

A photograph of a university campus featuring several multi-story, modern-style buildings with balconies. In the foreground, there are lush green trees and a paved area. A semi-circular structure, possibly a pool or a covered walkway, is visible in the middle ground. The sky is bright with some clouds.

Queering the family dialogue through entertainment education: Experiences of same-sex youth

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Presentation outline

- Same-sex identities in post-apartheid South Africa
- Background of Families and same-sex youth
- Entertainment Education & Queer dialogues
- Methodology Brief
- Findings
- What do parents say when queer scenes appear
- How do young people with same-sex identity experience it



Same-sex Identities in Post-apartheid S.A

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (DoJ, 1996), policies and established commissions affirm and protect sexual diversity
- Greater visibility of same-sex identities in public space
- Misalignment between Social Values & Constitutional Imperatives
- Society still navigate within strong patriarchy and masculine scripts
- Those deviating from the norm are vilified, dehumanized, ostracized and the price of living an embraced non-normative identity were fatal for many
- Unequal systemic responses and coverage



Family reactions to same-sex identities

- Family first line of safety, identity, being, values, morality
- The village – biological parents, siblings, extended families, community members, neighbours
- Families emanate from societies with compulsory heteronormative scripts (Religion & Culture)
- Family discussions around sexual diversity is silenced
- Reactions are marked with shock, denial, anger, disappointment
- Breakdown of family relations
- Result in compromised safety, emotional well-being, risky decisions,



Progressive Families

- African identities are embedded in the Ubuntu value framework
- *Ubuntu* , from IsiNguni languages, encapsulates the essence or quality of being human
- We come into a world obligated to others, and those others are obligated to us. We are mutually obligated to support each other on our respective paths to becoming unique and singular persons.
- Young people whose same-sex identities were embraced by family coped better, sustained emotional well-being, felt safer, performed better academically



Entertainment Education and Queer Identities

- Education, Normalization, social cohesion
- Entertainment education has become a tool in disseminating social cohesion messaging.
- Soap operas in particular have been used as a medium to drive the democratic socio-political change and to reshape individual and collective citizenry.
- Messages from soap operas permeate urban and rural spaces, old and young generations as well as the different class levels. It increasingly troubles the discursive beliefs and lifestyles about same-sex identities
- Uzalo – 8.27 million viewer
- Generations – 8.01 million viewers
- Igazi – 1.28 million viewers
- 7de Laan - 1.81 million viewers (lost 400 000 viewers after gay kiss)
- The Queen – 2 million viewers
- Isidingo – 4.5 million viewers



Methodology

- Qualitative study
- Narratives
- Sample – 12 same-sex identity students
- Office is a safe-zone for same-sex identities
- Students always share stories
- Consent (22 – 26 years), anonymity, write to withdraw
- Critical Discourse Analysis



Findings

- **Normalization, heteronormativity & (self) regulation**

“My grandfather always complain about men who change them into women when we watch Uzalo. I am raised by him I will cause his death if I come out. Its best he does not know about me”

Self- identified gay student

“My mother is a devoted Christian. She will watch these soapies but hints in the air – I never gave birth to this confusion. She will than turn to me and so when do we see your girlfriend. Because I live in a different province I always lie that my girlfriend is from Cape Town. I now stopped watching TV with her when I am home. It is just too much. I can only live my live at uni”

Student challenged with personal identity between home and university

*“I remember I was young when Zenzo and Jason was on the old generations. My father vowed that he will disown any of his children who brings shame on the family. My other brothers laughed. I knew I was on my own. All I can do is to stay in the closet”. **Student internalized homophobia***



Queered Families

Same-sex agency; Family ties; Education

“We watched Igazi. There are a lot of issues, from witchcraft to homosexuality. My family accepted my sexual orientation. When the scene of the gay couple came up my mom suddenly asked me when she will see my boyfriend. It was like cold water on my body. I avoided the topic and she said she was serious. I am still coming to terms with it.” Effeminate gay student.

“When I am home, Generations is family time. My one brother is fascinated about Wandile. I think my brother might be gay. I asked me the one day when Wandile appeared if lesbians also use condoms. He always want to know about my life as a lesbian. After the killing Noluvo, a lesbian from Cape Town, he kept begging me no to go to dangerous places. I love him so much”. Butch Lesbian

“When watching Uzalo, my mother told me the ladies in her stockvel asked her about me and how it feels to raise a stabane. They also asked if she is not scared I will die of AIDS. She told them I am her son no matter what. I was so shocked of her knowledge of HIV. She said my son is using a condom and any one can die of AIDS. She never went back to that stockvel. I was so embarrassed cause we don talk about sex and stuff like that”. Effeminate gay student.



Navigation around family dialogue

- **Hidden, uncertainty and well-being**

“I can only live my life at university, I hate holidays because it feels like a prison. The things they say at home especially when we watch those programmes makes me so depressed. Will my family ever accept me. I will find job in a completely different province.”
Heterosexual (straight) acting gay student

“I am in a relationship and sometimes we fight. People normally talk to families when they have problems. Who will I talk to one day. I want to live my life but it is hard with a family like my.” Student with hidden gay identity

“I don’t act butch like most lesbians. My family only know that lesbians are those who want to be men. People always say I am confused. My mother always talks about children and lobola when we watch these soapies. She always says she cares for us and that must be her honour. How will I ever tell her? I must maybe act butch for them to accept me”. Lesbian student



Navigation around family dialogue

- **Self-esteem, normalization, well-being**

“I don’t know if it is these soapies or is my mother just open-minded. She always talks to me about weird stuff. She sometimes irritate me with stuff like foundation to cover my spots in my face and try to pick my clothes. She calls me chommie. You once talked of objectification Sir. I think it watch she is doing”. Effeminate gay student

“ We are only two. My brother and I are close. He takes me to football. We sometimes hang out with the boys. They are cool too. But they treat me as a men. They must understand I am a woman who like other women. I don’t complain cause I feel normal and safe with them.” Butch lesbian

“My mom is crazy. Shem, the women. She one day brought a pack of condoms when she visited the clinic. She said I still have to return the investment from my studies. She makes life so easy for me. She says that I am an adult and I must stop hiding these things from her. It’s not easy but I am getting there. I start to open up about my partner. It is so awkward though.” Self-identified gay student.



Conclusion

- Entertainment education unsilence sexual diversity discourse
- It disrupts and troubles normativity (sexuality, sex and parent – child dialogues)
- Reactions either reinforce fear and stigma or enables safe environments
- Scenes often perpetuate social stigma
- More scenes are needed that empowers families to address compulsory heteronormativity
- Issues of well-being, safety and agency needs more coverage
- Overemphasis on effeminate gay scenes that perpetuate social stigma.
- Scenes that depict lesbian realities need to be screened too



Thank you

