et al. (2002) argue that alcohol is the most common form of substance abuse in sub-Saharan Africa associated with risky sexual behaviors. Based on their study to determine the association of alcohol consumption with specific high-risk sexual behaviors, Weiser et al. (2006) concluded that there is a strong relationship between heavy alcohol consumption and high-risk sexual behavior among men and women in Botswana. Pitso (2004) insists that heavy alcohol consumption reinforces myths and misperceptions about sexuality and condom use in Botswana. For example, Weiser et al. (2006) argue that alcohol abuse may be one of the most common and potentially modifiable HIV risk factors in Botswana.

Stigma and Discrimination

Worse, stigmatization has minimized the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS interventions by reinforcing existing negative social constructs that marginalize groups of people (NACA, 2009). For example, a study by Nyblade and Field (2001) revealed that stigma against HIV/AIDS positive individuals in Botswana and Zambia prevented people from participating in voluntary testing and counseling programs designed to prevent mother to child transmission. The fear of being identified as HIV-positive discourages individuals from knowing their HIV/AIDS status, changing their unsafe sexual practices, and caring for those living with HIV/AIDS (NACA, 2012). HIV/AIDS-related stigma and resulting discrimination have restricted access to and utilization of relevant health services and products, thereby increasing vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in Botswana (Botswana Country Report, 2010).

In the past, HIV/AIDS was mainly found among socially marginalized and discriminated groups. These groups include homosexuals and commercial sex workers. Letamo (2004) argues that people living with HIV/AIDS in Botswana may become implicitly associated with these stigmatized groups regardless of how they actually became infected. Alonzo and Reynolds (1995) suggest that people with HIV/AIDS are stigmatized and discriminated against because HIV/AIDS is often associated with deviant behavior and religiously taboo behavior. Stigmatized people often find themselves rejected and shunned, and they may experience harassment and violence based on their infection with HIV/AIDS (Letamo, 2004). Discrimination often stems from fear of being infected due to lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention (Letamo, 2004). According to a study by Letamo (2003) on factors associated with
HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discriminatory attitudes in Botswana, 60% of Batswana expressed negative attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS. Letamo (2003) suggests that stigmatization and the resulting discrimination remains one of the greatest challenges in mobilizing community members in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Botswana.

Gender Violence and Sexual Abuse

Machisa and Van Dorp (2012) suggest that more than two-thirds of women in Botswana have experienced gender violence. According to the authors, a high number of Batswana men have admitted to perpetrating violence against women. A study conducted by Shannon et al. (2012) evaluating gender inequity norms and the epidemiological relationship between violence and sexual risks for HIV and AIDS in Botswana revealed that greater adherence to gender inequity norms is associated with increased male sexual dominance and the perpetuation of rape and risky sexual practices. According to the National AIDS Coordination Agency of Botswana (2012), socially accepted norms related to male promiscuity place women at a higher risk of HIV/AIDS infection since women are often unable to negotiate safer sexual practices. There is a need for “strategies that empower girls and young women to resist and overcome these oppressive messages and the broader forces that endanger them” (Shanon et al., 2012, p. 106). The indoctrination of women and girls to conform to traditionally defined gender roles is pervasive and leaves them with little awareness of the extent to which these restrictions limit their choices and behaviors (Seloiilwe et al., 2001). Nkosana (2007) argues that in addition to intergenerational sexual relations contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS
across generations, intergenerational sexual relationships also involve inherent power imbalances between young women with very little sexual experience and older men who are sexually experienced and have socio-economic power to exploit inexperienced young women.

*Government Response to the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*

In response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the government of Botswana has partnered with non-governmental organizations nationally and internationally to combat the disease (Letamo, 2003). The surge in HIV/AIDS intervention projects in Botswana can be attributed to the funding the country is receiving from international organizations and companies to develop HIV/AIDS prevention strategies. Botswana has received several million U.S. dollars from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Merck Company (Letamo, 2003). The foundation and the company both worked collaboratively with the government of Botswana to develop the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnership (ACHAP), a conglomeration of organizations aimed at tackling different dimensions of HIV/AIDS in Botswana (Letamo, 2003).

Funding for HIV/AIDS entertainment-education programs in Botswana has primarily come from the Botswana-USA Partnership (BOTUSA). The goal of this partnership is to increase awareness and reduce infection and transmission at all levels of the society, especially the high-risk adolescent and young adult age groups (Letamo, 2003). BOTUSA is the main sponsor of the *Mareledi* serial television drama and *Makgabaneng* serial radio drama. As an initiative to raise awareness among members of
this high-risk group, the government and other stakeholders have employed media (radio and television) as agents for social and behavior change (Pappas-DeLuca et al., 2008).

*Mareledi* is a behavior-change entertainment-education serial television drama in Botswana designed to support the nation’s HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation goals. The *Mareledi* serial television drama targets 10- to 49-year-old Botswana citizens and combines the drama with community-based reinforcement activities to encourage safer HIV/AIDS related behaviors such as being faithful to one sexual partner. *Mareledi* is one of the most popular HIV/AIDS-based entertainment-education initiatives in Botswana that has continued to play a major role in educating Batswana about HIV/AIDS and health awareness. The serial television drama has aired on Botswana Television, a government-sponsored television station, since 2013. The storylines are developed so that the fictional characters serve to model appropriate thought processes and attitudes towards risky behavior related to HIV/AIDS. The Makgabaneng organization responsible for producing the *Mareledi* serial television drama and *Makgabaneng* serial radio drama uses the global reproductive health communication strategy framework known as Modeling and Reinforcement to Combat HIV/AIDS (MARCH). The MARCH model was developed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to inform the development and production of health-based entertainment-education interventions in developing countries. Both the Makgabaneng organization and *Makgabaneng* serial radio drama were launched in August 2001. The serial radio drama is the first of its kind in Botswana. *Makgabaneng* has been lauded for incorporating an innovative, attention-getting approach to teaching the people of Botswana about the far-reaching effects of HIV/AIDS.
in Botswana. Impact evaluations of *Makgabaneng* radio drama indicate that even though
general awareness about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention is very high, there is a
noticeable lack of more detailed knowledge (Pappas-DeLuca et al., 2005).

**MARCH Model**

Entertainment-education initiatives in developing countries, including *Mareledi*
and *Makgabaneng* productions in Botswana, have adapted the Modeling and Reinforcement to Combat HIV (MARCH) strategy as an approach for social change. The main purpose of the MARCH model is to intervene by providing alternative narratives in which one’s control over sexual and reproductive behavior is made desirable and possible (Galavotti, Pappas-DeLuca, & Lansky, 2001). As argued by Bruner (2002), a society becomes endangered when its members can no longer change the stories they tell among themselves. In Botswana, this threatens to become all too literally true.

The MARCH strategy, then, is grounded in social cognitive theory as applied to
entertainment education. The strategy is built on two fundamental principles of behavior change: modeling and reinforcement. In this strategy, adolescents and young adults are shown how to change habits and behaviors through the use of role models in serial television and radio dramas, as well as supporting efforts to change through interpersonal communication. Bandura (1977), among other researchers, attests to the truth that character similarities between the target audience and media personalities are a contributing factor in influencing audiences’ behavior. In order for program campaigns to be effective, there must be a sense of belonging, association, and relevance. Galavotti, Pappas-DeLuca, and Lansky (2001) note that evaluating program implementation and
impact on audience members is a critical part of the MARCH model. Evaluations are critical to understanding what effects the intervention programs have and how those effects are achieved.

Given how important the MARCH model is for entertainment-education interventions in Botswana, Petraglia (2007) notes how the reception element of the MARCH model (the reinforcement aspect of the model) has not received the attention it deserves. Instead of regarding reinforcement as the addition of interpersonal communication to entertainment-education intervention programs, Petraglia (2007) insists that reinforcement can be integrated through audience reception. Audience members reinforce many of the elements of entertainment-education intervention programs through the sense-making process itself (Petraglia, 2007). The focus of the effects approach has been on the number of people receiving the predetermined entertainment-education intervention messages—quantity, as it were, rather than quality (Petraglia, 2007). However, this study contends that it is necessary to understand how people interpret and make sense of an entertainment-education intervention program. Instead of asking questions about exposure, frequency, and (mis)understanding in relation to the intended messages, the present study explores sense-making and personal reality construction.

*Rationale for a Reception Study of Mareledi*

Botswana continues to be challenged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic despite aggressive HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. According to the Botswana National AIDS Coordination Agency (NACA), 18% of Batswana aged at least 18 months were infected
with HIV/AIDS in 2008 compared to 17% in 2004 (NACA, 2012). These statistics indicate a slight increase in the number of infections. After more than twenty years of HIV/AIDS education in Botswana with minimal results, Perlson (2013) argues that the slow progress of HIV/AIDS prevention suggests an anomaly in HIV/AIDS risk perception. Despite HIV/AIDS education and the availability of HIV/AIDS resources, too few people choose to alter the high-risk behaviors that spread the pandemic (Perlson, 2013). Considering the fact that many Batswana engage in risky sexual behaviors even though they have knowledge of how HIV/AIDS is transmitted and how it can be prevented, a possible explanation for their decisions, according to Perlson (2013) and Lecrec-Madlala (2008), may be misconceived, low-risk perceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.

Misconceptions

According to Letamo (2011), many of the Batswana who are sexually active often harbor misconceptions about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted. For example, Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2005) conducted a study in Botswana to assess the popularity, coverage, and impact of the Makgabaneng serial radio drama. The study recorded an overwhelmingly high rate of HIV/AIDS awareness among respondents. A total of 99% of respondents had heard of HIV/AIDS. According to the study, high levels of awareness were found regardless of age, sex, and residence. Yet, statistical reports from the study conducted by Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2005) revealed some of the misconceptions that Batswana hold. When surveyed about known ways of avoiding HIV/AIDS infection, only 40% of all respondents mentioned monogamy, or being faithful with one partner, as a
way to reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Furthermore, only 21% of respondents mentioned all three prevention techniques: abstinence, being faithful (monogamy), and condom use as ways to reduce the risk of HIV infection. Nevertheless, 78% of respondents did mention condom use as a preventative measure.

Perlson (2013) argued that high knowledge of condom use as a preventative measure has not translated into a large portion of the population using condoms, reasoning that if a large portion of the population were using condoms, then the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Botswana would not be so high. Another intriguing finding from this study is that respondents from urban Botswana were more likely than those from non-urban areas (82% versus 75%) to mention condoms as a preventative measure. This is quite interesting considering the fact that there are higher levels of HIV/AIDS prevalence in urban Botswana than there are in rural Botswana (NACA, 2012). These findings also testify to the fact that high knowledge does not necessarily result in behavior change.

A composite knowledge indicator was also developed and used to assess respondents’ knowledge of all three prevention strategies, namely, abstinence, being faithful, and using condoms (ABC) as well as respondents rejection of the three most common myths. The most common myths were: (i) AIDS can be cured by having sex with a virgin, (ii) mosquitoes can transmit HIV, and (iii) a healthy-looking person cannot transmit HIV. Findings revealed that only 16% of all respondents scored correctly on the composite knowledge indicator (i.e., mentioning abstinence, being faithful, and using condoms as ways to reduce HIV risk and correctly rejecting all three HIV/AIDS myths).
And only 61% of respondents correctly rejected all three myths. Findings from the study suggest that there is a need for more accurate knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention in Botswana. These findings also suggest that there is a need to further examine why audience members of entertainment-education productions in Botswana continue to harbor misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.

Letamo (2007) conducted a research study to explore the socio-demographic and behavioral factors in Botswana that are associated with misconceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS prevention and transmission. A total of 15,878 individuals were interviewed. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were females. Findings from the data showed that (i) younger, less educated people reported not using condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse, and (ii) those who believed that nothing could be done to reduce the chance of HIV/AIDS infection tended to harbor at least one HIV/AIDS misconception. Even though young people have high rates of awareness of HIV/AIDS transmission, findings from the study indicate that 58% of Batswana under the age of 25 harbored at least one misconception regarding HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. Findings also revealed that not knowing that there are ways to reduce infection with HIV/AIDS was a significant predictor of having HIV/AIDS misconceptions. People who had multiple concurrent sexual partners were also more likely to harbor misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention than those who had only one sexual partner. The study also found a statistically significant association between lack of understanding that it is possible to reduce one’s risk of HIV/AIDS infection and having misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. These findings show that
harboring misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention may partially explain the persistently high levels of HIV/AIDS in Botswana.


Low-Risk Perception

One factor associated with increase in HIV/AIDS due to intergenerational sex is risk perception (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008). Studies on intergenerational relationships among young women in Botswana suggest that even when knowledge of HIV/AIDS is
high, many young women believe the benefits derived from sexual relationships tend to outweigh the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (Cockcroft et al., 2010). The perception of HIV/AIDS risk infection from older men among younger women is often very low (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008).

Cockcroft et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative research study consisting of 12 focus group discussions with women aged 15-24 and 11 focus groups with men aged 40-55 years in urban and rural areas of Botswana, Namibia, and Swaziland to assess community views regarding intergenerational sexual relations. According to the findings, young women would acknowledge that they had sexual relations with older men to have monetary and material goods. Those who lived in urban parts of the three countries stated that they engaged in intergenerational sexual relations in order to maintain more modern lifestyles and to “keep up” with their friends. Those in rural areas also noted that they engaged in sexual relations with older men because they needed money to meet their basic needs such as food, household goods, and school fees—even though they recognized that older men were more likely to be infected than younger men. The young women also noted that it was harder to negotiate condom use with older men, but indicated they were willing to take the risk to get what they wanted.

Older men stated sex as their motivation for engaging in intergenerational sexual relationships, and blamed young women for “seducing” them. The older men believed that engaging in sexual relations with younger women put them at a higher risk of HIV/AIDS because they believed that young women have more partners and do not insist on using condoms. However, the older men were still willing to take these risks. Based
on these findings, it is clear that older men and younger women both discount the risks of
intergenerational sex against short-term benefits.

Letamo (2011) used a nationally representative sample of the Botswana AIDS Impact Survey (BAIS) 2004 to investigate the extent to which acquired correct knowledge about HIV and AIDS prevention and transmission actually guides protective sexual behaviors among young people in Botswana. The sample was limited to Batswana aged 10-24 who had completed the BAIS individual questionnaire and were having sexual intercourse at the time of the survey. According to findings from the study, knowledge that something can be done to prevent becoming infected with HIV/AIDS was a significant predictor of safe sex behaviors among young people. An unexpected finding of the study, according to Letamo (2011), was that the number of young people who knew that consistent condom use could help prevent HIV/AIDS infection did not correlate with the number of young people who had used condoms during their last sexual encounter. Letamo (2011) notes that this unexpected result shows that even though young people may be knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS prevention, knowledge cannot be equated with practice, possibly due to social and cultural circumstances.

Cockcroft et al. (2010) argue that isolated efforts to increase risk awareness are unlikely to be effective. The researchers suggest that interventions should incorporate women empowerment by providing alternative means of financial freedom and self-worth. Dintwa (2010) insists that in order to attain an HIV/AIDS-free generation in Botswana, there must be a clear understanding of the factors associated with nonuse of condoms and risky sexual behaviors for those who are sexually active. Nonuse of
condoms exposes individuals to the risk of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS and spreading the disease. In essence, low-risk perceptions need to be addressed as a way forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Botswana. As a result of these factors, behavior change has been identified by the government of Botswana and other stakeholders as the “only long term solution to the prevention of HIV and AIDS epidemic” (NACA, 2012, p. 17). Perlson (2013) also suggests that behavior change is the next step to ending the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana.

The key question, then, is why so many misconceptions and low-risk perceptions persist after the government of Botswana and other stakeholders have spent millions of dollars to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention through programs like the Makgabaneng radio drama and Mareledi serial television drama. If the majority of Batswana are, indeed, well-informed about HIV/AIDS prevention and transmission, one wonders why such high levels of misconception and low-risk perception are documented by Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2005), Letamo (2007), Letamo, (2011) and Cockcroft et al. (2010)—misinformation which in turn undermines HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. Part of the solution to this puzzle, the present research proposes, revolves around more closely examining how audience members of entertainment-education programs make sense of HIV/AIDS health messages through their interaction with entertainment-education narratives. Such studies may help entertainment-education scholars gain a better understanding of how to influence behavior change among audience members.
Letamo (2007) proposed that future entertainment-education programs should focus on dispelling the misconceptions. This study responds to this issue by investigating the underlying reasons for these misconceptions among audience members with a view to understanding how these issues can be addressed. Furthermore, understanding how and why audience members develop misconceptions and low-risk perceptions can help researchers to more effectively minimize misconceptions and low-risk perceptions through entertainment-education programming.

Misconceptions and low-risk perceptions are not foreign to entertainment-education scholarship. Indeed, they are often labeled as “unintended effects.” Entertainment-education scholars argue that audience members may sometimes misinterpret the intended messages (Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992; Sherry, 1998).

Though messages can always be interpreted differently than intended, misperceptions can be minimized by an appreciation of the audience members’ interpretive strategies, message-processing biases, and heuristics. This kind of knowledge can be gained through audience-centered reception studies that focus on how audience members interpret and understand narratives. Audience-reception studies enable two-way communication between audience members and producers, creating opportunities for more interactive and collaborative initiatives that allow objectives to emerge through dialogue (Mahoney & Bates, 2013).

Culture as Context

Another important issue in this discourse is the role of culture in the context of HIV/AIDS messaging. Culture has also been recognized as a driving force of HIV/AIDS
messaging in Botswana (Somma & Bodiang, 2003). Therefore, it is imperative to explore audience members’ meaning-making process through cultural and social contexts in order to gain a better understanding of how audience members negotiate the meaning of HIV/AIDS messages. Influences on sexual behaviors in Botswana are more societal in that individual members of a society are influenced by their social interactions. Most people in Botswana are wholly embedded within a social belief system that they hardly question its socially dominant values, nor do they realize how much they are implicitly controlled by them. According to Somma and Bodiang (2003), culture is one of the key factors that influence human behavior, beliefs, value systems, and practical knowledge about health messages in Botswana. According to Nitza, Chilisa, and Makwinja-Morara (2010), a study designed to determine the factors influencing risky sexual behaviors among adolescents and females in Botswana, cultural songs, narratives, and proverbs containing messages about sexual relations and behaviors were found to be key influences. Uwah and Ebewo (2011) suggest that health must be defined and understood through culture because cultural factors like narratives, proverbs, and songs are a significant rhetorical force in health communication. As Ntseane and Preece (2005) state, “sex is culturally regulated, and accepted types of sexual behavior are learned through socialization” (p. 351). Current entertainment-education research in Botswana needs to employ a broader and deeper understanding of individual and social change by focusing on audience-centered research that attempts to explain the relationship between media content, audience members, and socio-cultural contexts. In the context of Botswana, social forces, cultural beliefs and gender norms play a very significant role in influencing
sexual health behaviors. Ntseane and Preece (2005) argue that one key to addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Botswana lies in more deeply understanding the cultural practices of sexuality that are embedded in different ethnic communities. The present study will consider culture as the context through which audience members of Mareledi interact with and make sense of HIV/AIDS messages in the entertainment-education program. The assumption is that audience members’ cultural norms, beliefs, and personal experiences play a role in audience members’ sense-making process through their involvement with narratives.

Summary

This chapter lays a foundation of the study by discussing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Botswana. It describes the factors that have been identified by the Botswana National AIDS Coordinating Agency as the driving force behind the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. The chapter outlines the significance the study. The theoretical framework and research questions guiding this study are also introduced in this chapter. The next chapter presents a literature review of audience involvement with narratives as part of their sense making process in entertainment education.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Though several studies have highlighted the important role audience members play in HIV/AIDS interventions, it seems entertainment-education has not yet fully internalized the significance of audience involvement vis-a-vis audience reception (Cardey, Garforth, Govender, and Dyll-Myklebust, 2013). For example, there are very few audience-centered reception studies in entertainment-education scholarship that can help us to better understand the complex process of how audience members make meaning of health messages through their involvement with entertainment-education narratives (Moyer-Gusé 2008; Obregon, 2005; Petraglia, 2007; and Tufte 2000).

This chapter will provide a review of the current literature related to audience reception in entertainment education. The theory for the present study will also be discussed and the literature analysis will expand upon the introductory and background information discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 is divided into eight sections: (i) overview of entertainment-education, (ii) audience involvement in entertainment education, (iii) overview of reception studies, (iv) audience reception studies in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, (v) rationale for an audience-reception study in Botswana, (vi) Resistance to entertainment education, (vii) theoretical foundation of the research study, and (viii) summary and research questions.

Overview of Entertainment Education

Entertainment-Education (also known as “edutainment”) is defined as “the process of putting educational content in entertainment messages in order to increase knowledge about an issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior
concerning the educational issue or topic” (Singhal, Rogers, and Brown, 1993, p. 1). This definition implies that behavior change is a process that takes place over a lengthy period of time. In essence change in behavioral attitudes is accomplished gradually as part of a process that happens over a long period of time.

Tufte (2005) however argues that these initial definitions of entertainment education are insufficient because the field has undergone a gradual broadening in its epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations. There is now great diversity in current entertainment-education communication practices and “entertainment education” is much more than how it was initially defined. Tufte (2005) suggests entertainment education should be defined as “the use of entertainment as a communicative practice crafted to strategically communicate about development issues in a manner and with a purpose that can range from the more narrowly defined social marketing of individual behaviors to the liberating and citizen-driven articulation of social change agendas” (p. 162).

Entertainment education has not always recognized audience involvement and socio-cultural influences as key to behavior change. Entertainment-education research has evolved over three generations in an attempt to understand the complex process of behavior change. The first generation was driven by social marketing strategies. The main goal of first-generation entertainment education was to convey messages and transfer information through mass media (Tufte, 2005). Lack of information was believed to be the main problem within the social marketing approach to entertainment education, and the focus was on communicating the message (Glanz et al., 2008). It is important to
note that culture was viewed as a barrier that needed to be overcome or transformed in order to accomplish behavior change (Tufte, 2005). The expected outcome of these social marketing campaigns was change in norms and individual behavior (Glanz et al., 2008).

The second generation of entertainment education introduced the participatory approach to many entertainment-education intervention programs (Tufte, 2005). Since its inception, entertainment education has maintained a focus on individual behavior change (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). However, social-change agendas in the 1990s began to emerge as a key goal for entertainment-education interventions (Singhal et al., 2004). In addition to considering individuals as a unit of change, there was increased attention towards structural elements as equally important focal points. Society began to be addressed as a unit of change (Tufte, 2005). Unlike the prior generation (where culture was viewed as the problem), the second generation viewed culture as an ally (Tufte, 2005). Audience members were perceived as active participants who play a role in influencing change.

Soul City, a South African non-government organization, was a key innovator in the second generation of entertainment-education communication practices in sub-Saharan Africa (Tufte, 2005). Soul City was founded in 1992 with the goal of harnessing the power of mass media (radio, television, and print) and promoting health and development in South Africa and beyond (Samuels, 1997). The main focus of Soul City is to address and educate its audience about different health and development issues ranging from personal finance to women’s health (Samuels, 1997). HIV/AIDS has
remained a recurrent theme among all Soul City productions, and HIV/AIDS has increasingly been prioritized over the years (Samuels, 1997).

Soul City possesses a wealth of experience in conducting HIV/AIDS communication interventions. In-depth formative research (conducted eighteen months prior to the design and production of an intervention) is the strategy Soul City uses to engage all relevant segments of society, including audience members and experts, in the research, design, and implementation of an intervention (Samuels, 1997). The two key inputs for Soul City productions are the audience- and expert-centered research processes which include formative research, summative research, monitoring and evaluation, and the partnerships established with the society, government, private sector, and international partners (Farhana & Ahmed, 2008). Engaging the relevant segments of society has enabled Soul City to develop messages that are consistent with the audience knowledge, opinions, and needs (Farhana, & Ahmed, 2008). Messages are developed in a fully participatory process and integrated with creative products and media narratives then delivered mainly by television, radio, and print (Farhana & Ahmed, 2008). Soul City’s efforts have been very successful (Singhal, Rogers, Cody, & Sabido, 2004). The organization’s study and use of the social cognitive theory and entertainment education strategy enabled it to understand its audience and creatively develop strategic change implementation techniques suitable for their target audience (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004).

The third generation of entertainment education is represented by a radical shift in the definition of the key problem, as well as a transformed understanding of the notions
of entertainment, culture, education, and change (Tufte, 2005). The newest wave of entertainment education has moved beyond the diffusion and/or participation duality of previous initiatives. The third generation of entertainment education is marked by a shift from a production-centered approach to a more audience-centered approach in designing entertainment-education interventions. Previous interventions focused on correct and culturally sensitive messages conveyed through the mass media (Tufte, 2005). However, third-generation entertainment-education interventions recognize that deficits of information are not the core problem (Tufte, 2005). The mass media alone does not affect individual change, but it stimulates conversations among listeners, which in turn create opportunities for social learning as individuals consider new patterns of thought and behavior (Tufte, 2005). Interpersonal communication is the centerpiece of third-generation entertainment education. Interpersonal communication is believed to be the mediator for behavior change in entertainment-education interventions (Sood, Shefner-Rogers, & Sengupta, 2006). According to Sood, Shefner-Rogers, and Sengupta (2006), exposure to entertainment-education messages has been associated with increased interpersonal communication about family planning, and increased self-efficacy with regards to family planning methods. Interpersonal communication in social networks has also been recognized as an antecedent to changing health behaviors (Sood, Shefner-Rogers, & Sengupta, 2006). In this way, the core problem lies in power imbalances, structural inequalities, and deeper societal challenges (Tufte, 2005). Solutions to these issues focus on strengthening people’s ability to identify problems in their everyday life, and an ability to act collectively and individually upon those problems (Tufte, 2005).
With progression of E-E through the different generations, it has become clear that studying audience involvement with entertainment-education narratives can advance our understanding of the processes that make entertainment-education strategies effective tools for behavioral and social change. Singhal, Cody, Roger, and Sabido (2004) argue that theoretical-methodological approaches to audiences in entertainment education could lead to new ways of evaluating how entertainment-education interventions influence the audience. They emphasize the importance of applying audience-centered approaches to understand how audience members make sense of entertainment-education content. This argument has an implication for this study. The current study uses audience-centered data collection methodologies and data interpretation theories to explore how audience members make sense of E-E messages through their interaction with the Mareledi narrative.

_Audience Involvement in Entertainment Education_

There are two dimensions to audience involvement with entertainment-education intervention programs: these are the critical-cognitive dimension and the affective-referential dimension. The critical-cognitive dimension is characterized by audience members’ critical reflection on the entertainment-education message by distancing themselves from the text and scrutinizing the elements of the text as well as meditating on the message itself (Sood, 2002). The affective-referential dimension is characterized by audience involvement with story characters and also meditating on how the story relates to one’s own life. This framework is important because it draws the attention of entertainment-education researchers towards the multidimensional nature of audience
involvement with entertainment-education messages. Entertainment education-based behavior change is mediated by audience involvement, which is contingent upon critical and/or referential reflection (Sood, 2002).

According to Sood (2002), media effect-based research focused on measuring change in audience attitudes, knowledge, and behavior ignores how the changes occur. Papa et al. (2000) insist that most previous studies in entertainment education have not sufficiently detailed how audience members’ attitudes and behaviors change as a result of entertainment-education interventions. Much of the theoretically guided work in entertainment education has often explained audience effects as a consequence of direct or indirect exposure to entertainment-education interventions with very little regard to how audience members encode and decode those messages (Papa et al., 2000; Petraglia, 2007). Many of these media effect-based reception studies have suggested a positive relationship between exposure to entertainment-education messages regarding HIV/AIDS prevention and correct conceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention (Vaughan, Rogers, Singhal, & Swalehe, 2000). For example, based on their study examining the impact of a multimedia family planning promotion on the contraceptive behavior of women in Tanzania, Jato et al. (1999) state that as exposure to the number of HIV/AIDS prevention messages increases, misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission decrease. An evaluation of *Tsha Tsha*, a South African entertainment-education serial drama focused on young adults living in an HIV/AIDS-positive world, showed that exposure to the first 26 episodes of the serial drama had a positive impact on audience members’ attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS (Sood, Shefner-Rogers, &
Sengupta, 2006). Singhal and Rogers (1999) also attest to the positive relationship between exposure to entertainment education and HIV/AIDS-related behavior change such as adopting condom use and minimizing the number of sexual partners. Moyer-Gusé (2008) also notes that messages embedded in entertainment-education television programs can influence viewers’ attitudes about the issues being addressed.

Some researchers have voiced concerns about some of the limitations of this entertainment-education strategy. For example, Yoder, Hornik, and Chirwa (1996) found some entertainment-education interventions to have limited effects in changing overt behavior. Upon reviewing 20 entertainment-education soap operas, Sherry (1998) noted that the best-designed research including statistical controls suggests no significant effects of entertainment-education productions on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that can be attributed to the soap operas. However, entertainment education has generally been praised for its impact on attitudes and behavior change (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Singhal & Rogers 1999).

Although the above-discussed studies examine the impact and effects of entertainment education on audience knowledge, behavior and attitudes, the studies do not address the complex process through which audience members negotiate the meaning of entertainment-education messages through their interaction with narratives. The studies shed light on the effects of entertainment education as a result of exposure, but they do not explicate how the change process occurs. Papa et al. (2000) insist the entertainment-education approach of attracting individual attention, which leads to knowledge production leading to attitude and behavior change of audience members,
ignores the complexity of the social change process. Kincaid (2002) agrees that the methods used to study entertainment-education effects have difficulty demonstrating the connection between content, variables specified by theory, and the behavioral response of audience. Kincaid (2002) also insists that social and behavioral theories, such as social cognitive theory, have valid application to the effects of radio and television dramas. However, the theories are inadequate because they omit drama as a compelling aspect of entertainment education. Individual behavior theories don’t adequately capture the dynamics of social relationships, especially confrontation and conflict. They emphasize the cognitive rather than the emotional aspects of behavior (Kincaid, 2002).

It is important to recognize that audience involvement with entertainment-education messages also comprises affective and experiential components (Sood, 2002). In essence, entertainment-education intervention programs are designed to inspire audience involvement through narratives, not just persuasive health topics. Therefore emotions are an important aspect of audience involvement with narratives (Kincaid, 2002). Kincaid (2002) suggests the use of drama theory and argues that confrontation and emotional response of the characters can generate a corresponding emotional response among audience members through character identification. Guttman, Gesser-Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008) agree with Kincaid (2002) and Sood (2002) by arguing that the strength of narratives in entertainment-education interventions is their ability to create an emotional experience that engages audience members and ultimately influences behavior change. However, much of the audience involvement studies in entertainment education have focused on audience involvement with characters as a way in which audience
members interpret and understand entertainment-education messages with little attention to audience involvement with narratives.

Overview of Reception Studies

This study is grounded in a cultural studies approach to reception studies. A cultural studies approach focuses on the interplay between audience, culture, and power to understand how audience members make meaning (Sullivan, 2013). The main objective of reception studies in media is to “get a grasp of our contemporary ‘media culture,’ particularly as it can be seen in the role of the media in everyday life, both as a topic and as an activity structured by and structuring the discourse within which it is discussed” (Baran and Davis, 2012, p. 259). This means that the current status of reception studies in media is not just focused on the meaning and use of particular programs to particular groups of people. It also includes the frames within which people conceive media and its contents as reality and as representations (or misrepresentations) of reality. Perhaps the main purpose of understanding how audience members make meaning of entertainment-education programming is to help improve the ability to predict the results from media use and effect studies. Reception studies as a branch of cultural studies have continually incorporated Hall’s (1980) encoding and decoding model to understand how audience members make sense of media content in the context of their daily lives. The model suggests that a text is subject to human intervention. Audience members can decode media text from a hegemonic position, negotiated reading, or oppositional reading (Hall, 1980, Morley, 1983).
Cultural studies suggest that media reception does not happen in a vacuum. Audience members interpret and understand media content according to their cultural values, beliefs, and social influences. Therefore, audience members are actively involved in the message-reception process. Audience involvement is a key factor in the ability of an entertainment-education program to influence behavior change among audience members. Audience involvement has been associated with increased self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and greater interpersonal communication among audience members (Sood, 2002) with some communication scholars emphasizing the participatory nature of audience involvement. For example, Krugman (1966) defines “involvement” as audience members’ direct personal experiences during message reception. This kind of audience involvement is known as “interaction involvement.” Interaction involvement is “the degrees to which audience members engage in reflection upon, and parasocial interaction with, certain media programs, thus resulting in overt behavior change” (Sood, 2002, p. 156). Audience involvement in entertainment education is a significant aspect of behavior change because such change is a complex process that requires deliberation, interaction, and action by audience members within a social system (Papa et al., 2000).

Entertainment-education research recognizes the significance of societal and cultural influences and requires more audience-centered reception studies that shed light on how audience members of entertainment-education programs make sense of HIV/AIDS messages beyond measuring the presence or absence of intended effects (Cardey, Garforth, Govender, & Dyll-Myklebust 2013; Obregon, 2005). Understanding the behavior-change process requires understanding audience members’ meaning-making
process and considering cultural and social influences as contexts through which audience members make meaning. In line with this argument, this study examined how audience involvement with narratives contributed to their understanding of the message and its potential impact on their behavior.

_Audience Reception Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa and Beyond_

Soul City continues to be at the forefront of entertainment-education intervention and research by placing heavy emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, and has become an international showcase that has inspired many other social intervention initiatives (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Its interventions have helped secure tangible results by changing individual behavior and influencing more profound social change processes (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Nevertheless, until recently, what evaluations of Soul City have been able to document emphasize predominantly quantitative outcomes such as reach, ratings, and quantifiable relations between exposure to Soul City entertainment education productions and change in social norms, attitudes and behavior (Tufte, 2002). However, more recent reception studies of Soul City interventions focus on audience sense making in addition to audience reach and media impact on attitudes and behavior. An evaluation report of Soul City’s “Untold: Stories in a Time of HIV & AIDS” intervention program by Chikombero (2009) outlines how Soul City utilized the cultural studies approach of audience sense making to conduct a qualitative audience reception study of the intervention.

The _Untold: Stories in a Time of HIV & AIDS_ intervention is a cross-border health communication project developed and implemented by Soul City Institute for Health and
Development Communication in partnership with non-governmental organizations across sub-Saharan Africa. This health communication project is a series of nine short entertainment-education films produced in nine sub-Saharan African countries with the aim to increase HIV/AIDS awareness in their communities. The films were designed to reach people with authentic local narratives that create dialogue and debate among community members, encourage people to think about their lives and the choices they face in the context of HIV/AIDS, challenge social norms and values, stimulate action, and grow local skills to develop edutainment programs. HIV/AIDS related social issues affecting the individual countries are woven into the films through carefully crafted narratives drawn from in-depth formative research. Soul City worked with local non-government organizations and media professionals in each country to produce culturally and contextually relevant entertainment-education films using local dialects with English subtitles. The nine films were produced in Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Mozambique, and broadcast on public television in all the nine countries.

One unique aspect of the evaluation of Untold: Stories in a Time of HIV & AIDS is Soul City’s approach to the audience reception study. The research focused on how audience members understand the film they watch in relation to their own context and experiences. The research questions and open-ended interview questions were concerned with understanding the audiences’ overall impression of the films, the overall messages they internalized from watching the films and to a lesser extent, the impact of the film on behavior and attitudes. Respondents were asked what they liked or disliked about the
film, what overall message they got from watching the films, whether they could relate to the issues in the films, what prompted them to watch the films, and whether they discussed some of the issues in the films with friends and family. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling in urban and rural areas of each country. The criterion for research respondents was having watched at least one film in the “Untold: Stories in a Time of HIV & AIDS” series. Data collection methods included in-depth individual interviews and focus groups. Focus-group participants were segmented by age.

Data was collected in each country after a month of broadcasting the films. Thematic analysis was then used to analyze data from the interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis involved analyzing data to identify overriding themes.

Findings from the study revealed that the majority of audience members across borders viewed the films as realistic and true to life because they could relate to the issues being addressed. Audience members reported that they were emotionally involved with the drama. Emotions aroused among viewers included anger, pity, sadness, and joy depending on the respective narratives and the outcomes. Chikombero (2009) notes that the empathy the films created crossed national boundaries. Co-viewing and discussion with others also emerged as a significant part of audience sense making. Participants reported that they discussed the issues raised in the films with friends and loved ones. Beyond responding to interview questions, interviewees also raised their concerns about the films. For example, some audience members felt uncomfortable watching sex scenes and suggested future productions should minimize such scenes. Many of the respondents also suggested that the films be serialized. According to Chikombero (2009), the
suggestion to serialize the films speaks to the success of the intervention program.

Guttman, Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008) also conducted an audience reception study in Israel to investigate the views of adolescents regarding their schools’ live anti-drug theatrical drama. The study examined what the audience considered the most important issue in the drama, what impressed them most about the drama and the characters they identified with the most. Findings of the study showed that audience members were emotionally involved with the narratives and moved by the authenticity of the drama, which emerged as the central construct in the study. The researchers identified five aspects that contributed to the respondents’ conception of authenticity in the theatrical drama. They found the perception that (i) the drama was based on a “true story,” (ii) the actors express their “real” feelings about drug use and were not “just acting,” (iii) the actors were “authentically” connected to drug use, (iv) the actors genuinely care about preventing adolescents from abusing drugs (V) the portrayal of drug use and its effects was done in a realistic way. In response to these findings Guttman, Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008) note that while authenticity was important, it was evident that character identification and “transportation” may differ according to audience members’ conception of realism. This means that an entertainment-education drama may have a strong impact when the audience feels that it is realistic because it could happen to them or someone they know.

Findings from these studies by Chikombero (2009) and Guttman, Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008) suggest that authenticity, co-viewing and emotional connectedness or “transportation” play a significant role in audience sense making and should be further
explored in entertainment education research and practice. Such knowledge is useful in informing future entertainment education productions because it guides producers to creatively produce material that will effectively facilitate behavior change by placing an emphasis on important aspects of audience sense-making process such as transportation, authenticity in narratives, and interpersonal communication. A study by Livingston (1989) discusses how through an audience reception study of Dallas, a television soap opera, researchers learned that the show’s audience members had focused on personalities rather than ideologies and on emotions rather than realism. Resistance to entertainment education can be minimized by an appreciation of audience members’ interpretive strategies, heuristics and message-processing biases.

As demonstrated in the studies discussed above, a cultural studies approach to reception studies provides rich descriptive data researchers might not identify using quantitative or other qualitative research approaches. The data collection methods used in cultural studies such as in-depth interviews and focus groups encourage interviewees to interact with their interviewer in ways that go beyond merely answering questions. For example, the concerns spontaneously raised by respondents in the study by Chikombero (2009) provided useful information to entertainment-education researchers about what audience members deemed as important aspects of their sense-making process. Some of the sexual scenes in the film were viewed by some of the respondents as being explicit and offensive. Individuals hold different sense-making systems and see the world in a variety of manners. Their values, experiences, and media environment all play an important role in their sense-making process. Though there is no “correct” reading of
any given text, researchers can learn more about how audience members make sense of entertainment education by learning more about audience members’ heuristics.

The present study builds on the studies by Chikombero (2009) and Guttman, Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008). A commonality between these two studies is that the respondents had a one-time exposure to and involvement with the entertainment-education narrative. Moving forward, the present study explores audience members’ overall impression of a serialized television drama and their interpretation of embedded HIV/AIDS messages.

Findings from the study can inform future entertainment-education intervention programs in Botswana and beyond, especially with respect to audience members’ sense making through their interaction with serial television drama narratives.

*Rationale for an Audience-Reception Study in Botswana*

Though audience-reception studies in entertainment education have been conducted in Botswana, much of the entertainment-education research has mostly focused on character identification (Kuhlman et al., 2008; Mahoney & Bates, 2013; O’Leary et al., 2007; Pappas-DeLuca et al., 2008). However, these studies have not explored how audience members make sense of entertainment-education programs through their interaction with narratives even though narratives have been considered the foundation of the relationship between audience members and entertainment-education programs (Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011). According to Petraglia (2007), the use of storytelling is very old and deeply engrained in many African cultures. One cannot discuss audience members’ identification with characters without discussing
audience members’ identification with narratives. Some of the studies discussed below do acknowledge the need to further explore audience involvement not just with characters but also with the narrative in order to have a better understanding of how audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages and how entertainment education influences behavior change.

Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) examined the association between exposure to the Makgabaneng serial radio drama and outcomes related to HIV/AIDS testing among 555 sexually active participants. Some of the outcomes related to HIV/AIDS testing included stigmatization attitudes, intention to be tested, and talking with a partner about testing. The measures of exposure to Makgabaneng were frequency of listening, duration of listening, talking about the program, and character identification. Findings from the study revealed a positive association between exposure to the program and lower levels of stigma attitudes, stronger intentions to be tested, and talking to a partner about testing. Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) noted that increased duration of listening was associated with more positive outcomes. They suggest that longer exposure to entertainment-education programming may be important for behavior change. Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) conclude that audience perceptions of similarities with fictional characters needs to be maximized by conducting formative research that attempts to incorporate culture into entertainment-education productions.

Similarly, O’Leary et al. (2007) conducted a study to explore the association between exposure to an HIV/AIDS storyline in the soap opera The Bold and the Beautiful and HIV/AIDS-related stigma in Botswana. The main purpose of the study was to test the
hypothesis that viewers of the storyline would report significantly lower AIDS-related stigma than non-viewers. A survey was conducted shortly after the storyline aired in Botswana. Findings from the study revealed that viewers indicated significantly lower levels of HIV/AIDS stigma. Similar to findings reported by Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008), O’Leary et al. (2007) suggest a positive relationship between exposure to the HIV/AIDS storyline and reduced levels of stigma among audience members. In essence, the data suggest that stigma may be reduced after exposure to a serial drama in which HIV/AIDS is treated in a non-stigmatized manner. Character modeling was used to influence behavior change. It must be noted that the O’Leary et al. (2007) study does not explore character identification.

However, a more recent study by Mahoney and Bates (2013) produced results conflicting with the findings of Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) and O’Leary et al. (2007) with regards to exposure to entertainment-education programming and stigma attitudes. While Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) found that more frequent listeners had lower stigma attitudes, Mahoney and Bates (2013) found a higher percentage of less frequent listeners actually had lower stigma attitudes. Mahoney and Bates (2013) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of the Makgabaneng serial radio drama in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. A total of 204 residents of Gaborone, Botswana and neighboring villages participated in the study. The participants were 80 males and 131 females with 16 participants not disclosing their sex. A ten-item questionnaire related to the President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) goals and HIV/AIDS
knowledge was used to measure the general outcome towards target knowledge, attitudes and behaviors emphasized in the *Makgabaneng* serial radio drama.

The PEPFAR plan includes being able to change individual behavior on a social scale with regards to alcohol abuse reduction, partner reduction and fidelity, prevention, intergenerational sex, and abstinence. PEPFAR is premised upon the belief that influencing individual behavior on a social scale can reduce HIV/AIDS transmission by promoting pro-social behaviors. Though the data supported the hypothesis that there would be a greater self-report of attitudes, actions, and knowledge related to PEPFAR goals among those who listened to *Makgabaneng* more frequently, overall, other results were mixed with some data revealing success in some areas and lack of success in others. For example, with regard to audience members’ attitudes, exposure to *Makgabaneng* had a significant main effect on perceptions of stigma. However, those who only listened once or twice per week developed lower levels of perceptions of stigma than those who listened three or more times a week. And, counterintuitively, lower levels of perception of stigma were found among those who do not even listen at all. With regards to behavior, statistical results indicated that *Makgabaneng* had a significant effect relative to being faithful to one’s sexual partner, intending to use a condom, and abstaining from intergenerational sex, but results also revealed that those who listened to *Makgabaneng* once a week were closer to PEPFAR goals than those who listened more often.

With regards to knowledge, *Makgabaneng* did not have a significant main effect on promoting correct knowledge related to HIV/AIDS transmission, more specifically, transmission via blood transfusion. However, it did have a main effect on dispelling an
incorrect belief that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted through saliva. In this case, those who listened twice a week had the most accurate knowledge compared to those who did not listen at all.

Overall, the findings reveal that frequent listeners of the Makgabaneng serial radio drama seem to have less accurate information than less frequent listeners of the program (Mahoney & Bates, 2013). Such findings raise questions regarding why misconceptions should be more common among frequent listeners than less frequent listeners. The results also highlight a need to further investigate audience involvement with entertainment-education narratives by seeking to understand how audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages through their involvement with narratives. Based on their study, Mahoney and Bates (2013) suggest future entertainment-education research in Botswana should focus on assessing the more successful narratives that have impacted audience members as models for future entertainment-education interventions in Botswana and beyond. Exploring the differences between frequent listeners and infrequent listeners might yield to a better understanding of why extended exposure seems to result in less accurate knowledge.

Findings from an outcome evaluation of Makgabaneng reinforcement activities by Nkete et al. (2011) also echo some of the results from the study conducted by Mahoney and Bates (2013). The main objective of the evaluation by Nkete et al. (2011) was to establish whether the addition of reinforcement activities to the Makgabaneng radio serial drama contributed to the behavior outcomes with regards to abstinence, alcohol abuse, and intergenerational sex. Reinforcement activities are designed to
enhance the effectiveness of entertainment-education programming through discussion and other community-level activities. Of interest to the present study are findings on the association between listening to the radio serial drama and outcome indicators in the key behavioral areas of abstinence, alcohol abuse, and intergenerational sex.

Abstinence

Findings from the study by Nkete et al. (2011) revealed a significant association between frequency of listening and identification of abstinence as a prevention method for HIV/AIDS transmission. A total of 62% of weekly listeners identified abstinence as a prevention measure. However, a higher percentage of those who listen less frequently identified abstinence as a prevention method. A total of 71% of the monthly listeners and 81% of those who have listened once or twice identified abstinence as a prevention measure. Furthermore, 97% of weekly listeners, 100% of monthly listeners, and even 98% of those who have never listened to *Makgabaneng* believe that there are benefits to abstaining from sexual intercourse. In this way, there was no obvious relationship between frequency of listening and the decision to abstain. Indeed, these results confirm the finding by other scholars that the relation between HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention are well-known among Batswana (Letamo, 2011; NACA, 2012). Based on these findings, it seems audience members are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention from other additional sources.

Intergenerational Sex

With regards to the association between listening to *Makgabaneng* and intergenerational sex, there was a significant association between listening to
Makgabaneng and knowing the risk of intergenerational sex. Once again, findings revealed that a higher percentage of those who listen less believe that intergenerational sex puts one at risk of being infected. Overall 88% of weekly listeners, 92% of monthly listeners, and 91% of people who have never listened to Makgabaneng believe that sex with a person aged five or more years older increases one’s risk of being infected. Based on these data, Nkete et al. (2011) concluded that frequent listeners of Makgabaneng seem to embrace intergenerational sex more than less frequent listeners and non-listeners.

Alcohol abuse

There was a significant association between frequency of listening to Makgabaneng and sobriety in the past three months. A high percentage (about 70%) of those who listened more often noted that they had not been drunk in the past three months compared to 60% of monthly viewers. There is a significant association between frequency of listening and deciding not to drink alcohol when invited by friends. A higher percentage of those who listen more often indicated that they would disagree if their friends ask them to drink as compared to those who listen less often. It seems Makgabaneng has more success in addressing alcohol abuse.

Like Mahoney and Bates (2013), Nkete et al. (2011) also found that Makgabaneng has had a main effect in some areas, such as alcohol abuse, and less of an impact in other areas of the intervention program. Considering the high knowledge among non-listeners and the influx of HIV/AIDS prevention related campaigns in Botswana, it is likely that listeners are receiving relevant information from other sources besides Makgabaneng. However, it is odd that a pattern has emerged whereby a lower
percentage of more frequent listeners and a higher percentage of less frequent listeners demonstrate adequate knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention and transmission in Botswana. Perhaps it is necessary to examine more closely the relationship between entertainment-education programs and their audience members, as suggested by Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008).

Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) conducted a study to examine how story features such as narratives and character identification may reduce the three forms of resistance to persuasion: reactance, counter-arguing, and perceived invulnerability. Their study revealed that narratives reduce reactance by fostering involvement with fictional characters and decreasing perceptions of persuasive intent. However, there were some unexpected results. Transportation into the narrative world was associated with greater counter-arguing. Transportation and counter-arguing are incompatible processes and they should be negatively related (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi 2010). These findings, therefore, raise questions about the role of involvement with narratives and counter-arguing. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) suggest audience members could have “argued back” with what unfolded in the narrative thinking that characters should follow another course of action. Data from the research study demonstrate the need to further investigate audience members and their involvement with narratives (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008), Nkete et al. (2011), and Mahoney and Bates (2013) agree that entertainment education in Botswana and beyond can benefit from additional qualitative research on audience involvement with narratives and identification with characters. More specifically, Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008) suggests such research could explore the
level of connection between the audience and the narrative.

Character Identification

Entertainment-education studies in Botswana have explored audience involvement through character modeling. They mostly focus on how the relationship between audience members and fictional characters facilitate behavior change. The emphasis has been on the need to further explore character identification by seeking to understand audience involvement with entertainment-education narratives with the hope of gaining a better understanding of how audience members make sense of entertainment education and how entertainment-education effects work. For example, Kuhlman et al. (2008) concluded that attention to and identification with specific characters in an entertainment-education drama may prompt behavior change. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how audience members relate to characters through their involvement with narratives. Kuhlman et al. (2008) used data from a 2003 survey of 504 pregnant and postnatal women to assess the association between exposure to episodes of the *Makgabaneng* serial radio drama that encourage Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) and HIV/AIDS testing during pregnancy. According to the findings, women who spontaneously named a PMCTC character as their favorite were almost twice as likely to test for HIV/AIDS during pregnancy compared to those who did not spontaneously name a character as their favorite. In this way, identification with characters in the serial drama was associated with testing during pregnancy. Additionally, although a large proportion of women listened to *Makgabaneng* regularly, being a weekly listener or simply recalling a character in a PMTCT storyline was not significantly
associated with testing for HIV/AIDS during pregnancy. Nevertheless, a smaller subset of women who spontaneously named a PMTCT character as their favorite was more likely to test for HIV/AIDS during pregnancy. Findings from this study seem to suggest that audience involvement with characters in entertainment-education programs is an important aspect of behavior change. However, character identification does not occur outside of a narrative, especially in the case of a radio serial drama (Petraglia, 2007). Nkete et al. (2011) also considered the role of character modeling in behavior change in their study. Findings from their study reveal that when respondents were asked about their favorite characters, the respondents mentioned characters that most represented all character types. However, the characters that were mentioned the most were transitional and positive characters. Audience members deemed the characters as being realistic. Such findings attest to the role of audience members as co-authors who assess the authenticity and realism of a narrative and its characters as part of the sense-making process (Fisher, 1987).

Similarly, Lovell et al. (2008) conducted a study to explore listeners’ involvement and character identification with three different types of characters in the Makgabaneng radio drama. A total of 31 regular listeners were interviewed and the data was analyzed to assess respondents’ reactions to the three characters. Findings from the study suggest fictional characters were generally perceived as intended. For example, characters designed to be negative, positive, and transitional role models were perceived as such by listeners. Findings also revealed that the type of behavior modeled by characters influenced whether a character was perceived to be transitional or positive. In addition,
results also revealed that listeners compared characters’ approaches to coping with similar problems even when the storylines were not interconnected. The outcomes of the study seem to echo the idea that audience members intelligently interact with entertainment-education interventions by selectively relating to fictional characters. Lovell et al. (2008) suggest that future research should explore audience involvement with narratives in more depth, examining changes in audience members’ thoughts, feelings, and attitudes as they interact with the drama. Based on the above-discussed studies, it is clear that audience members consciously and selectively interact with character as part of their sense-making and behavior-change processes. The current study argues that focusing on how audience members interact with narratives will give a better understanding of how audience members make sense of entertainment-education interventions through their interaction with characters.

To expand the scholarship of audience involvement with entertainment education in Botswana and beyond, perhaps it is necessary to explore audience involvement with narratives as the foundation of audience members’ engagement with entertainment education. Some scholars have suggested that audience identification with characters is a result of audience involvement with narratives. However, others argue that audience involvement with narratives is a result of involvement with characters. Murphy, Frank, Moran, and Patnoe-Woodley (2011) note that the conceptual relationship between identification with character and audience involvement with narratives through transportation is unclear. For example, Slater and Rouner (2002) argue that identification with characters may be an outcome of audience members being transported into the
narrative world. Green and Brock (2000) define “transportation” as “a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (p. 701). In contrast, Cohen (2006) suggests that identification could precede transportation. Cohen (2006) argues that if identification with characters involves loss of awareness as an audience member and an entrance into the world of the fictional characters, then it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate it from transportation. Green (2006), on the other hand, suggests that transportation may be a necessary condition for audience members’ involvement with characters. However, Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) theorize that transportation and identification work together to produce a broader construct they define as engagement. A more recent study by Murphy, Frank, Moran, and Patnoe-Woodley (2011) suggests that although character involvement has been hailed an important predictor of entertainment-education effects, character involvement may be more important for its ability to intensify transportation which, in turn influences behavior change. In essence, Murphy et al. (2011) suggest that transportation is the foundation of audience involvement with entertainment education.

One thing these scholars seem to agree upon is that audience involvement with narratives is an essential part of audience members’ sense-making process. Understanding audience involvement with narratives can help us better understand how entertainment education influences behavior change. As stated earlier, audience-reception studies in entertainment education in Botswana have mostly focused on character identification. The present study explores audience members understanding of entertainment-education messages through involvement with narratives.
Resistance to Entertainment Education

The narrative influence strategy used in entertainment-education programs is not without limitation (Moyer-Gusé, Jain, and Chung, 2012). For example, unintended effects can arise when viewers interpret the intended message in different ways. Malwade-Rangarajan (1992) and Sherry (1998) also argue the educational intentions of entertainment-education interventions may sometimes be misinterpreted by some audience members. Since the underlying persuasive content in entertainment-education narratives is designed to be less overt, viewers actively construct their own meanings. As a result, entertainment-education intervention programs can lead to misinterpretation among some viewers (Singhal & Rogers, 2002). However, it could be argued that misinterpretation and unintended effects of entertainment-education messages reveal the complexity of the meaning-making process. Entertainment-education audiences do not simply accept the dominant meanings of entertainment-education messages as intended by producers. They negotiate the meaning based on social and cultural influences (Petraglia, 2007). The outcomes of entertainment-education intervention programs, such as television and radio dramas, are dependent on how narratives are understood by audience members rather than on the intentions of the producers. Therefore, the meaning of a media text does not reside in the text, but it resides in the meaning that audience members impute to the text (Petraglia, 2007). Cardey, Garforth, Govender, and Dyll-Myklebust (2013) argue that much of the audience-reception studies in entertainment education have been based on methods that impose researcher-defined categories on audience members’ responses. This is why Cardey et al. (2013) propose a rebalancing of
power between the researcher and the researched by incorporating audience ethnography to highlight the social and cultural practices of audience members and how they react to entertainment-education intervention programs in the context of their daily lives.

Sood (2002) reiterates Cardey et al. (2013) by insisting that there is a need to pay attention to the theoretical and empirical processes that are unique to audience involvement with entertainment-education narratives. Instead of fitting audience members into preconceived categories, involvement of audience members can be better understood by asking specific questions about how audience members make sense of entertainment-education media to which they are exposed (Sood, 2002). Another question researchers can ask is how audience members differ in producing their meaning of entertainment-education programs in their daily lives. Kincaid (2002), Moyer-Gusé (2008), Pappas-DeLuca et al. (2008), and Sood (2002) stress the need for more research on audience involvement in order to refine the dimensions of audience involvement with entertainment education. According to Sood (2002), sense-making and reception analysis techniques can be used to study audience involvement. Moreover, qualitative techniques can be used to understand audience involvement through the words of the audience themselves. Audience involvement with entertainment-education interventions is a complex process that requires more scholarly attention (Sood, 2002). Singhal, Cody, Rogers, and Sabido (2004) suggest that audience-reception studies help to meet the need for improved analysis of audience sense-making in entertainment education. They suggest that reception studies in entertainment-education research should approach audience-reception studies as an analysis of a social process rather than an analysis of a
particular moment. Socio-cultural and environmental influences cannot be overlooked as a significant part of reception studies in entertainment education (Singhal, Rogers, Cody & Sabido, 2004).

Though audience-reception studies in entertainment-education research have mainly emphasized the importance of character identification (Singhal & Rogers, 1999), audience experience, and emotional involvement with characters (Kincaid, 2002) some scholars have argued that entertainment-education research fails to address the significance of audience involvement with narratives as its very foundation. Petraglia (2007) submits there have been few studies examining how narratives shape understanding and motivate health-related behavior change. According to Petraglia (2007), narratives help people to impose meaning on the world around them. Narratives provide a framework for possible worlds in which our lives might be. Moyer-Gusé (2008) also argues there still exists conceptual confusion in the entertainment-education literature on audience involvement. She suggests that in order to advance a theoretical understanding of how entertainment education influences behavior change, it is necessary to consider the role of involvement in an entertainment-education narrative. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) note that evidence supports the effects and effectiveness of entertainment-education messages in influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. However, they note that mixed findings in existing research highlight the need for a clearer mechanism by which narrative persuasion occurs. Kincaid (2002) agrees that entertainment-education research tends to overlook the contextual and narrative aspects of drama. The foundation of entertainment education is a captivating storyline—readers
remember the story long after the details have faded (Kincaid, 2002). Therefore, the entertainment-education lessons issue from the narrative events of the story and not necessarily from the reward and punishment of individual characters (Kincaid, 2002).

Narratives are central to the human experience, and they emerge as the foundation of audience involvement with entertainment education. Larky and Hecht (2010) argue that humans use narratives to make sense of their lives as embedded in social experiences and shared narratives. Kreuter et al. (2007) define a narrative as “a representation of connected events and characters that has an identifiable structure, is bound in space and time, and contains implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed” (Kreuter et al., 2007, p. 222). The aim of most narrative-based interventions is to provide narratives that encourage the audience members to understand their own experiences in light of the narratives (Petraglia 2007). Kincaid (2002) highlights narrative as the key element necessary to influence behavior change within a drama. He argues that audience members start by understanding the drama’s premise then proceed to focus on the characters and what happens to the characters. Moyer-Gusé (2008) also notes that entertainment-education messages foster involvement in the storyline due to their narrative structure. She defines involvement in this case as “the interest with which viewers follow the events as they unfold in the story” (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 409). The main idea behind narrative involvement is that audience members are engaged in the storyline and are “experiencing vicarious cognitive and emotional responses to the narrative as it unfolds” (Moyer-Gusé 2008, p. 409). Moyer-Gusé (2008) notes that the term most commonly used in entertainment-education scholarship is “transportation.”
The idea of being swept into a storyline is what distinguishes entertainment-education message processing from traditional health messages that are overtly persuasive.

Theoretical Foundation of the Research Study: Narrative Paradigm Theory

This study uses Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm theory as a theoretical framework to understand how audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages through their involvement with narratives. The main purpose of the narrative paradigm theory in this study is to offer a way of interpreting and assessing human communication. According to Fisher (1987), narratives are rhetorical devices that are often used to achieve social influence. The theory also assumes that audience consumption of narratives and adoption of values embedded in those narratives is not passive. This implies that audience members actively interpret narratives and make judgments of whether or not to accept the values being communicated.

The narrative paradigm theory stresses ontology rather than epistemology, suggesting that knowledge does not have an absolute foundation in ordinary discourse. The narrative paradigm theory sees people as storytellers and co-authors of a content that creatively read and evaluate the text. Fisher (1987) stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages—either as authors or audience members (co-authors). According to Fisher (1987), audience interpretation takes the form of judging narrative rationality: “Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings, their inherent awareness of narrative probability, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing fidelity, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (p. 64). Narrative
rationality, which is an inherent human process of interpreting narratives, has two components—fidelity and probability (Fisher, 1987).

Narrative fidelity is defined as how audience members interpret the social reality presented in the narrative. Narrative fidelity is the audience’s assessment of the individual aspects of the story such as characters and scenes. Individuals assess these components to see if they represent the social reality known to them. They determine if the elements ring true with their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Entertainment-education scholars have often labeled this as perceived realism. Guttman, Gesser-Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008) suggest audience members’ level of perceived realism can contribute to the impact of an entertainment-education intervention drama. Perceived realism is critical in entertainment education because it is able to elicit emotional involvement, as stated by Kincaid (2002). Guttman, Gesser-Edelsburg, and Israelashvili (2008) note that despite its importance as a persuasive factor, perceived realism has received little attention in entertainment-education literature.

Narrative probability is the judgment of the coherence of the story, free of contradictions. Narrative probability is made up of three components of assessment. Audience members assess structural coherence, characterological coherence and material coherence. Structural coherence has to do with the consistency of a story and its characters. Characterological coherence on the other hand is judgment of characters’ actions and decisions. Material coherence is concerned with the question of whether the themes and facts in the story can be compared to discourses in other stories. Fisher’s notion of narrative rationality serves as a good analytical tool to understand audience
interpretation and sense-making in entertainment-education interventions.

Probability and fidelity are considerations for judging the worthiness of a story and its values as a guide for behavior change. Fisher (1987) notes that culture plays an important role in assessing the probability and fidelity of a storyline. Culture is a lens through which we judge the coherence and fidelity of a narrative. Therefore, audience members’ assessment of narrative probability and fidelity will be shaped by their pre-existing values and beliefs. The current study assumes that the audience members of *Mareledi* assess the probability and fidelity of the serial television drama based on their values, beliefs, and experiences as shaped by the Botswana cultures. Based on the aims and goals of the *Mareledi* serial television drama and entertainment-education dramas in general, there exists a potential for audience values to be modified by their experiences being transported into the narrative world of *Mareledi*.

**Summary and Research Questions**

This chapter reviewed the literature on the significance of audience involvement with entertainment-education narratives in influencing behavior change. Evidence supports the effects of entertainment-education messages in influencing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Moyer-Gusé and Nabi, 2010). Entertainment-education scholars also agree that character identification fosters behavior change when audience members see their own lives through the lives of the fictional characters (Durantini, Albarracín, Mitchell, Earl, & Gillette, 2006). This literature review further demonstrates that media can stimulate conversation among listeners and viewers which, in turn, can create an opportunity for social learning (Brown, Fraser, & Bacarnea, 2001). I also discussed
audience members’ resistance to entertainment-education messages. Some scholars suggest that the educational intentions of entertainment-education programming may be misinterpreted by audience members (Malwade-Rangarajan, 1992; Sherry, 1998). However, other scholars such as Petraglia (2007) and Cardey, Garforth, Govender, and Dyll-Myklebust (2013) argue that audience members do not simply accept the dominant meaning of entertainment-education messages as intended by producers. They actively negotiate the meaning based on their social and cultural influences—the audience can reinterpret or even counter-interpret the intended messages. From this review of the literature, several key claims emerged that naturally led to the present research questions.

First, narratives are a central part of human communication. It is through narrative construction that we understand others and present our own vision of the world. Fisher (1987) also suggested that we make sense of the world around us through narratives. This bearing explains how many individuals can engage in the same experience and emerge with different interpretations. Audience-reception studies in Botswana attest to this truth by revealing a pattern whereby frequent listeners of an entertainment-education radio drama seem to be more resistant to some entertainment-education messages than less frequent listeners (Mahoney & Bates, 2013; Nkete et al., 2011). The review of literature in this chapter led to the conclusion that audience members do not just accept the dominant meaning in entertainment-education programming. They actively negotiate the meaning based on social and cultural influences. Rather than simply labeling resistance to entertainment-education messages as “misinterpretations,” we should consider such resistance as a part of the audience sense-making process. Instead of measuring audience
members’ understanding of intended messages, which has been the norm in entertainment-education research, this study proposes refocusing on how they approach the intended message. This refocus is based on the realization that the outcomes of entertainment-education programs are dependent on how narratives are understood by audience members rather than merely on the intended messages of the producers (Petraglia, 2007). From this appreciation, emerged the key question: How do audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages? Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010), Petraglia (2007), Cardey, Garforth, Gvender, and Dyll-Myklebus (2013), and Moyer-Gusé (2008) all argue that a clearer understanding of how audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages through interactions with narratives is needed.

Second, the study reviewed the literature on audience involvement with characters. According to the para-social interaction theory, audience members establish interpersonal relationships with fictional characters and these relationships can change the values and behaviors of audience members (Brown, Fraser & Bacarnea, 2001; Singhal et al., 2004). Entertainment-education literature clearly demonstrates how audience members’ relationships with fictional characters facilitate behavior change (Durantini, Albarracín, Mitchell, Earl, & Gillette, 2006). Indeed, the literature review revealed that audience-reception studies in entertainment-education research have mostly focused on how audience members’ relationships with fictional characters facilitate behavior change (Brown et al., 2001). However, some scholars such as Rouner (2002) argue that identification with fictional characters may be an outcome of audience
members being “transported” into the narrative world. Murphy, Frank, Moran, and Patnoe-Woodley (2011) also argue that audience involvement with fictional characters emerges from the audience’s involvement with narratives. They suggest that identification with characters may be a result of audience members’ involvement with narratives. If identification with fictional characters emerges from audience members’ involvement with narratives, then it is safe to believe that audience members interact with fictional characters as part of their sense-making process. Based on this relationship, the question that arises is then how do audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages through their interaction with fictional characters. Lovell et al. (2008) suggest that in order to better understand audience involvement with fictional characters, future research should explore audience involvement with narratives in more depth by examining audience members’ “thought process” or sense-making process. Such insight will help us to gain a better understanding of how audience members make sense of entertainment-education messages and how entertainment-education effects work (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Pappas-DeLuca et al., 2008; Petraglia, 2007).

Through answering these research questions, the current study seeks to provide a foundation upon which future scholarship can expand the investigation of how audience members make sense of entertainment-education media through their interaction with narratives and how to best engage them with intervention programs that inspire positive health behavior.
Research Questions

1. How do audience members of Mareledi understand and interpret HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in the Mareledi serial television drama based on their assessment of narrative probability and narrative fidelity?

2. How do audience members of Mareledi identify with the characters in the drama in relation to the health behaviors being addressed?
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As discussed in Chapter 2, I have identified the need for a clearer understanding of how audience members of entertainment-education programs interpret and understand health messages through their interaction with narratives as a significant gap in entertainment-education literature. I propose to fill this gap in the entertainment-education literature by investigating how audience members of Mareledi interpret and understand HIV/AIDS messages in the serial television drama. This chapter presents the specific steps that were used for collecting and analyzing data. The rationale for using a qualitative approach, the sampling method, the qualitative methods used, and data analysis are discussed in this chapter.

Data Collection

Semi-structured, In-depth interviews and focus groups were used in this study to understand how Mareledi audience members make sense of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in the serial television drama. Focus groups and semi-structured, in-depth interviews are appropriate data collection methods for this study because they enable rich descriptive answers to the ‘how’ question in audience-reception studies. Sood (2002) and Cardey, Garforth, Govender, and Dyll-Myklebus (2013) argue that audience members’ involvement with narratives can be better understood by asking questions about audience members’ sense-making of entertainment-education media messages rather than fitting audience responses into preconceived categories. The purpose of focus groups and semi-structured, in-depth interviews is to understand the experiences of audience members and the meaning they make of those experiences. Semi-structured, in-
depth interview and focus group interview methodologies allow people and their context to be viewed holistically rather than reduced to a set of variables. Qualitative methods are often used in entertainment education because they enable researchers to incorporate contextual factors that may influence reception of entertainment-education messages (Obregon, 2005).

By employing these two qualitative research methodologies in audience research, people can be studied in the context of their past and the situations in which they find themselves. Semi-structured, in-depth interview and focus group interview methodologies allow people to be understood on their own terms without limiting their responses to preconceived response categories. The foundation of qualitative interviewing (be it in-depth interviews or focus groups) is based on the assumption that diverse perspectives are meaningful, knowable, and explicable (Patton, 2002). Gubrium and Holstein (2002) state that the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations—not construct facts or laws from respondents. Rather than seeking “the truth,” an appreciation of diverse perspectives informs and broadens my understanding of audience sense-making in entertainment education and also directs me to future areas of research. Seeking “the truth,” in my opinion, underestimates the complexity and unexpected dimensions of what is being researched.

Semi-structured, in-depth interview and focus group interview methods complement each other in the current study by emphasizing different facets of this research subject. For example, focus groups are a useful method for studying attitudes, experiences, and understandings of audience members because the production of
meaning is a social and shared process (Pickering, 2008). People develop their views through social interactions. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews, on the other hand, are particularly useful for systematically studying the complex connections between the social world and the individual (Pickering, 2008). These methodologies are often intertwined when applied in the field. The result of this triangulation is rich data that addresses different facets and dimensions. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) state, “The whole point of qualitative research is to come up with new view points to the mundane reality organized by natural attitude, and in doing so to find out new things about it” (p. 79). Qualitative research is not just about “collecting a bunch of stories.” Rather, qualitative research is about discovering different dimensions and gaining a deeper and more detailed understanding of how audience members of Mareledi make sense of HIV/AIDS messages through their involvement with the narrative. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) define qualitative research as the process of collecting and analyzing data by rigorously developing precise and useful language for describing, conceptualizing, interpreting, explaining, and critiquing recorded communication. It is a research procedure that produces “descriptive data.”

**Focus Group Interviews**

To gain an in-depth understanding of the role social and cultural influences play in audience members’ interpretation and understanding of HI/AIDS transmission and prevention messages from the serial television drama, focus group interviews were conducted. Focus group interviewing is a discussion on a particular topic among a selected set of people (Glesne, 2011). In fact, focus group interviews have helped develop
better ways of educating people about health related issues such as contraception and HIV/AIDS prevention since the 1980s (Glesne, 2011). The method has been most useful in action and evaluation research where participants can express multiple perspectives on a similar experience, such as condom use (Glesne, 2011).

Focus group interviews provided an opportunity to understand how HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages from the *Mareledi* entertainment-education serial television drama are collectively interpreted and understood by audience members. The most compelling reason for using the focus group methodology was to exploit the group effect. Focus groups were most beneficial in understanding how males and females understand and interpret HIV/AIDS messages in *Mareledi* and draw upon shared experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds. The focus group methodology produces data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. Focus groups enabled *Mareledi* audience members to compare, contrast, and critique each other’s perspective on the entertainment-education messages being addressed in the serial television drama. In essence, the purpose of conducting focus group interviews was to employ a setting for analyzing divergent or contending viewpoints.

*Focus Group Sample*

The focus groups comprised selected self-proclaimed fans of *Mareledi.* Each focus group had 8 to 13 respondents and lasted for about two hours. As self-proclaimed fans, respondents are regular viewers who watch the serial television drama at least twice a month. In this way, respondents were expected to be able to discuss prior episodes of *Mareledi.* A total of six focus groups were conducted for this study. The first
two focus groups consisted of both males and females. The purpose of these focus groups was to understand how male and female audience members co-create meanings of entertainment-education messages. The third and fourth focus groups consisted of females only while the fifth and sixth focus groups consisted of males only. Separating genders shed light on how women and men create meaning of entertainment-education messages in the context of culture. Discussants of all the focus groups have an age range of 18-49 years. The focus group interviews were designed to elicit audience members’ perceptions of *Mareledi*.

*Semi-Structured, In-depth Interviews*

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to explore how audience members of the *Mareledi* serial television drama interpret and understand entertainment-education messages. Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing is defined as the implementation of a number of predetermined questions asked in a systematic and consistent order with a bit of spontaneity, depending on the responses of the interviewee (Berg, 2001). Interview research is a useful approach to evaluating the influence of entertainment-education interventions on behavior, attitude, and knowledge change because it provides more insight about audience members’ interior experiences, their perceptions of their experiences, and how they interpret their perceptions. The main purpose of an interview, according to Patton (2002), is to explore what cannot be directly observed. For example, we cannot observe thoughts and intentions or past behaviors. The purpose of an interview is to “understand people’s experiences, accounts, and explanations” (Patton, 2002, p. 343).
The present study employed a semi-structured interview approach because humans make sense of their experiences by recounting narratives of their experiences. Interviews were conducted because they reveal people’s stories, and stories are a way of knowing. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process because, when people tell stories, they select details of their experiences from their stream of consciousness. Seidman (1998) notes that storytelling is a process of “selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them,” (p. 1). At the heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experiences through language (Seidman, 1998).

Another reason this study utilized semi-structured interviews was to ensure that essential questions are addressed, but at the same time, ensure that an atmosphere for the interviewee to feel free to respond to the questions and beyond, within the boundaries of the main issues being discussed, is created. Essential questions are the central concern of the study (Berg, 2001), but the mechanism of semi-structured interviews based upon open-ended, directive questions encourages interviewees to respond in depth, rather than giving short answers. Directive questions encouraged interviewees to think along certain lines or questions. Glesne (2011) notes that engaging questions can broaden an interviewee’s thought process by helping them to think about a topic in new ways.

Semi-Structured, In-depth Interview Sample

With regards to the number of respondents for in-depth interviews, in qualitative research studies, the quality of the data collected depends more on the quality of the sources than the quantity of sources. Identifying a group of informants is guided by a
commitment to selecting people who, together, can provide the information the study requires (Weiss, 1994). Carefully selecting the right respondents was critically important in order to obtain the richest possible data for the study. By focusing on recommended key informants, the researcher was better positioned to engage respondents who are consistent viewers of the show and who are interested in the issues being addressed. Kvale (1996) suggests that 6 to 25 respondents interviews are enough to provide sufficient descriptive data for a qualitative research study. However, in the social sciences, “data saturation” has become the standard by which purposive sample sizes are determined (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The present study includes 25 in-depth interviews of Mareledi audience members. The in-depth interviews consisted of about 13 open-ended questions, lasted about one hour, and were conducted in English. Follow-up questions and probes were also used throughout the interview when appropriate.

**Sampling**

This research study utilized a “snowball” sampling strategy. Qualitative research often uses some kind of purposive sampling to recruit relatively small numbers of informants (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting people with an explicit purpose to address the research aim (Tongco, 2007). The individuals are usually selected because they are valuable sources of data in relation to the research aim (Tongco, 2007). Respondents can be selected on the basis of their personal characteristics like gender, socio-economic status, experience of a specific event, etc (Tongco, 2007).

The criteria used to select respondents for this research study are location, age, and viewership (respondents who watch the serial drama at least twice a month).
Respondents for both the in-depth interviews and the focus group interviews were selected from within Gaborone, the nation’s capital city, and surrounding areas. Snowballing is a kind of purposive sampling approach that draws upon the knowledge and resources of community members to help locate appropriate informants (Patton, 2002). Members of the *Mareledi* fan club that volunteered to be a part of this study by responding to the advertisement posted on the *Mareledi* Facebook fan page were consulted to help locate and recruit appropriate additional participants. Appropriate informants in this case were self-proclaimed fans of *Mareledi* who met the minimum viewership criteria. Utilizing this approach, the researcher was naturally led to larger pools of informants with the desired characteristics.

Makgabaneng productions target audience members aged between 10 and 49 years old. As stated earlier, HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death among Batswana aged 15-49. In addition, the largest proportion of new infections is expected to occur within this age group. Therefore, respondents for both the focus groups and the in-depth interviews are within the age range of 18-49 years old. In Botswana, individuals aged 18 years and older are considered to be adults. Therefore, parental consent was not needed to engage the youngest members of the target sample for this study. Although the HIV/AIDS pandemic is said to affect women more than men in Botswana, men are still a very significant part of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Therefore, a balance between males and females was maintained when selecting respondents for the present study.
**Principal Unit of Analysis**

Individuals or members of a group are usually the units of analysis (Patton, 2002). The primary focus of the data collection is what is happening to individuals in a setting, and how individuals are affected by the setting (Patton, 2002). The principal units of analysis for this study, then, are the audience members being interviewed and the cultural and social context through which they create meaning of HIV/AIDS messages.

**Data Analysis**

The present study employs a basic interpretative qualitative approach. Data was analyzed by focusing on how socio-cultural factors influence audience members’ meaning-making process of HIV/AIDS messages in Mareledi. The main goal of data analysis in this study is the conceptual development of audience meaning-making processes. A thematic model of narrative analysis is utilized. The thematic model can be applied to a wide range of narrative texts including narratives produced in interviews and written documents (Frost, 2011). Themes that emerged from the interviews were examined in order to compare similarities and differences in audience responses to interview questions. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) emphasize the importance of looking for themes by examining the data in as many ways as possible. By analyzing thematic similarities and differences, a conceptual framework can emerge that can help clarify how audience members make meaning of HIV/AIDS entertainment-education messages in relation to their social and cultural milieu.
Strategies for Validating Findings

Triangulation

A “triangulation” of two qualitative research methodologies—in-depth interviews and focus group interviews—is used to provide corroborating evidence across data. Although the term triangulation might imply the use of at least three approaches to data collection, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), triangulation “involves the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of interest” (p. 274). Patton (2002) also defines “triangulation” as a methodology used to describe two or more data collection approaches designed to measure a single concept or construct. Utilizing two or more methods helps bolster confidence in the quality of a research finding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Incorporating different approaches toward data collection helps the researcher gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the research respondents and their cultural context. Silverman (2004) argues that by combining several qualitative research methodologies, researchers obtain a better and more substantive picture of reality.

Berg (2001) insists that each qualitative methodology reveals slightly different facets of the same symbolic reality. In this way, multiple methods minimize the inadequacies of single-source research. For example, triangulation can simultaneously reduce, on the one hand, the impact of bias (Berg, 2001), but also address concerns related to “lack of appropriate subjectivity” on the other (Stake 2010). Stake (2010) argues that all researchers have bias, a “predisposition to error—an inclination to err more than it is the resulting error” (p. 166). Some error is inevitable in any data
collection, but it can be minimized by utilizing two or more data collection methods (Stake, 2010).

Utilizing multiple methods of data collection can also provide verification and validity while complementing similar data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). However, Patton (2002) cautions that the goal of “triangulation” is not to arrive at consistency across data sources because inconsistencies are likely given the relative strengths of the different data collection approaches. Inconsistencies in data from different data collection methods should not be seen as undermining the evidence but rather, inconsistencies should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data (Patton, 2002). Silverman (2004) notes how “looking at an object from more than one standpoint provides researchers and theorists with more comprehensive knowledge about the object” (p. 36). Utilizing two qualitative research methods can provide richer and more comprehensive data (Silverman, 2004).

**Peer Review and Debriefing**

Peer review and debriefing were also utilized to provide an external check on the research process. External checking is necessary for monitoring the progress and quality of the research study during data collection and analysis. As Stake (2010) argues, “Multiple eyes is one of the most important triangulations” (p. 127). Although peer review often provides valuable confirmation, differences among views also provide depth to the perception of data (Stake, 2010). According to Creswell (2013), a peer reviewer is an individual who can help keep the researcher “honest” and who can ask “hard” questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations.
Consent was obtained before data was collected. Participants for this study were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research study and their participation. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) insist that before research is conducted, researchers must consider the ethical implications of their study. Social scientists have an ethical obligation to their research respondents and informants (Silverman, 2004). Researchers must prioritize the privacy, welfare, and rights of those being researched (Berg, 2001).

**Role of the Researcher and Reflexivity**

It is important for researchers themselves to understand their role and the significance of their presence as data collectors in the field. Being a product of the Botswana culture worked to my advantage in gaining access to interviewees. Berg (2001) points out that one of the problems shared by researchers is the problem of getting access into a setting. My initial interaction with each of the interviewees set the tone for the interviews. Though all the interviews were conducted in English, all introductions prior to the interviews were in Setswana. My ability to converse with participants in Setswana helped me to identify as one of them and earn their trust. Similarities in cultural background that emerged from introductions also played a major role in connecting with interviewees and earning their trust. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest that trust increases when interviewees realize that they share a common background with the interviewee. The fact that audience members saw me as one of them created a comfortable atmosphere for them to freely express their personal opinions and impressions of the drama and the HIV/AIDS messages embedded in the drama. Glesne (2011) suggests that interviewees
will talk more willingly about personal or sensitive issues once trust has been developed between them and the interviewer.

Furthermore, being a male researcher also had its advantages. Male interviewees recognized me as one of them. Their assumption was that as a Motswana male, I could relate with their experiences and understand them better. Therefore, the male interviewees did not hold back in expressing how they really felt about the drama. Similarly, female interviewees saw my interaction with them as an opportunity to express how they really feel about issues relating to gender and HIV/AIDS in *Mareledi* to a Motswana male figure that is willing to listen. Female audience members saw me as a male representative capable of relaying their message to Batswana men.

Prior to conducting interviews, I spent a couple of weeks watching all of the episodes of the drama that the current study is based on. Watching the first 52 episodes of the drama helped me to familiarize myself with the *Mareledi* narrative, the characters, and the geographical settings (rural and urban) in the drama. Such knowledge was beneficial in conducting the research because I was able to better understand audience members’ interaction with the *Mareledi* narrative. My familiarity with the drama helped me to gain a better understanding of their interpretation of the messages in the drama. Furthermore, I was able to ask thought-provoking follow-up questions that helped me to gain a better understanding of how audience members make sense of HIV/AIDS messages in the narrative. Being a part of the Botswana culture was an added advantage when conducting interviews because I was able to understand audience members’ verbal and non verbal forms of communication that are unique to the Botswana culture.
According to Berg (2001), reflexivity implies that “the researcher understands that he or she is part of the social world that he or she is investigating” (p. 139). It is imperative for the researcher to record their own behavior in the field because they are part of the context. Their interpretations and attitudes as observers, as well as the way they conduct interviews and focus groups, is part of the context and it affects the final outcome (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). For this reason, conclusions from the current study cannot be reported as facts. Rather, conclusions are constructed interpretations of my experiences in the field.

Summary

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach used in the study and the rationale for using focus group and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The chapter also describes the sampling and data analysis methods used. The next chapter presents findings.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Negotiating with the status quo to bring about behavioral and social change

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this qualitative study is to consider how audience members of the Mareledi serial television drama make sense of HIV/AIDS messages through their involvement with the Mareledi narrative. The study was inspired by the researcher’s quest to understand why low-risk perceptions and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention are still prevalent among Batswana even though there is a high degree of knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention, and, moreover, there has been an influx of entertainment-education HIV/AIDS interventions (Perlson, 2013; Letamo, 2011; and Lecrec-Madlala, 2008). The aim was to embark on a study that would contribute to improving the lives of Batswana by empowering them to live healthier lives. The current chapter presents an analysis of data collected with the aim to answer the following research question:

1. How do audience members of Mareledi understand and interpret HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in the Mareledi serial television drama based on their assessment of narrative probability and narrative fidelity?

2. How do audience members of Mareledi identify with the characters in the drama in relation to the health behaviors being addressed?

Results from this study identify a few important areas that can inform future entertainment education interventions in the fight against HIV/AIDS transmission in Botswana. First, Mareledi audience members understand and interpret the HIV/AIDS
transmission and prevention messages in the serial drama through a humanistic perspective. Secondly, Mareledi audience members identify with the characters in the drama in relation to the health messages by empathizing with the characters. Through this identification with characters, viewers are drawn into the message embedded in the drama. Third, gender power imbalances continue to contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana despite women empowerment interventions. Fourth, the serial drama suffers from depicting male characters as predominantly negative—as responsible for spreading HIV/AIDS—without contrasting a range of positive male characters as narrative foils. Finally, many Batswana are suffering from HIV/AIDS information fatigue. Viewers of Mareledi expressed sentiments of being unresponsive to HIV/AIDS messages due to information fatigue.

Mareledi Theme and Plot

The Mareledi serial television drama is a national HIV/AIDS intervention program designed to bring about behavioral change. The drama is intended as a reflection of life in Botswana. It shows the hardships that Batswana experience in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Mareledi also suggests achievable positive behaviors for its viewers to help them deal with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Mareledi uses the MARCH model discussed in chapter 1 to inform the design, development and implementation of its productions. The Mareledi narrative uses fictional characters to model appropriate attitudes and thought processes towards risky sexual behaviors that are related to HIV/AIDS. Viewers are shown how to change their behaviors through the role models in the drama. The MARCH model does not influence behavior change by simply including
the desired behavior in the message. Audience members interact and identify with negative characters, transitional characters, and positive characters. By interacting with different types of characters in the narratives, viewers make informed decisions about their sexual behaviors (Galavotti, Pappas-DeLuca, & Lansky, 2001). Mareledi uses the MARCH strategy to convey its message of healthy sexual behaviors through the following themes: multiple concurrent partnerships, gender-based violence, alcohol and substance abuse, abstinence, correct and consistent condom use, women empowerment, and environmental health issues. The messages are conveyed in an entertaining and educational way. The Mareledi narrative takes place in three settings familiar to African cultures: the town, the village, and the cattle post. The first season of the drama aired nationally on Botswana Television from December 2013 to December 2014. A total of 52 episodes aired during this time period. This study is based on the 52 episodes aired between December 2013 and December 2014.

Study Participants

Respondents were self-identifying fans of the Mareledi serial television who reside in Gaborone and surrounding areas. They were mostly students and employees from tertiary institutions within Gaborone, such as Gaborone University College of Law, University of Botswana, and Limkokwing University. However, participation was not limited to tertiary employees and students. There was a significant number of participants who work in government and private sectors, such as police officers and landscape engineers. Other participants included self-employed and unemployed individuals, both young and old. All the participants in this study have college education as their highest
level of education. All participants were identified utilizing the snowball methodology as described in Chapter 3. The first set of participants was found through social media by contacting participants who responded to the research advertisement posted on the Mareledi Facebook fan page. Subsequent respondents were identified and recruited by initial informants. All participants were aged between 18 and 49 years. The study did not involve any participants below the age of 18.

Equal gender representation was ensured among participants by actively soliciting more male or female participants as necessary. Of the 25 in-depth interviews that were conducted, 13 participants were female and 12 participants were male. Two of the 6 focus groups conducted were mixed gender. The first mixed-gender focus group comprised 9 females and 4 males while the second mixed-gender focus group comprised 5 males and 7 females. The 2 female-only focus groups had 8 and 11 participants while the 2 male-only focus groups had 11 and 9 participants.

Study participants are divided by age and gender using the following terms to identify and describe the respective groups: younger female audience members denotes females aged 18-30, older female audience members denotes females aged 31-49, younger male audience members denotes males aged 18-30, and older male audience members denotes males aged 31-49.

Emerging Themes

In order to gain a better understanding of how audience members of Mareledi construct their own lives through the serial television drama, it is important to appreciate how they understand and interpret HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in
the drama. In this section, I will discuss interviewee’s interpretation of the HIV/AIDS messages in the *Mareledi* narrative based on their assessment of narrative probability and narrative fidelity.

**Narrative Probability**

As stated in Chapter 2, narrative probability is the judgment of the coherence of a story. Narrative probability is composed of three components of assessment: structural coherence, characterological coherence, and material coherence. Structural coherence is defined as audience members’ measurement of the consistency of a story and its characters. Characterological coherence is defined as audience members’ judgment of characters’ believability. Material coherence is the congruence between *Mareledi* and other related stories. It is concerned with whether themes in the story are comparable to themes in other stories (Fisher, 1987). This portion of findings will shed light on how audience members of Mareledi assess the three components of narrative coherence in the drama and how their assessment facilitates interpretation of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages.

**Structural Coherence**

Viewers of *Mareledi* judged the consistency of the drama based on (i) the clarity of the message and (ii) the production of the drama. These two themes are discussed below.

**Clarity of the Message**

Younger and older female audience members of *Mareledi* believe the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages of the serial drama are clear. They said the drama
highlights the core causes of HIV/AIDS in Botswana by showing the process by which one gets infected and the consequences thereof. This gives the viewers an opportunity to introspect and learn from the characters’ negative behaviors and consequences. Female audience members communicated the clarity of the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention message in *Mareledi* by sharing what they learned from the serial drama in relation to the world they live in:

The HIV/AIDS message in Mareledi is very clear. I have learned that one needs to be very informed about sexual reproductive health issues before getting involved. One also needs to know the pros and cons of being involved in different kinds of sexual relationships. There are government programs out there to help those that are already infected or affected by HIV/AIDS (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

A younger female interviewee said,

The message is straightforward. Mareledi showed that taking a short cut to life by relying on rich men who have already established their lives to provide rather than focusing on education does not pay off at the end. The end result may include getting infected with HIV/AIDS and being convicted for marriage wrecking (Personal Communication, April 13, 2015).

Moreover, all female audience members said *Mareledi* was an appealing drama with a clear message. It “encourages you to keep watching because you want to know what is going to happen next” (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015). Female viewers of the serial drama were impressed with how the messages are communicated and called
the drama “educational and informative” because they saw change among characters as it progressed. However, younger male participants argued that the HIV/AIDS prevention message in Mareledi was not very clear. More specifically, Mareledi failed to clearly communicate the importance of abstinence. The drama focused more on treatment—after being infected with HIV/AIDS—not prevention:

*Mareledi* did not stress on the importance of abstinence, especially among young people. I feel like they did not really hit the nail on the head there (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

As this interviewee spoke about a lack of emphasis on abstinence, other focus group members nodded their heads, indicative of their agreement. Interventions in Botswana have constantly emphasized the importance of preventative measures such as abstinence and the consistent and correct use of protection. However, *Mareledi* focuses on curative measures, such as taking treatment after being infected. Almost all the positive characters end up engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse.

Furthermore, younger male audience members pointed out that the drama was inconsistent with educating its viewers about consistent and correct condom use. While Moses, a bank manager used a condom when cheating on his wife, Thandie, with his co-worker, Mary, Mary did not use protection with her other sexual partners. Rra T, a wealthy businessman who owns a construction company, did not use protection when cheating on his wife, Mma T, with Mary and Masego, a young college student. Likewise, Masego did not use protection with her many other sexual partners. When Thandie, in turn, cheated on Moses with Mokganedi, she did not use protection either. These
examples paint a messy web of characters that do not use protection consistently. A younger male viewer said,

Masego was more upset that the gifts from Rra T were not expensive enough. The use of protection did not surface as being priority to her. It was more about exchange of goods for services rendered. The drama should have shown the importance of using protection (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015).

Younger male audience members argued that failing to emphasize abstinence and consistent condom use as preventative measures distorts the clarity of the HIV/AIDS prevention message. Nevertheless, older female audience members insisted that focusing too much on abstinence and condom use would give a “false depiction of reality.” Older female audience members saw the inconsistent emphasis on abstinence and condom use as a reflection of reality in Botswana. The drama was, in essence, merely reflecting how inconsistent people really are. By the same token, the drama was implicitly communicating the importance of the consistent use of protection and practicing abstinence. Younger male interviewees insist that there needs to be a balance between depictions of reality and communicating the intended message. While Mareledi may implicitly communicate abstinence and correct and consistent condom use, male audience members expect the drama to explicitly communicate the prevention messages.

The Production of the Drama

Younger male and female audience members regard the production of the drama as a significant aspect of the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention message. They felt that the production of the drama was substandard in comparison to international
productions, more specifically Hollywood productions. Younger male and female interviewees discussed lack of professionalism among actors and substandard picture and sound quality as areas that must be improved for future intervention productions.

Lack of Professionalism among Actors. Throughout the interviews, younger male and female audience members complained how the acting was unprofessional. Even though the Mareledi narrative resonates with the audience members’ experiences and the world they live in, audience members expressed that Mareledi used amateur actors to deliver the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention message. Younger male and female audience members pointed out that lack of professionalism among some actors was distracting, it divided the audience members’ attention between the narrative and the actors’ noticeable level of unprofessionalism. Interviewees said, “The message and the messenger are intertwined and cannot be separated” (Personal Interview, April 11, 2015). Audience members spoke very passionately about the lack of professional actors in Mareledi:

I could see the message being relayed in the drama but at times I was discouraged by the effort that the actors put into their acting. I felt like they were not bringing the characters to life, they were just acting. The effort that an actor puts into acting can enable a viewer to remember the scene and the message embedded in the scene (Personal Communication, April 19, 2015).

Another interviewee said,

You can’t separate the actor and the message. The two are intertwined. We need good actors to effectively relay the message. The message and the acting have to
go the same direction not different directions. The acting has to be affective. Unfortunately, that is not the case with the actors in *Mareledi* (Personal Communication, May 20, 2015).

Non-verbal responses within the focus group expressed disappointment and disbelief that an intervention program with such a crucial message would use amateur actors to deliver such a vital message. A pervasive sense among younger male and female interviewees was that *Mareledi* needs to replace actors in order to improve the quality and impact of the message.

The fact that some participants talked about amateur acting as distracting suggests that poor production quality has the potential to dilute the HIV/AIDS transmission message, making it less impactful. Nevertheless, older male and female audience members believed that *Mareledi* has the best actors Botswana has to offer. These audience members were impressed by the quality of acting and level of professionalism among the actors in *Mareledi*.

Their quality of acting draws you in. The acting is very good. It does not show that they are acting. It is like real life situation. Most of the time when I watch local dramas, I watch them only for entertainment. Of all the local dramas that I have watched, *Mareledi* is the only drama that I was able to get the ultimate message because actors portraying characters like Mary effectively communicated the main message (Personal Communication, May 16, 2015).
Another interviewee excitedly said,

    I liked the acting quality. Sometimes if you pick actors that are not competitive enough, they are not able to pass on the message the way it is supposed to be perceived. The way the actors in Mareledi did it was engaging (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

It is clear that even though all audience members perceive the Mareledi narrative as believable, audience members have varying perceptions of the professionalism among actors possibly because of the diverse local and/or international productions to which the respective audience members have been exposed. For while some audience members view certain actors as professional, others view the same actors as amateurs. For instance, older male and female audience members felt that the actor that portrayed Moses, a bank manager that cheated on his wife with a co-worker, was professional and played his part very well. However, younger male and female audience members criticized the same actor for being emotionless. They described him as having a “poker face.” It is possible that Mareledi used some of the best actors in Botswana yet younger male and female audience members remain critical of local productions when comparing them to “Hollywood” productions. While the actors in Mareledi may have not satisfied some audience members’ expectation of professionalism, all the audience members pointed out that the Mareledi narrative is a true reflection of their everyday life experiences.

    Nevertheless, although Mareledi actors may not reach “Hollywood” standards of acting, older male audience members argued that achieving “Hollywood” standards would not necessarily increase the efficacy of the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention
messages. Several viewers made reference to *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* as a locally inspired and produced movie that mostly featured professional “Hollywood” producers and actors such as Jill Scott. Audience members said,

While the acting quality was excellent, the movie was not appealing to some Batswana. It was more appealing to the Western world. Some Batswana felt that the depiction of the Botswana culture was not authentic, especially when ‘Hollywood’ actors try to mimic local accents and behaviors (Personal Communication, April 11, 2015).

Therefore, keeping interventions local and authentic will make them more appealing to audience members rather than trying to use international standards of professionalism to reach local people.

Substandard Picture and Sound Quality. In addition to unprofessional acting, the majority of younger female and male audience members also expressed disappointment with the picture and sound quality of *Mareledi*. Though it is agreed that local intervention productions need to improve sound and picture quality, older male and female audience members argue that authentic indigenous productions are a significant ingredient for effective interventions to draw audience members’ attention. Africanist scholars Noss and Buren (2007) also emphasize the importance of using indigenous media and the arts for communication and development.

Characterological Coherence

One of the aims of the current study was to investigate how audience members of *Mareledi* identify with characters in the drama. Parasocial interaction theory suggests that
audience members’ relationships with fictional characters can change the values and behaviors of audience members. The actor’s status as a role model is suggested to have the potential of activating identification through narrative content, which illustrates their experiences and position with regards to social issues. Through pro-social messages and role modeling, characters can engage public discourses and impact opinion making (Brown et al., 2001). The question then is: How do audience members make sense of messages through their interactions with these fictional characters? To answer this research question, audience members were asked to name and discuss their most and least believable characters. Findings show that viewers of Mareledi connected with the characters at a humane level by identifying and empathizing with the characters. According to Cohen (2001), identification with characters is a process by which audience members assume a character’s identity, goals, and perspectives. It is a mechanism through which audience members interpret media texts as though the events were happening to them.

Furthermore, Dillard, Somera, Kim, and Sleight (1988) argue that the cognitive aspect of empathy is when an individual adopts another persons’ viewpoint. Cohen (2001) suggests that empathy and identification with characters are intertwined. In essence, empathy is an aspect of character identification. The audience members in Mareledi shared in the characters’ feelings and reactions. They see their own lives unfolding through the characters. Audience members learned about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention through interacting with the characters by empathizing with them. All female audience members and younger male audience members were critical of
the status quo, the sociocultural behaviors that promote the spread of HIV/AIDS. They yearned for more scenes that focused on achievable social and behavioral change in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This was mainly demonstrated through their solution mindset when interacting with the narrative and, more specifically, the characters. Audience members discussed a character named Mpho as a positive role model that young people could learn from in the fight against HIV/AIDS. They also discussed a character named Masego as a good transitional role model whose transformation process from a promiscuous lifestyle to a healthy sexual lifestyle was inspiring.

**Positive Role Model**

Viewers discussed Mpho as the “ideal positive role model.” They admire her for her persistent focus and determination not to be deterred by anyone. Mpho, the daughter of Moses and Thandie, is a teenage girl who goes to a public high school and lives with her father and younger brother. Her mother is studying abroad but visits them during vacations. Mpho is very studious and initially does not engage in premarital sexual relationships. Though her boyfriend, Zakes, tries to get her to have sex with him, she refuses and he ends up having a sexual relationship with a different girl. Mpho is constantly approached by both young and older wealthy men enticing her to have sexual relationships with them, but she refuses and stays focused. However, frustrations at home (related to her parents’ marital troubles) eventually push her to have sexual relations with a taxi driver. Younger female viewers admired Mpho for being positive and focused in the midst of all the challenges she faces as a teenager witnessing her parents experiencing marital difficulties. Younger female participants described her as “an intelligent and
determined chick” (Personal Communication, May 20, 2015). She was also praised for her love for her family. Her character was enviable among participants.

I like Mpho, she has a stand. She knows what she wants and she goes for it regardless of what it takes. When she says ‘no,’ she means ‘no’ regardless of the pressure that she gets from her friends, peers, and her family. She also took care of her brother during the time when her parents were thinking of divorcing (Personal Communication, April, 14, 2015).

A younger female interviewee expressed how she felt empathetic towards Mpho because the character had a lot to deal with as a teenager: “She was going through a lot with her family but still she had to maintain her teenage life and her school life and her parents’ life” (Personal Communication, April 16, 2015). While many of the female interviewees admired Mpho as a good role model, younger male interviewees argue that Mpho failed as a positive role model because she eventually fell for a taxi driver that was much older than herself as she sought comfort and escape from the challenges she was going through with her family and the marital difficulty that her parents were experiencing. As a result, the only difference between her and other negative characters in the drama is that she merely delayed her intergenerational sexual relationship. And when she did get involved in this relationship, she did not use any protection. Audience members further noticed how Mareledi failed to use Mpho’s character to communicate abstinence as a prevention strategy among young people. Nevertheless female audience members argue that if Mpho was perfect, her behavior would have seemed unachievable for many of the young people that desire but struggle to practice abstinence. Interviewees argued that there are no
“perfect people.” Mpho remains a role model, despite—or even because of—her imperfections, just like themselves. Mareledi shows her imperfections and how lessons can be learned from these faults. A younger female interviewee said,

Mpho is an introvert who never talks to anyone about the challenges that she and her family are going through. Instead she keeps everything inside and tries to handle life’s challenges on her own. Even when her boyfriend encouraged her to open up about her problems, she would not tell him anything. Unfortunately she ended up breaking down and falling for a taxi man (Personal Communication, May 17, 2015).

The lesson here is that it is important to talk about issues and seek help when necessary. Overall, Mpho emerged as a compelling character and an inspiration for the majority of female viewers not because she was perfect but because she sincerely tried not to falter. Mpho epitomizes “an ideal young Motswana girl that is hardworking, focused and not easily deterred by peer pressure” (Personal Communication, April 10, 2015)—even if flawed. The majority of the female participants considered Mpho to be a positive role model because of her focus and continuous resistance to peer pressure. Through their interaction with Mpho’s character, viewers learned the importance of taking control of one’s life rather than allowing it to be controlled by peer pressure or monetary or material enticements.

*Transitional Role Model*

Many of the younger female audience members identified with Masego as a transitional character. Masego is a nursing school student who has a very committed and
focused boyfriend named Phillip. Masego lives on campus with a female roommate who is also a focused young lady. However, Masego ventures into a lifestyle of engaging in multiple concurrent and intergenerational sexual relationships in order to live a luxurious lifestyle that her committed boyfriend Phillip cannot afford. Masego’s roommate and Philip try to advise her to stay focused on school and avoid such relationships. However, Masego does not take heed and instead continues with her promiscuous lifestyle and dumps her boyfriend Philip for rich men, such as Rra T, who can provide a more luxurious lifestyle. This decision affects her studies and she no longer attends classes. She ends up infected with HIV/AIDS and starts taking Antiretroviral Treatment (ARV). Masego finally gets her life back together, returns to school and ends up re-uniting with her boyfriend Philip. He accepts her back into his life even after he found out that she was infected with HIV/AIDS and the couple eventually marries. Interviewees identified Masego as an example of many young women in Botswana, especially tertiary students that have sexual relationships with older, wealthy men known as “sugar daddies” in order to have extra spending money. Younger female audience members empathize with her financial challenges in college stating that the lack of jobs is a major problem in Botswana. More specifically, they admired her transformation from a promiscuous lifestyle to completing her education and getting married after being infected with HIV/AIDS. Masego’s character brings hope to many who may have lost hope due to being infected with HIV/AIDS. Her actions can inspire those who believe being infected with HIV/AIDS is the end of life and the beginning of death. She showed that there is life
after contracting HIV/AIDS. Being infected is not a death sentence. A younger female interviewee said,

Masego was infected with HIV/AIDS after having multiple concurrent partners and when Phillip, her college sweetheart, told her he still loved her, she did not beat herself down. Instead, she embraced the love, took courage to go to the clinic to get treatment and do all she was supposed to do. I like that she overcame the barrier of being infected and got married to Phillip. When people are HIV/AIDS positive, they feel like that is the end of the world. They stop taking care of themselves. They just give up on everything (Personal Communication, April 14, 2015).

Younger female participants could relate to Masego’s experiences and were moved by her transformation and positive outlook on life after she was infected with HIV/AIDS. They expressed empathy towards the character. An interviewee said, “though some may say she deserved being infected because of her behavior, everyone deserves a second chance” (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015). Another interviewee said,

She is going through things which we college girls go through. We tend to find bad solutions to our problems. We engage in sexual relationships with older men for money. I can relate to her experiences (Personal Communication, May 21, 2015).

Even though Masego’s character is one of hope, especially for those that are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, older male audience members caution that such scenes in Mareledi can also give the impression that HIV/AIDS can be successfully
managed or even cured. Audience members expressed concern over the fact that almost all promiscuous female and male characters in Mareledi continue to live normal lives after being infected with HIV/AIDS. Such an approach in entertainment-education intervention is curative and contrary to the preventative approach that is constantly preached across interventions in Botswana. As a result, the severity of being infected is trivialized. It is important to keep prevention and cure at different levels and emphasize the former over the later. Even when portraying life after being infected with HIV/AIDS, it is important to portray a level of struggle that one can only be freed from if they actively prevent themselves from being infected. An older male interviewee said,

> The drama should not only focus on life after HIV/AIDS. It should also show what happens to people who decide not to take treatment and proper care of themselves. This way, the drama will not give the impression that HIV/AIDS is another disease one can get and still live a normal life. It will not discourage people from experimenting with risky sexual behaviors when they see their favorite characters living normal lives with HIV/AIDS (Personal Communication, April 18, 2015).

*Least Believable Character*

The majority of viewers believed that a character named Sparks in Mareledi was poorly developed because he did not reflect Botswana culture or the HIV/AIDS behaviors prevalent among Batswana. Sparks is a very wealthy and well-known drug lord who lives in the city. He has two employees (Umaga and Ryder) who work for him as drug dealers. They recruit other community members, including high school students, to help them sell
drugs with promises of being paid a lot of money. Sparks dresses like a gangster with several gold rings, chains, and fancy clothes. He also has multiple sexual partners. Interviewees remarked how “There are no drug lords in Botswana, only petty thieves” (Personal Communication, April 13, 2015). Sparks does not reflect life in Botswana in the way he dresses, talks, and acts. Viewers of Mareledi could not relate to Sparks’ character and often referred to him as a misfit in the drama. Most importantly, viewers of Mareledi did not understand his role in the drama. They often seemed irritated or annoyed when talking about Sparks, suggesting that he is more of a distraction in the drama. A younger male interviewee said, “I did not understand Sparks’ role in the drama. Mareledi does not show the relationship between his illegal drug business and HIV/AIDS” (Personal Communication, April 19, 2015). An older female interviewee said,

Though we know that drugs and alcohol contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS, Mareledi could have used Sparks’ character to enlighten us on how this happens and how the issue can be addressed (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015).

A younger female interviewee also noted that Sparks was never punished for his behavior:

In real life when someone commits a crime, they eventually get arrested but in Mareledi, Sparks was not arrested. It was known in the community that he was a drug lord but he did not get arrested (Personal Communication, April 6, 2015).

Since Sparks was never punished for his negative behavior, the character may communicate the wrong message to viewers, especially young people, by giving them the
impression that illegal drug businesses can be run and multiple sexual partners can be had with impunity. Negative behaviors should not be rewarded positively. Nevertheless, older male audience members argued that while Sparks may seem like a misfit, given that HIV/AIDS intervention programs are designed with the benefit of extensive research to guide their narrative structure, there “must” exist a culture of drug lords in Botswana. At a minimum, one interviewee remarked how “Sparks’ dress code and luxurious lifestyle also reveals the influence of the Western culture on young Batswana” (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015). Either way, all participants agreed that the link between Sparks’ character and the HIV/AIDS message was hazy and needed clarification.

This study’s findings indicate that Mareledi audience members identified with the characters in the drama in relation to the health behaviors being addressed by empathizing with the characters. They saw their lives unfolding through the characters and were able to reflect and reason through the characters’ actions towards a healthier sexual lifestyle. Chory-Assad and Cicchirillo (2005) suggest that empathy is necessary for identification with characters. According to Chory-Assad and Cicchirillo (2005), “Empathic individuals are also likely to recognize similarities between themselves and these others by virtue of opening themselves up to the experiences and viewpoints of others” (p. 152). Liebes and Katz (1990) assert that when asked to discuss their impressions of a television show, audience members often focus their reactions and impressions on characters. This often includes strong identification with characters. Through their interaction with the characters in Mareledi, audience members learned it is important to take a stand and not be easily tempted into risky sexual behaviors. They also
learned that being infected with HIV/AIDS is not a death sentence; it is possible for one to survive, even thrive. Nevertheless, there were gender differences. Both the transitional and positive role models were most appealing and inspiring for female audience members while less so for male viewers. The reason for this discrepancy seems obvious: The transitional and positive role models were prominently female, not male.

**Material Coherence**

Audience members compared the storyline and production quality of *Mareledi* to another locally produced intervention drama called *Itshireletse*. This drama does not specifically focus on HIV/AIDS. It is designed and produced by the Botswana Police Force to raise awareness about issues that affect Batswana from a law enforcement perspective such as robbery, theft, ponzi schemes, etc. However, the drama occasionally addresses HIV/AIDS-related issues such as domestic violence. When comparing *Mareledi* to *Itshireletse*, audience members compared the presentation of messages and intervention strategies. Their comparisons were based on their exposure to both productions. Older female viewers felt that *Itshireletse* was more appealing than Mareledi. When asked why, they commented how “*Itshireletse*’ communicates its messages explicitly” (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015). Those audience members appreciated the inclusion of an epilogue that kept them focused on the key message in relation to the narrative. For instance, audience members talked about how *Itshireletse* used the epilogue to discuss ways in which domestic violence can be prevented or addressed after depicting a drama with a domestic violence theme. *Mareledi* on the other hand does not pursue the explicit epilogue approach. Indeed, younger male
and female audience members felt that including an epilogue makes *Itshireletse* boring and very predictable, like any other entertainment-education narrative in Botswana. The idea here is not that *Mareledi* must include an epilogue, but rather, the serial drama should be more explicit, rather than implicit, in communicating preventative strategies such as abstinence, condom use, and counseling. Yet viewers are sensitive to being overtly preached to. Ideally, striking a new balance towards education would not jeopardize the popularity of *Mareledi*.

**Narrative Fidelity**

Narrative fidelity refers to how audience members interpret the social reality presented in the narrative. Narrative fidelity determines how the story matches the background of the world according to the audience members’ knowledge of their world (Fisher, 1987). In order to learn about audience members’ assessment of narrative fidelity, *Mareledi* audience members were asked whether the drama reflects the world they live in. Findings show that for the *Mareledi* audience members, the narrative was a true reflection of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. According to audience members, the serial television drama discussed gender power imbalances and how they continue to contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Audience members also said the predominantly negative depiction of males in *Mareledi* is fueling the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Finally, audience members pointed out that HIV/AIDS information fatigue, especially among men, is a major contributing factor. The audience members critiqued and challenged some of the social and cultural beliefs that continue to spread HIV/AIDS in Botswana.
More specifically, female audience members were vocal and critical of the social and cultural beliefs that spread HIV/AIDS in Botswana.

*Gender Power Imbalance*

Interviewees recognized that *Mareledi* portrayed domestic violence to address persistent sociocultural and economic imbalances between genders that continue to contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Though the drama depicted other core causes such as intergenerational sex and multiple concurrent partners, audience members focused more on the issue of gender power imbalance, and more specifically gender violence, as the foundation for their discussion. While gender power imbalances in *Mareledi* focus more on women as the disadvantaged and the need for more women empowerment, audience members also approached the issue from a different perspective. They felt that future interventions need to focus more on involving men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Audience members argued that men have the social power to influence behavior change but, ironically, it is the men who are most resistant to change. By the same token, women want to influence behavioral change but have less social and economic power to do so. The result is that men are using their social power to spread HIV/AIDS through domestic violence, intergenerational sexual relationships, and multiple concurrent partnerships. These findings are interesting because behavioral change interventions in Botswana have emphasized women empowerment as an important element in the fight against HIV/AIDS (Cockcroft et al., 2010). Examples of believable behaviors and lifestyles discussed by respondents were mainly about male-dominated relationships, cases of domestic violence, intergenerational sexual
relationships, and multiple concurrent partnerships among Batswana. Participants talked about a character in the drama named Botshelo who depicts the life of Batswana in rural areas of the country. The character is a married man who lives in the village with his family and is the sole provider. Botshelo is an alcoholic who physically and verbally abuses his wife, Babedi, whenever he comes home drunk. He engages in multiple concurrent sexual relationships with women he meets at different drinking spots around the village. Botshelo ends up infecting Babedi with HIV/AIDS. This abusive husband is also involved with selling illegal drugs in the village. Though his parents have tried to correct and guide him, Botshelo does not take heed. He is a stubborn individual who does not take advice from anyone. Botshelo’s character does not transition to positive behavior but instead ends up in jail for a drug-related offense. An older female interviewee said,

The drama is very believable. There are men who have turned themselves into characters like Botshelo, abusing their wives physically. I don’t think a woman should be beaten regardless of what she has done (Personal Communication, April 13, 2015).

A younger male interviewee said: “the prevalence of gender-based violence suggests that men still have the upper hand in many sexual relationships” (Personal Communication, April 10, 2015). The discussion about gender power imbalance among audience members was anchored on sociocultural beliefs that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana.

*Sociocultural beliefs.* Women that are dependent on their spouses for economic stability tend to withstand the abuse from their spouse due to fear of losing their main
source of living. Botshelo abused his wife Babedi regularly throughout the drama, but his wife withstood the abuse and did not leave. Participants noted that this is one of the challenges that women in Botswana face due to sociocultural and economic disparities. A younger female interviewee discussed how gender power imbalances in relationships have made it difficult for women to stand up for themselves due to low sense of self-worth. She expressed fear of being rejected by her partner:

If my partner wants to sleep with me without using protection, the chances of me refusing are lower. We have difficulty in standing up for ourselves as women. I think it is the fear of being rejected (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

An older female participant argued that the producers of Mareledi allowed Babedi to withstand her husband's abuse in order to show the strength of a women that is celebrated in the Botswana culture.

Women are believed to be the pillars of society, the ones who build a home and fight to maintain the home. In fighting for peace, unity, and harmony in their marriages, Batswana women sometimes undergo a lot of physical and emotional abuse. The drama could be showing that she is a strong women who fights for her marriage and does not give up during hard times (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015).

Another younger female interviewee said, “Babedi withheld a lot of abuse in her marriage. I respect her for that. I would have long walked out of that kind of relationship” (Personal Communication, April 14, 2015). It is clear from this statement that the interviewees, were interpreting the gender power imbalance message in the drama
through both a humanistic and a cultural lens. Even though the interviewees do not believe women should be abused, they recognize the social and cultural beliefs that influence Babedi’s decision to accept her husband’s abuse. In this case, withstanding physical and emotional abuse demonstrates strength, perseverance, and the will to fight for her family. A younger female interviewee said,

The female characters in Mareledi take too long to walk out of such relationships. They really shouldn’t have to undergo so much abuse before they take action or speak out even though that is the case among many Batswana (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

The older female participants believe Babedi’s behavior stems from the social and family influence. The culture of an individual determines how they react to issues of domestic violence and gender power imbalance.

It depends on how one was raised. There are some women who just never take action regardless of how much they are being abused. These are the individuals that end up killing themselves and people are shocked (Personal Communication, May 20, 2015).

Another female interviewee shared a real life story to reiterate the idea that the way an individual is raised influences how they react to domestic violence.

I know a lady in real life who has withstood constant abuse from her husband. She will tell her problems to her friends and family relatives but will never talk to her husband. But it seems like she does not want to do anything about it. She feels
that she will never find another man if she leaves her spouse (Personal Communication April 10, 2015).

While softly taping on the table with her hand and gently shaking her head to emphasize how she feels about her point, a younger female interviewee said,

Women talk to other women and family members about their marriage problems but they don’t talk to their spouse. As such, the women they talk to only encourage them to endure, which is the norm. However, open communication between spouses can in some way help address the issue of domestic violence and gender power imbalance (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015).

Yet open communication about such sensitive issues between spouses in Batswana is very rare. Many Batswana are more comfortable talking to friends about sex than their spouse or loved ones. An older female interviewee said,

Our culture is very strict. You cannot have a conversation with your parents about sex. They will feel like you are disrespecting them. So sex is seldom discussed in the Botswana families. Many Batswana grow up with that mentality (Personal Communication, May 20, 2015).

Botswana culture does not encourage open communication with loved ones about sex. In fact, the culture discourages communication with loved ones about HIV/AIDS by virtue of reacting negatively to those that do attempt to be open about sex. Furthermore, older female interviewees argue that although open communication between spouses is possible, “Men that cheat on their spouses are often dishonest about their extramarital relationships” (Personal Communication, May 22, 2015). This creates distrust, which
discourages many women from attempting to have honest and open communication with their spouse. Audience members further discussed Rra T’s wife as an example of Batswana women that do not take action in abusive or unhealthy relationships. While Rra T cheated on his wife, Mma T, with many women, including college girls, she never questioned or confronted him. She always “played along” as if everything was ok even though Rra T was becoming abusive. Younger male audience members said while some Batswana women may be as calm as Mma T is, to them, she seemed very naïve. A younger male interviewee laughed and said,

    Rra T’s wife was naïve for a very long time. Even though her husband was cheating on her, she was very loving, sweet, and kind to her husband. Batswana women are very analytical. They will know when their husband is cheating and they will take action (Personal Communication, April, 15, 2015).

This male participant suggests that although it is true there are some Batswana women that behave like Mma T (especially older women in rural areas), these days, younger Batswana women are more proactive in their relationships. The interviewee’s laughter communicated his view that Mma T’s behavior does not reflect women today, especially young women. When asked what they have learned from watching women who endured abuse in their marriage, a younger female interviewee said,

    Mma T could have taken action right from the beginning instead of just playing along even though she silently questioned her husband’s actions. She should have talked to her husband to find out what is going on and talk about consequences of his behavior (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).
Older female respondents believe that Batswana women are more empowered than ever before. Women are standing up for themselves and their health. Women empowerment interventions are clearly not in vain. An older female interviewee said: “these days, women are more empowered. That is why the divorce rates are even higher” (Personal Communication, April 18, 2015). According to this interviewee, increasing divorce rates in Botswana suggest that women are taking control of their lives and becoming more independent. However, younger male and female audience members believe the female characters in the drama could have been more proactive in the fight against domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. Both younger male and female audiences were disappointed in Babedi and Mma T and how they handled their marital relationships. Men continue to abuse women every day. Audience members suggested the need to challenge and negotiate with the social and cultural beliefs that fuel the spread of the pandemic in order to minimize more infections. They stressed the need to talk more openly about domestic violence and seek counseling.

To further investigate gender power imbalance among the audience members of ‘Mareledi,’ the interview data was separated by gender to learn how men and women respectively understand and interpret gender imbalance as it relates to HIV/AIDS. The general consensus among younger male and the majority of female interviewees was that men are the driving force behind the pandemic because of the economic and sociocultural power they possess. However, older male interviewees still blame women for the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. For instance, some of the older male interviewees believe that women are the ones that need to be “empowered” in the fight against
HIV/AIDS. They view women as too easily influenced by gifts and monetary enticements. These men perceive women as “loose.” An older male interviewee said,

Women are responsible for their sexual lives. She decides to allow a man into her life. She is supposed to judge the guy and decide if he is worthy of being a part of her (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

Older male interviewees discussed two female characters and how they each handled men. Masego, a nursing student, was easily enticed by different men to have sexual relations in exchange for money. Male viewers argued that she could have learned from her first two relationships and said “no” the next time a man tried to tempt her. However, Masego kept engaging in more relationships even though they hurt her more than they helped her. Mpho, on the other hand, remained very focused and was not easily tempted into unhealthy sexual behaviors. Even as a young girl, she knew not to fall for men who enticed her with money.

However, the majority of female audience members perceive men as a major barrier they need to overcome in their fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. A younger female interviewee said, “Men are the ones who rape women, they are the one that often initiate violence against their spouse” (Personal Communication, May 21, 2015). An older female interviewee said,

Men are responsible for spread of HIV/AIDS. They chase after young girls, even married men. They use money to entice vulnerable children. We often see men chasing after young girls. Men use money to bribe young women. In most
circumstances, women do not chase after men (Personal Communication, April 14, 2015).

When asked if they are suggesting that women never cheat on their spouses, the female respondents talked about how Moses cheated on his wife Thandie and Thandie ended up cheating on her husband Moses with Mokganedi. A younger female interviewee argued that, “Women don’t cheat, we revenge. Men lead women to make decisions to do things they never intended to do because of the men’s untrustworthiness” (Personal Communication, April 14, 2015). Another younger female interviewee said,

Men are a lot more persistent. Even if you say ‘no’ they will entice you with everything. Men never take ‘no’ for an answer. Sometimes a woman will back down if a man says ‘no, I don’t want you.’ But men never take ‘no’ for an answer (Personal Communication, April 16, 2015).

Female interviewees talked about how men are constantly pursuing women in Mareledi. They specifically talked about how several men persistently pursued Mpho regardless of how many times she said “no.” Some men even got very angry with her for refusing to give in to them, and called her “a fool.” Another character named JP tried to entice Mpho and she refused. He warned her that she would regret her decision. An older male interviewee challenged this female belief by insisting that women should never be so desperate to be in relationships:

Batswana women like to be served. Once you give them something they love, you own them. That is one of the reasons why they are constantly looking for men
with money and not necessarily responsible men (Personal Communication, May 15, 2015).

Another older male interviewee stated,

It is up to women to empower themselves and men will support. But not every man will support that, especially the more traditional ones (Personal Communication, May 16, 2015).

The intense discourse between genders at first seemed like a blame game but it reveals important insight about how women and men perceive each other with regards to sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Botswana. It is interesting that older men feel women need to be empowered, but the men themselves do not see the need to play an active role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Older men blame women for giving into temptation when the men entice them with money. However, the men themselves do not seem to appreciate how their enticement contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Based on how both younger and older women navigate the embedded social and cultural beliefs surrounding the fight against HIV/AIDS, it is clear that women empowerment influences how females perceive males in Botswana. But it is also clear that these beliefs inform how older men perceive themselves—and females. And this is why the exclusion of men from pro-active, preventative roles against HIV/AIDS in entertainment-education interventions in Botswana is counter-productive. Older men need to be “empowered” to see themselves as a source of the problem, rather than only blaming women. However, it also encouraging to see how Mareledi female audience members negotiate for preventative strategies that
include men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. They want men to be proactive in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

It is clear that cultural beliefs and proverbs still play a major role in the spread of HIV/AIDS—especially among older men. Female audience members discussed a character named Borahman who epitomizes how culture encourages power imbalances in ways that promote the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Borahman is an elderly man who lives in a village with his wife, Mma Meshach. He is respected in the community and is an advisor to the village chief. Borahman is known as a very hardheaded man who almost never agrees with his wife on anything. Borahman has multiple concurrent sexual partners and ends up infected with HIV/AIDS as a result. He upholds the cultural belief that the man is the head of the house and must make all household decisions without consulting his wife. When his wife advises him to take treatment, Borahman refuses. An older female participant said that in Botswana, gender and culture are intertwined and cannot be separated:

Gender plays a very crucial role because in Botswana, gender goes hand in hand with culture. Men are considered to be the head of the family and the community. When it comes to relationships and marriage, the female counterparts don’t have a say especially about sexual activities (Personal Communication, May 16, 2015).

In fact, ironically, older female viewers discussed how Botswana culture prioritizes men:

Our culture also gives men more priority over women. For instance, a widow is expected to stay single for two years before she can be married again but a man
can marry within days after his wife dies. Our culture is suppressing women in the name of protecting them (Personal Communication, May 23, 2015).

The majority of female viewers in the all-female focus groups argued that men believe having multiple partners is prestigious. Participants also talked about how society encourages men to engage in behaviors that spread HIV/AIDS. Viewers of Mareledi discussed how Rra T engaged in intergenerational sexual relationships and multiple concurrent sexual partnerships but was never frowned upon or punished (other than by getting infected with HIV/AIDS). Mary, on the other hand, was ostracized by her coworkers for engaging in multiple sexual relationships with her manager Moses and her customer Rra T. Female viewers passionately talked about how that dynamic rings so true in the world they live in:

Some men believe it is a prestigious thing to have multiple partners.

Society seems to encourage it. When a woman has multiple partners, she is looked down upon. When a man has multiple partners he is not shunned but rather women are seen to be after him for his money (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015).

The all male focus groups also discussed the idea that men’s negative sexual behaviors are tolerated in the Botswana society:

Having multiple partners for women is seen as wrong and undignified. Having multiple partners for men is seen as masculinity and even respected for it. However both parties are responsible (Personal Communication, April 13, 2015).
Many young men in colleges around Botswana practice this behavior in order to be recognized and admired by their colleagues, but the personal and social consequences are often debilitating. Younger male viewers of Mareledi said such behaviors must be discouraged. Interviewees said Mareledi is a true reflection of what is happening in Botswana in that men, especially older men are disproportionately responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Their actions—and inactions—persist due to social and economic disparities. However, all audience members also emphasized the role women play in the spread of the pandemic by giving into temptations and at times engaging with men sexually in exchange for money. Audience members discussed characters such as Mary, who actively pursued sexual relationships with financially stable men in exchange for money. An interesting point raised by male viewers is that women have opted to pursue men for money in exchange for sex because society and culture tolerate men’s unhealthy sexual behaviors. The general conclusion among audience members was that men should stop abusing their socio-economic power and get involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Yet, insofar as entertainment-education interventions like Mareledi emphasize women’s empowerment without also modeling proactive men’s behavior, it is unsurprising that male behavior would be resistant to these HIV/AIDS interventions. A younger male respondent expressed his view with great concern:

The best thing that can be done to help men is to form an organization for men by men. I feel like more of the HIV/AIDS teachings are adopted by women. As men, we are trailing behind. I think somewhere, somehow we should be compelled to
learn because men are very reluctant to HIV/AIDS things (Personal Communication, May 17, 2015).

Another young male interviewee said,

Men need to talk to men about their behavior since they don’t take counsel from women. They need to sort themselves out (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

Younger male respondents and the majority of female respondents suggested that Mareledi must involve men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. With regards to how the drama addresses the issue of gender power imbalances, interviewees expressed dissatisfaction. While the drama brought the issue to the forefront for discussion, it did not focus on how to address the issue and prevent future cases:

If someone is experiencing domestic violence or stigma, the drama should have shown ways of dealing with such issues by showing scenes of individuals going for counseling instead of showing one side of the story (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).

Audience members’ nonverbal expressions communicated that providing clear solution on the part of the drama is a necessity. Possible solutions are necessary in a society where the status quo tolerates behaviors that spread HIV/AIDS.

Findings show that Mareledi female audience members believe their ability to implement change is limited by the sociocultural structure they live in. Change can be achieved if men become proactive in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Therefore, continued women empowerment efforts to promote healthy sexual behaviors when women do not
have much control over their sexuality may not yield fruitful results. Male respondents agree that there is need to target and include men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. It is also clear that some men are still controlled by social and cultural beliefs that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, it is imperative to engage men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Rakgoasi and Odimegwue (2013) conducted a study to explore representations of masculinity and maleness in the context of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Findings from their study indicate that men are eager to change the traditionally held masculine beliefs that disempower women in exchange for masculine roles that emphasize on equality and healthy sexual behaviors. HIV/AIDS intervention programs in Botswana and other African countries have maintained a female focus instead of recognizing the centrality of men in the spread of HIV/AIDS. The female-focused empowerment approach depicts men as “problems” and “obstacles” that women must overcome (Rakgoasi and Odimegwue, 2013). However, this approach has excluded men in the fight against HIV/AIDS and it promotes the belief that only women need help in the fight against HIV/AIDS—not men. HIV/AIDS interventions are not appealing to men. While older men remain resistant to HIV/AIDS interventions and perceive them as “women’s” programs, Mareledi continues to focus on empowering women.

**Negative Depiction of Males in Mareledi**

Male audience members expressed how Mareledi presents a predominantly negative depiction of males as irresponsible members of society who spread HIV/AIDS by luring multiple women to engage in sexual relationships with them in exchange for money. Though some of the negative male characters end up embracing positive
behaviors after being infected with HIV/AIDS, the drama does not explore the transformation processes among these male characters relative to the female characters. Nor does the show provide clear dramatic alternatives to these male characters by portraying male characters who not only display “good behaviors,” but, and more importantly, remain true to these values even when faced with so many temptations.

One younger male interviewee said,

> There were no male characters to emphasize on how to be positive, there were more negative characters. They did not show how to keep positive characters from being lured into negative behavior (Personal Communication, May 19, 2015).

Younger male interviewees talked about how Mpho emerged as a positive role model for young women. However Mareledi “did not provide a male version of Mpho” (Personal Communication, May 22, 2015). While Philip did not engage in negative behavior, the drama did not put an emphasis on him as a positive male character. He only appeared in scenes where Masego was involved.

As much as past interventions in entertainment education have emphasized women empowerment as a way forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS, findings from the current study emphasize the importance of interventions targeted towards men in addition to traditional interventions aimed at women empowerment. An older female interviewee said, “lack of positive male role models in the serial drama has left many young men with no option but to model the negative characters” (Personal Communication, May 18, 2015).
Worse, the negative characters tend to portray a curative approach to HIV/AIDS rather than a preventative approach. Depicting men as irresponsible but hopefully redeemable members of society is not an effective way to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic for two reasons: First, preventing HIV/AIDS is always preferable to managing HIV/AIDS. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Second, negative characters do not “speak” to men. Of course, men may see other men in these negative depictions (just as women recognize these male behaviors), but men are unlikely to see themselves in such characters since associating with negative characters is psychologically implausible. Peirce (2011) conducted a reception study of the Makgabaneng serial radio drama to gain a better understanding of how citizens of Botswana make sense of the entertainment-education drama. Peirce’s findings show that when discussing negative behaviors, respondents consistently cited the behaviors of others, not themselves. Audience members naturally avoided applying the Makgabaneng narrative to make sense of negative behaviors in their personal lives. Peirce (2011) concluded that audience members find it hard to see themselves in negative characters, and as a result reflect on the negative behaviors of only those around them.

There is no doubt that men must be vested in the fight against HIV/AIDS; they are disproportionately responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Dramatic productions designed to reach men must therefore provide positive role models in addition to depicting negative characters—male characters who question and resist the culturally pervasive, socially acceptable and often self-serving behaviors which lead to the transmission of HIV/AIDS. In addition to depicting negative characters who become
slaves to their own fears and desires, the drama needs to portray male characters overcoming their own weaknesses. By presenting negative male characters without distinctly positive dramatic foils, *Mareledi* foregoes its entertainment-education potential. By not balancing positive and negative male characters, it ends up, by default, appearing to endorse the very sociocultural beliefs that encourage men to engage in unhealthy sexual behaviors. Rather than depicting the rewarding challenges of the “high road,” the drama tends to depict only the adverse failings of the “low road.” As one younger male interviewee said,

There is no use showing someone the problem without showing possible solutions because it will be just like promoting the problem without giving relevant solution (Personal Communication, April, 15, 2015).

For instance, Botshelo, an abusive husband who eventually infected his wife with HIV/AIDS, ended up in jail for selling illegal drugs to minors. Rra T, a successful businessman who engaged in multiple sexual relationships and intergenerational sexual relationships, ended up infected with HIV/AIDS and losing everything he had. Moses, a bank manager, approved a loan for a customer that did not qualify as a favor for his coworker Marry in exchange for sex. Moses’ actions eventually cost him his family and marriage. These are all examples of negative male characters that are not complemented by contrasting positive male characters. Such pessimistic depictions can counter-productively inspire apathetic resignation, not redoubled resolve. Just as much as women need to be empowered to become economically more independent, men need to be reminded that they too must play a positive role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. But
unlike women, their success is more contingent upon stopping what they are doing rather than “empowerment.” At best, they must be “empowered” to refrain from “business as usual.” And this is why depicting positive male characters is so critical. Without clear and positive depictions, not only do male viewers fail to associate themselves with the male characters, the various male characters seem like the same person in different scenes. They engage in negative behaviors and end up infected with HIV/AIDS. And even when they do change, the drama does not focus on the psychological or emotional transformation this required—or enables. Mareledi’s predominantly negative depiction of men is neither a true reflection—nor inspiring depiction—of life in Botswana. In this way, the drama fails its charge by negatively stereotyping men. Here is how one older male participant expressed it:

I feel sorry for all the male characters in the drama. I am very sensitive to issues of gender in Mareledi where men are portrayed negatively. HIV/AIDS intervention scripts are often written such that males play an abusive part whereas women never play the part of an abusive spouse. However, there are women who abuse their spouse in Botswana. Women are often portrayed as good people going through bad experiences with men. That is a problem in itself because what I am getting is that they are trying to address gender violence issues. I think there should be variances from women’s perspective. I know of women who verbally abuse their partner, which leads to emotional abuse (Personal Communication, April 13, 2015).
A better intervention would not be so susceptible to stereotypically portraying men as “hopeless” members of society. And, by the same token, it might include women who are abusive. Either way, cardboard cut-out characters do not serve entertainment-education interventions well. They may be amusing and even superficially realistic in some ways, but such depictions are unlikely to win hearts and minds. Such characters are ill-suited role models for self-evaluation, self-criticism, and self-improvement.

Information Fatigue

Another key issue that emerged from audience members’ responses was HIV/AIDS information fatigue. Audience members suggested that Batswana are already so repeatedly targeted by HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages that HIV/AIDS information overload might help explain why low-risk perceptions and resistance to behavioral change persists, especially among older men. Bawden and Robinson (2009) submit that health information fatigue occurs when the information received by audience members becomes a boring burden rather than actionable information. Throughout the interviews, viewers consistently talked about HIV/AIDS fatigue as an important factor to consider when designing HIV/AIDS intervention programs in Botswana. They believe that some Batswana do not take the disease seriously anymore as a result of HIV/AIDS message fatigue. An older male interviewee said, “People are fed up of HIV/AIDS messages. They already know all about HIV/AIDS, multiple concurrent partnerships, safe male circumcision and intergenerational sex” (Personal Communication, May 13, 2015). The older male Audience members blamed the information fatigue on redundant HIV/AIDS information.
They described HIV/AIDS entertainment-education interventions in Botswana as “predictable and redundant.” One older male interviewee said, “Producers of edutainment programs need to be more creative when designing interventions. HIV/AIDS interventions in Botswana always present the same information the same way” (Personal Communication, April 24, 2015). When asked what they have learned from Mareledi about HIV/AIDS, an older male interviewee said, “I did not learn anything from Mareledi. It is information I already know” (Personal Communication, May 7, 2015). As stated in Chapter 1, the government of Botswana has been at the forefront of the fight against HIV/AIDS. It has spent several million U.S. dollars to sponsor HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and make ARV drug treatment free. Unfortunately, the abundance of HIV/AIDS awareness information may have resulted in citizens becoming desensitized. Nevertheless, female interviewees argue that while it is true that HIV/AIDS interventions have become redundant, people are still responsible for their health and the decisions that affect their health. Viewers talked about how Masego, a nursing student engaged in intergenerational and multiple concurrent sexual relationships despite her knowledge about the importance of healthy sexual behavior. By virtue of being a nursing student, audience members assumed she is very knowledgeable about sexual health. A young female interviewee said,

Many of the people who contract HIV/AIDS are like Masego. They are educated individuals who know the dangers of unprotected sex and a promiscuous lifestyle. They are bombarded with information about HIV/AIDS but they still engage in unhealthy sexual behaviors (Personal Communication, April 4, 2015).
An older male interviewee added: “Regardless of how much information we get, the environment we live in influences how we behave at the end of the day” (Personal Communication, April 5, 2015).

The second interviewee’s response suggests that social and cultural beliefs still have preeminence over entertainment-education messages. Social and cultural beliefs, some of which actually promote the spread of HIV/AIDS, appear to have built a wall between audience members and entertainment-education interventions, blunting the message. If that is indeed the case, then penetrating this wall is a critical challenge.

Moreover, fans of *Mareledi* also believe the introduction of free ARV drugs has led Batswana to accept HIV/AIDS as part of their daily lives. Interestingly, discussions from both male-only focus groups in this study reveal that older male audience members of *Mareledi* believe young Batswana women are more concerned about becoming pregnant than being infected with the disease: “Girls no longer fear HIV/AIDS because they know there is life after being infected with HIV/AIDS. The idea is that HIV/AIDS can be managed and controlled” (Personal Communication, May 10, 2015).

Another older male interviewee said,

These days, young women are not scared of getting infected with HIV/AIDS. When they engage in a sexual relationship, they are more concerned about getting pregnant than they are about being infected with HIV/AIDS (Personal Communication, May 16, 2015).

Some older male interviewees commented that *Mareledi* also seems to promote this belief by minimizing the risk perception through several key characters. Audience
members discussed how the majority of Mareledi characters that get infected with HIV/AIDS continue to live normal lives after starting treatment. Masego was the most talked about character exemplifying how Mareledi seems to promote the idea of HIV/AIDS as just another manageable disease. Masego changed her lifestyle for the better after being infected. She married her longtime boyfriend and continued to pursue her academic ambitions. Older Male audience members suggest that Mareledi should create a balance in its presentation of the consequences of being infected as well as the hope after being infected.

As one viewer remarked,

People are no longer afraid of being infected with HIV/AIDS. They are more afraid of cancer than they are of HIV/AIDS (Personal Communication, May 15, 2015).

So while it is true that people can now live very normal lives after being infected with HIV/AIDS (so long medical regimens are followed)—and Mareledi viewers know this—these pharmaceutical successes appear to have devolved toward complacency.

Audience members’ responses suggest that HIV/AIDS message fatigue is a contributing factor for low risk perception. One older male interviewee said, “HIV/AIDS campaigns have become monotonous. We are numb to HIV/AIDS. There is no more fear” (Personal Communication, May 14, 2015). When asked what they believe should be done to counteract message fatigue, respondents highlighted the need to change the focus of the interventions.
There is a need to focus more on the morality than just on how HIV/AIDS is transmitted and prevented. That’s what we learn at school (Personal Communication, April 7, 2015).

However, Adewusi (2004) argues that educating adolescents and youth in areas of HIV and AIDS prevention using didactic methods has proven to be ineffective. However, some respondents insist that the government of Botswana should intensify its efforts towards HIV/AIDS awareness. Other participants contend that intensified efforts in the fight against AIDS would not make much of a difference because the nation is already fatigued with HIV/AIDS education. Overall, as a result of a combination of successful treatment and message fatigue, people have come to accept HIV/AIDS as part of their daily lives.

Summary

*Mareledi* audience members understand and interpret the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in the serial drama based on their assessment of narrative probability and fidelity through a humanistic perspective. Mareledi audience members, especially female audience members and younger male audience members, recognize the cultural and social limitations that influence characters’ actions and they try to negotiate their own lives within such limitations. In essence, audience members of Mareledi think progressively and focus on how to address issues in order to improve their lives. However, older male audience members still adhere to the sociocultural beliefs that suppress and disempower women.
Mareledi’ audience members identify with the characters in the drama in relation to the health messages by empathizing with the characters. Through this identification with characters, viewers are drawn into the message embedded in the drama.

Several factors emerged as part of the audience members’ assessment of narrative fidelity. Viewers highlighted gender imbalances as a key issue in their sense-making process. Older men have the power to influence behavioral change, but they are resistant to change while women want to influence behavioral change but they have little social power to do so. Viewers communicated the need for culturally relevant interventions targeted towards men in the fight against the pandemic. Women have adopted HIV/AIDS prevention messages; older men have not. The painful irony is that the people who have internalized the message are largely powerless to implement it while the men who have the power to bring about change do not exercise such power.

Viewers also expressed the need for more positive role models in the drama and particularly positive male role models. Understandably, predominantly negative depictions of males in Mareledi are ineffective to involve men in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Finally, findings show that audience members are knowledgeable about the core causes of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. However, viewers expressed HIV/AIDS message fatigue as an important factor to consider when discussing entertainment interventions in Botswana. They believe HIV/AIDS message fatigue has contributed to a lower risk perception of HIV/AIDS. In the next chapter, the key findings presented here are related to the standing research literature.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a summary of the study, discusses findings, and draws conclusions from the findings presented in Chapter 4. It draws from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and provides a discussion of the implications for action and further research with the objective of better understanding how audience members of entertainment-education interventions make sense of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages. The current chapter will conclude with a review of the limitations of the study.

Summary of Results

The goal of this study was to learn how audience members understand and interpret HIV/AIDS messages in Mareledi based on their assessment of narrative probability and fidelity. Viewers of Mareledi understand and interpret the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages in Mareledi through a humanistic lens.

Secondly, Mareledi’ audience members identify with the characters in the drama by empathizing with the characters. Through this identification with characters, viewers are drawn into the messages embedded in the drama.

Numerous factors emerged from audience members’ assessment of narrative fidelity. First, Fans of the serial drama expressed gender power imbalances as an important issue. Women want to influence change but they are not empowered to do so while men have the power to influence change but, ironically, they resist doing so.

Second, a predominantly negative representation of males emerged as a major point of discussion among audience members. Viewers felt that Mareledi depicts men
negatively, but this dramatic orientation is not conducive to effective messaging to men. Given that men’s behaviors are critical to the fight against HIV/AIDS and Mareledi is failing to speak to half of its audience, the persistence of counterproductive beliefs and behaviors among men is no less predictable than it is frustrating.

Third, audience members are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. However, audience members discussed HIV/AIDS message fatigue at length as a barrier that needs to be addressed in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Botswana. The nation of Botswana has been so saturated by HIV/AIDS messages over the past several years, that the efficacy of entertainment-education messages, especially among men, has been reduced.

Interpretation of Key Findings

A Humanistic Perspective

Viewers of Mareledi understand and interpret the messages embedded in the drama through a humanistic perspective. The humanistic approach holds the fundamental belief in people’s capacity for reflective consciousness. The human ability to have reflective consciousness makes it possible for people to have self-determination and freedom (Rice and Greenberg, 1992). The humanistic approach also believes that the human capacity for choice, free will, and self-determination are crucial aspects of human functioning (Schneider, Bugental and Pierson 2001). Female audience members of Mareledi see themselves as trapped by their social and cultural limitations. Audience members, more specifically younger female and male audience members, refuse to adopt values, beliefs, or culture or follow doctrines they are not convinced about. Younger
Mareledi female and male audience members were vocal about some of the social and cultural beliefs and practices they do not agree with, such as women who withstand constant domestic abuse. They questioned and reasoned with characters’ actions and decision with the aim to pave what they believe to be a reasonable way forward toward a healthy HIV/AIDS-free Botswana. Schneider, Bugental, and Pierson (2001) submit that humanists believe in making reasoned decisions. Humanists believe reasoned decisions allow for the rational settlement of differences. They acquire new ways of looking at themselves and the world through enquiry and reasoned decisions.

A humanistic approach encourages self-exploration instead of behavioral analyses of human relations (Rice and Greenberg, 1992). Female audience members and younger male audience members reflected on their behaviors and their role in the fight against HIV/AIDS through their interaction with the narrative. They also explored their capabilities as agents of change by negotiating with the status quo, and the social cultural beliefs that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS. These findings corroborate with past studies that suggest audience members of entertainment-education interventions negotiate the meaning of embedded messages based on their social and cultural influences (Cardey, Garforth, Govender, and Dyll-Myklebust, 2013). Moreover, by interpreting entertainment-education narratives through a humanistic perspective, audience members engage with the messages to effect behavioral and social change. These findings also demonstrate that humanity is not static but rather, it is progressive. People’s beliefs and values evolve based on their experiences and vision of the future. Macy and Johnstone (2012) suggest that people can achieve social change through a transformational mindset.
A positive, change-focused mindset can strengthen the audience members’ capacity to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic with resilience.

*Gender Power Imbalance*

An important issue that emerged from this study is gender power imbalances. Older men are resistant to behavioral change though they have the social and economic power to influence change, and women want to influence behavior change but they do not have the social and economic power to do so. Botswana culture still tolerates men’s unhealthy sexual behaviors and socioeconomic inequities still undermine women’s efforts. Cockcroft et al. (2010) suggest that future entertainment-education interventions should focus on women empowerment by providing alternative means of financial freedom and self-worth. And while important, it is important to realize that in this case, women are, as it were, “leading indicators” of social change. It is time the men—the lagging indicators—catch up. Audience members talked about how older men are resistant to HIV/AIDS interventions and the need to design interventions that are tailored towards men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Gilbert and Selikow (2011) argue that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is “increasingly being feminized” as new HIV/AIDS infections occur among and affect mostly women. According to the authors, recognizing HIV/AIDS as a gendered phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa is a step forward in the right direction. But gender has multiple facets and those factors that affect men’s participation in the fight against HIV/AIDS also require attention. A one-sided “women empowerment” approach neglects the fact that empowering women does not
directly address how men must change their behavior. If men are the primary vector of HIV/AIDS, then they—and their issues must be addressed head-on.

While the majority of respondents for this study are educated individuals, there were variations in how older male audience members responded to the HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention message in Mareledi compared to the majority of the women and younger male audience members. Findings show that all female viewers and younger male viewers of Mareledi constantly negotiated with the social cultural beliefs and behaviors that empower men to spread HIV/AIDS and limit women’s ability to fight against the pandemic. However, older male audience members still harbor social cultural beliefs that influence the spread of HIV/AIDS. These findings corroborate with findings from other studies that suggest that some Batswana are implicitly controlled by the socially dominant values and belief system. This belief system influences values, and knowledge about health messages in Botswana (Somma and Bodiang, 2003). It is clear that social and cultural influences that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana are still very dominant among older Batswana men regardless of the fact that they are educated and knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. These findings are interesting because past studies have suggested that educated individuals in Botswana and sub-Saharan Africa are more likely to adhere to HIV/AIDS prevention messages than those that are not educated (Zuilkowski and Jukes, 2012; Letamo, 2007). Findings from the current study suggest that culture has preeminence over HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention intervention messages among older educated male audience members. Indeed, cultural beliefs continue to implicitly control their behaviors. That is why this study
proposes the inclusion of men in the fight against HIV/AIDS in future entertainment education interventions.

**Negative Depiction of Males**

Programs like *Mareledi* need to do more to involve men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The serial drama has failed to include sufficient positive male role models who engender respect and motivate change. The majority of male characters in the drama, including Rra T, Borahman, Botshelo, and Moses, depict promiscuous and abusive lifestyles and they never fully transition to living positive lifestyles until it is too late. They tend to adopt positive lifestyles only after being infected and then continue to live “normal” lives. Such a curative approach to behavior change can be counter-productive for it reduces the risk perception of HIV/AIDS. Taylor-Seehafer and Rew (2000) suggest interventions that incorporate keys to prevention are successful in reducing sexual risk through increasing self-efficacy to use condoms. The lack of positive role models leaves male viewers with little to relate to save resigning themselves to the negative behaviors depicted in the drama.

Mahoney (2013) conducted an audience-reception study to learn about gender representations found in the *Makgabaneng* entertainment-education radio drama in Botswana. The overall outcome of the study based on 42 in-depth interviews with fans of the drama, indicated that male characters were construed as irresponsible, uneducated, and dependent on society. Mahoney (2013) proposed that producers of the drama address this inequity by producing interventions that have a balanced number of positive and negative female and male characters. Likewise, based on the audience responses
reviewed here, Mareledi needs to achieve a better balance between positive and negative female and male characters. More specifically, Mareledi should focus more closely on incorporating more positive characters—especially positive male characters. This will also reduce the biased depiction of men in Mareledi. Negative characters should be contrasted with positive role models to avail audience members an opportunity to identify with more positive lifestyles.

HIV/AIDS Information Fatigue

Interviewees constantly referred to HIV/AIDS information fatigue as an important factor to consider when discussing interventions. They noted that Batswana are fatigued to the point of apathy by HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention messages and, as a result, have come to accept the pandemic as part of their daily lives and identity. Plattner (2015) explored the extent to which young people in Botswana experience HIV/AIDS information fatigue. Her study also explored the extent to which HIV/AIDS information fatigue is associated with risky sexual behavior. Plattner (2015) defined HIV/AIDS information fatigue as a state of mind in which an individual feels flooded with HIV/AIDS information, has lost interest in HIV/AIDS matters, and is not motivated to prevent HIV/AIDS infection. Outcomes of her study show that information fatigue was not associated with risky sexual behavior. However, when analyzing only sexually active informants, outcomes show that respondents who reported not using a condom at their last sexual intercourse rated higher in HIV/AIDS prevention fatigue than those who had used a condom. This is why Plattner (2015) concluded that HIV/AIDS message fatigue might be increasing the risk of HIV/AIDS infection among sexually active youth.
Considering the fact that Botswana has been recognized internationally for being proactive in the fight against HIV/AIDS, it is almost inevitable that citizens will eventually fatigue from being targeted by so many campaigns. Messages about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention are unlikely to be effective until information fatigue is addressed. In cases like these, more does not simply mean better. A disheartening response from some of the viewers about their impressions of Mareledi is that the show is “just another HIV/AIDS drama” (Personal Communication, May 3, 2015). Such perceptions are debilitating for HIV/AIDS entertainment-education campaigns. When viewers see the drama as heavy-handed health education more than engaging entertainment, the dual goals of entertainment-education have been jeopardized. Indeed, this is one way of conceptualizing message fatigue: when the balance of entertainment-education is perceived to be more education than entertainment. And, of course, striking the right balance is a perpetual “holy grail” that even when found, must always shortly be re-found. Understanding this dynamic is key for future interventions. Future entertainment-education interventions in Botswana have to be continually rebranded and re-presented.

One way to do this is to widen and vary the scope of the underlying messages from being exclusively about HIV/AIDS to other important issues. This way, viewers will not have the stale perception that the intervention programs are always and only about AIDS. Instead they will be able to identify with the narratives and characters beyond HIV/AIDS. Audience members’ perception of the narratives is paramount to their interaction with the narrative and ultimately their behavior change. Findings from the
current study regarding message fatigue reveal how entertainment-education intervention is an ever-evolving strategy that requires producers to be innovative in their design and implementation. It is important that entertainment-education interventions are kept current, relevant, and interesting.

Theoretical Implications

This study demonstrates that the narrative paradigm theory is useful in learning how audience members of entertainment-education interventions in Botswana understand and interpret messages in narrative. Application of the theory reveals details of how audience members assess different aspects of a narrative as part of their sense-making process, and such findings can inform future entertainment-education interventions. This study therefore supports the use of narrative paradigm theory as the theoretical underpinning for future audience reception studies in entertainment education in Botswana.

One of the aims of this study is to explain how audience members’ involvement with narratives shapes their understanding of embedded entertainment-education messages. The *Mareledi* narrative provides a platform upon which viewers can make sense of the embedded messages by reasoning with the narrative based on their own sociocultural and personal experiences, retelling their own versions of the story based on what they believe is relevant and important to themselves. This means that audience members will inevitably agree with some aspects of the drama and disagree with other aspects for reasons that can be unique to each viewer. In any case, the varied responses are all considered interpretations that can reveal important insights to improving future
interventions. In understanding and interpreting the HIV/AIDS messages embedded in the drama, audience members were involved with and expressed empathy towards the characters.

Audience members’ interpretation of the Mareledi narratives was not passive; they actively judged what they deemed to be the important issues. In this regard, Mareledi audience members could be observed applying the techniques of the negotiated reading approach characteristic of the encoding/decoding model of Hall (1980) when interacting with the narrative. These findings demonstrate that viewers’ familiarity with the cultural context of Mareledi is important for viewers’ assessment of narrative fidelity. Narrative paradigm theory allows researchers to understand and interpret audience members’ situated experience of Mareledi by asking questions that prompt viewers to retell their stories. These narratives encourage participants to impose meaning on the current status of HIV/AIDS in Botswana in relation to HIV/AIDS interventions.

Findings from this study demonstrate that using audience-centered theories and approaches in audience-reception research can stimulate audience members to uncover important issues about their experience with the narrative that the study may have not considered. This step may prove to be a difficult task to accomplish with an approach that focuses solely on measuring the effects of only the “intended” messages.

Implications for Practice

This study has opened several new lines of entertainment-education inquiry which can help minimize low-risk perceptions and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS
transmission and prevention. Results from this study provide new insights on how audience members process and make sense of entertainment-education messages. First, the study recommends interventions targeted towards men in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Though women are responsive to HIV/AIDS interventions, men still trail behind in adopting positive behavior change. Second, the study recommends the use of more positive male role models. The majority of male characters in the drama depict abusive and promiscuous lifestyles and never fully transition to living positive lifestyles until it is too late. Finally, the study indicates that many Batswana have reached HIV/AIDS information saturation. It proposes that future interventions and research in Botswana should consider HIV/AIDS information fatigue in the design and implementation of interventions. Future interventions should creatively minimize HIV/AIDS information fatigue by presenting HIV/AIDS as the underlying theme in addition to other medical, social, and cultural issues that affect Batswana in the fight against the pandemic.

Recommendations for Additional Research

Further audience-reception studies of Mareledi are needed based upon larger and more demographically balanced sampling. Because Mareledi is a depiction of both urban and rural Botswana, it would be beneficial to learn how audience members of Mareledi in rural Botswana understand and interpret HIV/AIDS messages in the drama compared to audience members in urban Botswana, especially considering the fact that urban Botswana has a higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS compared to rural Botswana even though there is higher knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention in urban Botswana (NACA, 2012). Findings from the current study shed some light on this issue
by showing that while both younger and older women in urban Botswana are responding positively to HIV/AIDS interventions, older educated men are resistant to entertainment education interventions. Instead, their beliefs are rooted in sociocultural practices that influence the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana. An appreciation of the similarities and differences between how younger and older male and female audience members in rural and urban Botswana interpret HIV/AIDS messages in the drama can help E-E scholars to better understand resistance to entertainment education in Botswana. A better understanding of this resistance to entertainment education can be a step forward towards minimizing misconceptions and low-risk perceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention in Botswana specifically, and have the potential to positively impact the efficacy of entertainment-education interventions around the world.

Limitations

This study is an example of an audience-reception study in entertainment-education research. It is an example of a research study that focuses on how audience members understand entertainment education messages through their involvement with the narrative. It is therefore important to recognize some of the key limitations of the study.

First, the study relied on self-identifying fans of Mareledi within Gaborone and the surrounding areas as sources of data. Fans of the drama participated in focus group interviews and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Those not self-declared fans of the drama were not included in this study. The sample was, then, necessarily limited, and therefore, does not address how citizens of Botswana generally understand and interpret
the HIV/AIDS messages in the drama. Instead, it focuses on how fans of Mareledi interpret the HIV/AIDS messages in the drama.

Second, the sampling of participants was geographically restricted to the capital city of Botswana and surrounding areas. The sample population consisted of mainly educated urban residents of Gaborone. However, because Mareledi is a reflection of both urban and rural life in Botswana, a more extensive study would ideally include both urban and rural dwellers in order to achieve a demographically more comprehensive and balanced sampling.

Third, all in-depth interviews and focus group interviews were audio recorded. Informants consented to being recorded prior to the interviews. However, some potential informants did not participate because they were not comfortable having their opinions about the drama being recorded (or perhaps they were just uncomfortable with being recorded). Results of the study should be interpreted in light of these restrictions on the collection of primary data.

Conclusion

It is evident from the current research as well as previous work by Perlson (2013), Letamo (2011), and Lecrec-Madlala (2008) that while the messages are being heard—arguably to the point of repetitive exhaustion—they are not being enacted. The message is marginalized by larger sociocultural forces related to gender inequalities, blunted by stereotypical and unappealing male role models and diluted by information fatigue. Both entertainment and education are, of course, central to entertainment-education initiatives, but the real goal is to change behavior. And this seems to be the problem. For while
influencing minds is no doubt a necessary condition for changing behavior, it is proving frustratingly insufficient due to a combination of practical, social and psychological factors—some of which are within the purview of program developers (counteracting message fatigue and reimagining male characters) while others are symptomatic of less tractable social ills (gender imbalances within Botswana society). Re-approaching entertainment-education programming from a different perspective can help. Pursuing an audience-centered approach to entertainment-education programming means that viewers become the experts and the experts become better observers. Such an approach provides an avenue through which producers of interventions can better understand how their audience members make sense of the HIV/AIDS messages embedded in their interventions. When producers better understand how audience members make sense of themselves, they are positioned to formulate and deliver messages that do more than just “entertain” and “educate” but activate change.
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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were your impressions about the drama?

2. What did you like about the drama?

3. What did you dislike about the drama?

4. How believable is the storyline overall?
   a. Is there anything that is not believable about the story? Explain
   b. Were there any missing links in the structure of the drama?

5. Which of the characters are most believable? Explain
   a. Which characters are least believable? Explain

6. Do you feel empathetic towards any of the characters? Explain
   a. Who is your favorite character in the television drama? What do you like about the character?
   b. Which character do you dislike the most in the television drama? What do you not like about the character?

7. What have you learned from Mareledi about sexual health and HIV/AIDS?

8. Does the message in Mareledi reflect your values, beliefs or experiences? Does Mareledi reflect the world you live in? How or how not?

9. What are some of the behaviors that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana? (e.g., the key drivers of HIV/AIDS in Botswana)

10. How are these behaviors being addressed in Mareledi?

11. What are some of the behaviors people engage in that may put them at risk for HIV/AIDS?
12. What are some of the health behaviors you have learned from the Mareledi serial television drama that you are applying now to your everyday life?

13. What role do you believe gender plays in the spread of HIV/AIDS in Botswana?

14. How is gender and HIV/AIDS being addressed in Mareledi?

Summary

If I were to ask you what Mareledi is all about, what would you say?

a. What is the main message in Mareledi?

The main purpose of this study was for me to learn how you interpret and understand the HIV/AIDS prevention message in Mareledi. Is there anything else you would like to share with regards to this?
APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM


Researcher: Shumie Odirile

You are being asked to participate in a research study. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of the research study

This study is being done to learn more about how audience members of the *Mareledi* serial television drama understand and interpret the HIV/AIDS messages embedded in the drama. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your experience with *Mareledi* serial television drama in a one-on-one personal interview setting. You should not participate in this study if you are not familiar with *Mareledi* or are under the age of 18. Your participation will last approximately 1 hour.

What you should know about a research study?

- Whether or not you take part is up to you
- You can choose not to take part
You can agree to take part now and later change your mind

Whatever you decide will not be held against you

Feel free to ask all of the questions you want before you decide

Participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue your participation at any time

There are no adverse consequences to withdrawing from the research

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts anticipated.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you. However, this study is important to science/society because it will help us understand how Mareledi’s audience makes sense of HIV/AIDS messages embedded in the entertainment education serial television drama. Such knowledge can inform future entertainment education interventions and research.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researcher, Shumie Thapelo Odirile. No identifiable information will be on the final analysis. Participants will be audiotaped and the recordings will be stored in the researcher’s password-protected hard drive. They will be kept locked for one year before they are destroyed. Participants will also be asked to use fake names during the interview to protect their confidentiality. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
• Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

• Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact *Shumie Thapelo Odirile*
Shumie@yahoo.com

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• You have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered

• You have been informed of any potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.

• You understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study

• You are 18 years of age or older

• Your participation in this research is completely voluntary

• You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Signature_____________________________ Date______
Printed Name________________________________________
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM


Researcher: Shumie Odirile

You are being asked to participate in a research study. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study.

You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of the research study

This study is being done to learn more about how audience members of *Mareledi* serial television drama understand and interpret HIV/AIDS messages embedded in the drama. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be in a group of approximately 10 – 12 participants. There will be a facilitator who will ask questions and facilitate the discussion. You will be asked to answer questions regarding your experience with *Mareledi* serial television drama in a discussion group setting. You should not participate in this study if you are not familiar with *Mareledi* or are under the age of 18.

Your participation in the study will last approximately 2 hours.
What you should know about a research study:

- Whether or not you take part is up to you
- You can choose not to take part
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind
- Whatever you decide it will be not be held against you
- Feel free to ask all the question you want before you decide
- Participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. There are no adverse consequences to withdrawing from the research

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you. However, this study is important to science/society because it will help us understand how Mareledi’s audience makes sense of HIV/AIDS messages embedded in the entertainment education serial television drama. Such knowledge can inform future entertainment education intervention programs.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researcher, Shumie Thapelo Odirile. No identifiable information will be on the final analysis. Participants will be audiotaped and the recordings will be stored in the researcher’s password-protected hard drive. They will be kept locked for one year before they are destroyed. Participants will also be asked to use fake names during the interview to protect their confidentiality.
Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

• Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;

• Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees research at OU.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact **Shumie Thapelo Odirile**, Shumie@yahoo.com

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• You have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered

• You have been informed of any potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.

• You understand that Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study

• You are 18 years of age or older

• Your participation in this research is completely voluntary

• You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the
study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature ________________________________ Date _____

Printed Name ________________________________
APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL LETTER (OHIO UNIVERSITY)

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

Project Title: An Audience Reception Study of 'Mareiedi,' an HIV/AIDS Entertainment-Education Serial Television Drama in Botswana: Understanding How Audience Members Make Sense of Entertainment Education Content through Their Involvement with the Narrative

Primary Investigator: Shumie Thapelo R. Odirile
Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Steve Howard

Department: Media Arts

Shelly Rex, B.S., Compliance Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date: 1/9/15
Expiration Date: 1/8/16

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
APPENDIX E: PERMISSION TO CONDUCTION RESEARCH IN BOTSWANA

REFERENCE NO: PPME 13/18/1 IX (394)  
15 April 2015
Health Research and Development Division
Notification of IRB Review: New application

Shamie Tshapelo Odirile
25 Elliot Street
Athens Ohio
45701, USA

AN AUDIENCE RECEPTION STUDY OF 'MARELELI' AN HIV/AIDS ENTERTAINMENT EDUCATION SERIAL TELEVISION DRAMA IN BOTSWANA: UNDERSTANDING HOW AUDIENCE MEMBERS MAKE SENSE OF ENTERTAINMENT EDUCATION CONTENT THROUGH THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE NARRATIVE

HRU Approval Date: 14 April 2015
HRU Expiration Date: 13 April 2016
HRU Review Type: HRU reviewed
Risk Determination: Approved

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for submitting new application for the above referenced protocol. The permission is granted to conduct the study.

This permit does not however give you authority to collect data from the selected sites without prior approval from the management. Consent from the identified individuals should be obtained at all times.

The research should be conducted as outlined in the approved proposal. Any changes to the approved proposal must be submitted to the Health Research and Development Division in the Ministry of Health for consideration and approval.
Furthermore, you are requested to submit at least one hardcopy and an electronic copy of the report to the Health Research, Ministry of Health within 3 months of completion of the study. Approval is for academic fulfillment only. Copies should also be submitted to all other relevant authorities.

**Continuing Review**

In order to continue work on this study (including data analysis) beyond the expiry date, submit a Continuing Review Form for Approval at least three (3) months prior to the protocol’s expiration date. The Continuing Review Form can be obtained from the Health Research Division Office (HRDD), Office No. 7A.7 or Ministry of Health website: www.moh.gov.bw or can be requested via e-mail from Mr. Kgomoito Molthanka, e-mail address: kgmmlthanka@gov.bw. As a courtesy, the HRDD will send you a reminder email about eight (8) weeks before the lapse date, but failure to receive it does not affect your responsibility to submit a timely Continuing Report form.

**Amendments**

During the approval period, if you propose any change to the protocol such as its funding source, recruiting materials, or consent documents, you must seek HRDC approval before implementing it. Please summarize the proposed change and the rationale for it in the amendment form available from the Health Research Division Office (HRDD), Office No. 7A.7 or Ministry of Health website: www.moh.gov.bw or can be requested via e-mail from Mr. Kgomoito Molthanka, e-mail address: kgmmlthanka@gov.bw. In addition, submit three copies of an updated version of your original protocol application showing all proposed changes in bold or “track changes”.

**Reporting**

Other events which must be reported promptly in writing to the HRDC include:

- Suspension or termination of the protocol by you or the grantor
- Unexpected problems involving risk to subjects or others
- Adverse events, including unanticipated or anticipated but severe physical harm to subjects.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. P. Khulumani at pkhulumani@gov.bw, Tel +267-3914467 or Lemphi Moremi at lamoremi@gov.bw or Tel: +267-3632754. Thank you for your cooperation and your commitment to the protection of human subjects in research.

Yours faithfully

P. Khulumani

For Permanent Secretary

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**Vision:** Model of Excellence in Quality Health Services

**Values:** Botha, Equity, Timeliness, Customer Focus, Teamwork, Accountability