

*'I would be thinking days after that; sitting in a taxi, I would look at people and go 'maybe she has slept with someone I have slept with before':*

The conceptualisation of the sexual network in the drama series, *Intersexions*, and viewers' subsequent engagement with this message

Laura Myers, Alice Clarfelt, and Helen Hajjiannis  
Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE)

---

## **Background**

The producers of *Intersexions* set out to develop a drama series that was original and hard-hitting and unlike any previous HIV and AIDS education production. The series aimed to combine the best of entertainment and education in a bold, compelling and intriguing manner, and broke away from standard television drama conventions. Guided by contemporary research, the series utilised novel and original storytelling to dig deep into the lives and attitudes of ordinary South Africans in order to dig beneath the surface of what is known about the virus and the people most at risk.

The theoretical orientation of the series was based on Kim Witte's *Extended Parallel Process Model* (1992, 1998), which explores the interaction between fear and efficacy. The *'fear-based approach'* was intended to motivate viewers to take action against a threat as reflected within the messages that were communicated in the series. The intention was that viewers would then be motivated to respond to this threat through an evaluation of the possible responses built into the message. Ultimately, the aim was not to create a sense of paralysis from a perception that HIV is inevitable, but to create a situation in which viewers developed a critical understanding that acknowledges the real threat of HIV and to which potential responses could be conceptualised, forming a basis from which action to prevent HIV infection would be taken.

## **Post-broadcast evaluation**

A qualitative post-broadcast evaluation consisting of 12 focus groups and 11 interviews was conducted across six provinces with 87 regular viewers of the series<sup>1</sup>. Participants needed to have watched at least half the episodes (in their entirety) and reflected a mix of urban, peri-urban and rural localities. All discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded and analysed using qualitative data software. The evaluation explored the extent to which regular viewers 1) identified, resonated and internalised the series' educational messages, 2) interrogated existing understandings of themselves and their social world through critical reflection and dialogue, 3) developed new conceptualisations that were conducive to healthier behaviours; and 4) whether a sense of one's personal power to conceive and enact behaviour change was enhanced through their engagement with the series. The evaluative data provided rich insight into how regular viewers engaged with the drama series and the impact it had on individual, interpersonal and social levels in order to determine whether the educational objectives were met.

## **Series objectives**

HIV infection in South Africa predominantly occurs in heterosexual contexts, of which a key factor is multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships.<sup>2</sup> The series focused on this driver of

---

<sup>1</sup> Findings are also taken from a focus group discussion conducted to pre-test *Intersexions* series 2, during June 2012, in which participants spontaneously reflected on episode 26 and its influence on interpersonal communication and behaviour change within their communities.

<sup>2</sup> Halperin & Epstein (2007); Steffenson et al. (2011); Johnson et al. (2009); Pettifor et al. (2007); Rehle et al. (2010)

the epidemic, highlighting the role that the sexual network and concurrent relationships play in HIV transmission to viewers. Overall educational objectives were thus to:

- Highlight the concept of sexual networks and concomitant risk of HIV infection;
- Emphasise how multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships increase HIV risk;
- Provide the science of HIV infectivity and explain why this varies over time;
- Highlight the importance of knowing one's partner well before commencing a sexual relationship.

One of the overall objectives of the qualitative evaluation of the series was to see whether there was evidence of regular audience members reflecting on their lives, sexual histories and relationships and the meanings and messages they took away from the series, and whether that reflection led to any conceptualised or enacted behaviour change in terms of communication with sexual partners, HIV testing, or partner reduction. This paper will review 1) how the series constructed and communicated the sexual network concept, 2) new understandings about the sexual network that viewers took from watching the show, 3) how this particular message was internalised, 4) how these realisations entered social spaces through communication, and 5) led to actual, self-reported instances of behaviour change.

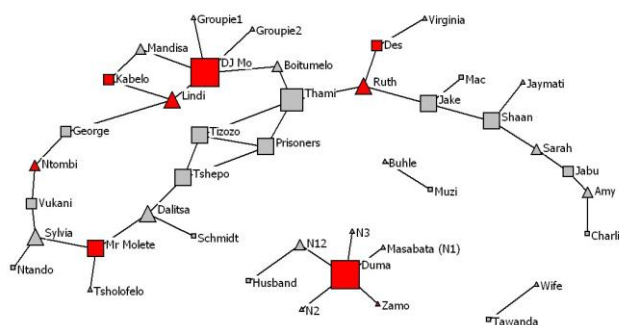
## Results

Overall, the series' aims and educational objectives were met, and often times, exceeded expectations. The sexual network and the centrality of its role in the risk of HIV infection were well understood and engaged with on numerous levels by participants. Closely related to the sexual network, participants were clear about how multiple and concurrent partners increase the risk of HIV infection, even in cases where a person may only have one partner. There was critical engagement with the concepts of knowing one's sexual partner well, including their sexual history. Participants often reflected on their own relationships and the extent to which they have known their sexual partners and/or the quality and type of communication they have with sexual partners.

### The sexual network as a dramatic device

The experimental drama series '*mapped*' out a sexual network over 25 independent, but interrelated episodes that followed an HIV infection chain as it cut across geographic, age, racial and class boundaries. The series began by introducing viewers to the framing story, in which Mandisa discovers that her ex-lover (DJ Mo) is dying of an AIDS-related illness and decides not to tell this to her fiancée, Kabelo, who eventually finds out and leaves her. After the opening episode, the series goes back in time to reveal a complicated sexual network that was set in motion by an affair that occurred five years earlier. Viewers are taken on a journey where they experience the lives and situations of the different characters that place them at risk of contracting HIV. A variety of risk scenarios were highlighted including: infidelity, multiple and concurrent sexual partners, child sexual abuse, intergenerational sex, commercial sex work, alcohol abuse, casual sex, migrant labour and traditional medicine.

Each episode took viewers closer to understanding the interconnected nature of their own sexual networks. The series focused on issues relating to love, sex and relationships and how people's lives intersect in ways they do not even know about; that the moment



someone becomes sexually active, they become part of a sexual network of people who are related, even though they may be complete strangers. Through the use of compelling storylines and characters, it was hoped the series would resonate with audiences and that it would evoke identification with the theme.

The HIV content was perceived to be communicated to audiences in an innovative, original, and gripping manner; the unusual dramatic formula was seen to bring home to viewers knowledge about the sexual network and related risks of multiple and concurrent partnerships.

### ***Repetition of lines***

The series was structured like a mystery that was constructed to answer one central question, *'do you know your lover's lovers?'* (meaning, *'do you know your partner's sexual history?'*). This line was repeated like a refrain at the start of every episode, continually inviting audiences to reflect on their own sexual history and behaviour. Participants were asked about the use of these repetitive lines: when the central character, Mandisa explains while being tested for HIV that she can *'count the amount of people that she has slept with on one hand'*, and the nurse's response, *'but do you know who your previous lovers slept with?'* The repetition of the same scene served to both situate the audience in terms of where they were in the series, as well as force a reflection on their own situation.

Participants appeared to find Mandisa's line about counting her lovers humorous as it revealed her naiveté about HIV. They understood that the problem was not the amount of people Mandisa had slept with but rather, Mandisa's partners' sexual partners, which made her sexual network bigger than she realised. The nurse's response to Mandisa's statement (*'but do you know who your partners have slept with'*) was also widely discussed. It was apparent that participants understood that the nurse's statement referred to the sexual network and that the line prompted viewers to reflect on their own lives. The sexual network was widely regarded as an important concept to communicate:



*Because most of us didn't know... Some of the people still don't know about the sexual network and how it is working so I think it was very enlightening to some of us who saw the episodes. That's why I said that when the doctor told Mandisa 'it's not who you have slept with, it's who your previous lover...' I was like, 'wow, really?' And the story actually explained why the doctor said that (Female, 25-29 years, rural, North West)<sup>3</sup>.*

The sexual network was further constructed in the title sequence that each week spelled out how *'our lives intersect in a vast network that affects us all. In sex, there are no strangers'* and the promotional previews for the series that presented two characters, with the slogan, *'they may not have met, but they are sexual partners'*. The notion that individuals who have not met could still be sexual partners received a good deal of discussion from the participants. Some suggested that they knew exactly what was meant while others admitted they found the line confusing. One participant explained how the last episode helped him make sense of the line: *'I think it was very confusing because I didn't understand how people can be sexual partners when they have never met. And when they showed the last episode; they explained the whole line'*<sup>4</sup>. The line was broadly

<sup>3</sup> Transcript IDI Female 25-29 North West Rural 12 May 2011.txt, 35098,36084

<sup>4</sup> Transcript FGD male, 25-29, urban and peri-urban KwaZulu-Natal, txt, 34226,35159

understood, however, and even considered 'deep' by one participant, who shared how it made her more cognisant of the connections between people and the need to use condoms.<sup>5</sup>

### **The docudrama**

The series closed with a one-hour 'docudrama' which broke form to explicitly reveal the sexual network, the virus's movement between characters, and to educate viewers about specific contexts of risk and what behaviours reduce HIV transmission risks; this included specific information on viral load and acute infection, the period of highest infectivity of HIV. Participants described how this episode revealed the missing connections between characters, and how their stories and sex lives intersect. Participants were able to trace the path of HIV transmission within particular storylines and talked about these with reference to specific episodes and the series as a whole. This was accompanied by an ability to reflect on the sexual network and develop an understanding of how HIV risk is hidden and only knowable through acquaintance with your partner's sexual history.

The docudrama was successful as a culmination of the series, as viewers described attaining a deeper engagement with mainstream messages about HIV risk and sexual behaviours through this episode. Some participants gained insight into the science of HIV infectivity, understanding more about why sexual partners may be sero-discordant and how this relates to viral load. Other aspects of the episode that participants engaged with included a deeper understanding of the sexual network, and how the storylines and characters intersected. This was the most talked about episode on social media, with the 'talking virus'<sup>6</sup> garnering much discussion about the larger lessons about what puts people at risk for acquiring HIV:

*In the last episode they were talking too much, I think it's because of that talking virus... This one friend of mine in Kimberley, she said 'hey, we are all in risk of HIV and we will die, all, with HIV'. I said 'why, my friend'? She said 'my boyfriend is in Eastern Cape, I don't know what he is doing there' (Female, 18-24 years, rural, Eastern Cape)<sup>7</sup>.*

---

*The last, last, last episode of Intersexions, people were talking on Facebook and Twitter. I believe that Intersexions has made a lot of changes in people's lives... Facebook and Twitter must speak about that specifically, because that's what people use, they use that format. People who spoke about Intersexions, they spoke about that specific last episode, they were thinking about going to test, and most of my friends did go and test. Yes, some of them got good results; some of them didn't get good results (Male, 18-29, peri-urban, Free State)<sup>8</sup>.*

Grasping the network or 'spider web' path of HIV infection was said to break through ignorance and to encourage viewers to take action, such as going for HIV testing.

*F5: For someone like me who missed the first five episodes it was the best one hour because then I got to know how this person got to meet that with the next person. It took me back to what I had missed and teaching me about what happened in-between that as well.*

*F4: The link was like wow, how do you get AIDS? You don't just get it from F1, somebody slept with F1 but after sleeping with F4 he finds out he has it.*

*F1: We get that condom advert every day from Scrutinize, it shows us how you get AIDS but it took Intersexions a matter of 25 episodes to break it down. Do you understand why I say people need to be reminded constantly? Because people don't take it to heart.*

*F4: I was sitting and thinking about my life; like M3 said a person doesn't come with a stamp on their forehead saying 'positive' but the person behind that person and the one behind the first*

---

<sup>5</sup> Transcript IDI female 30+, peri-urban Free State, txt, 29962,30811

<sup>6</sup> Transcript IDI Female Eastern Cape Rural 18th April.txt, 5998,6853

<sup>7</sup> Transcript IDI Female Eastern Cape Rural 18th April.txt, 42065,43549

<sup>8</sup> Transcript FGD 18-29 Mixed, peri-urban Free State, pp. 12-13

*one. It is up to you to take the stand and decide whether you want to take the stand and go test or do you just ignore it (Females, 18-24 years, urban and peri-urban, Free State)<sup>9</sup>.*

Some participants were overly focused on trying to work out the detail of the network, wanting to link HIV back to some original character or source, while others seemed able to grasp the bigger concept the series tried to convey: that most people have a sexual past, one's sexual history is interconnected with several others besides one's immediate sexual partner and, moreover, that this is not always traceable back to some 'origin'. It often seems that in the search for an original agent who started the chain of HIV transmission, participants sought someone to blame. It is only once they have realised that this is not possible that they will fully understand the overall message of the series, the complexity of the network, and everyone's personal responsibility within it.

### ***The sexual network in specific storylines***

In terms of specific characters, DJ Mo was seen to take advantage of his charms in order to attract many sexual partners and was perceived as irresponsible, given his high-risk behaviour. One participant spoke about DJ Mo as being his 'role-model' because of the lessons he learnt from his (bad) behaviour, namely, not to abuse power for sexual pleasure and for revealing the sexual network and therefore causing him to reflect on his own sexual history<sup>10</sup>. A male from Gauteng shared how he connected his personal experience of finding out that his girlfriend was dating someone he knew to what happened in the second episode with DJ Mo.<sup>11</sup>

The episode that was most frequently cited as being true-to-life was episode 16, 'N4', which epitomised how a marriage could be part of a complex sexual network. Many participants shared how they knew truck drivers who were just like Duma and would have sex with different women along their route: '*a person that I know that actually has done something like that.... that episode was déjà vu for me*'<sup>12</sup> and:

*My brother discovered at a very late stage that he was HIV positive. He had just been married and when we eventually discovered it, it actually made sense because he had been a truck driver for most of his life as young as he was, that was his life. Sadly, and as much as we didn't want to admit the truth, the fact is that he must have been picking up girls along the road because he would travel all over South Africa and leave the girlfriend behind. In the end when you realise such things it makes you realise that it is the truth (Female, 25-29, urban and peri-urban, KwaZulu-Natal)<sup>13</sup>.*

The message of this episode was seen to extend beyond the example of truck drivers in portraying the HIV risks associated with multiple and concurrent sexual partners, including risks faced by faithful partners in the sexual network. Duma and his wife Zamo portrayed how having a single sexual partner does not necessary mean one is safe from HIV infection, but knowing who one's partner's partners are may motivate one to take measures to avoid infection. The episode resonated with several female participants who could relate to Zama's situation:

*...my boyfriend is not a truck driver, but I put him in the same situation as Duma. The fact that he goes around and drives around, and then there's me in the house, I'm the housewife. The next thing, he's sick, and there comes F6, F3, F1 with a baby, and then this one says... you understand? That's how it is. They could have used different types of angles, but the same thing, it's just putting yourself in the same shoes (Female, 25-29 years, urban, Mpumalanga)<sup>14</sup>.*

---

<sup>9</sup> Transcript FGD 18-24 Free State Urban and Peri-urban 16 April 11.txt, 58784,59821

<sup>10</sup> Transcript IDI male, 30+, peri-urban Gauteng, 35943,37130

<sup>11</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban Gauteng, txt.,7663,8816

<sup>12</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban Mpumalanga, txt, 17828,txt, 18774

<sup>13</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban and peri-urban KwaZulu-Natal, txt, 22982,23731

<sup>14</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban, Mpumalanga, txt.63433,65195

Participants' responses indicated that the series' ending, in which the narrator (the personification of HIV, 'Mr. V.') reveals the sexual connections among the original characters, was pivotal in engaging and prompting them to interrogate their own knowledge of HIV transmission and relationship values:

*The talking virus [laughs], it was so scary.... Because when you see those episodes, the last ones, I didn't think that it could lead, or the HIV could be transmitted [so easily]... But when it was shown there, it made me wonder, hey, it doesn't take much to get infected (Female, 18-24 years, rural, Eastern Cape)<sup>15</sup>.*

It was pivotal in the sense that participants grasped the concept of the sexual network in this episode more meaningfully, which mostly took the form of trying to trace the journey of HIV transmission subsequent to the revelations made at DJ Mo's funeral. When reflecting on the sexual network concept, participants demonstrated understanding the importance of knowing one's sexual partner's history and of having protected intercourse in the event that one does not.

## Identification and realism

*Intersexions* was broadly perceived as a contemporary, unconventional, dramatic, and realistic drama series. There was a strong sense that the series depicted what happens in reality and depicted genuine South African issues. Often described as a 'reality show' that depicted the 'harsh reality' that people live, the stories were said to closely resemble 'things that are happening in our communities that we sweep under the carpet'. The portrayal of the sexual network in particular and related risk scenarios was seen as accurate and resonated with viewers so much that many described a sense of personal discomfort from being confronted by a new awareness of their personal HIV risk, which became evident through engaging with the series.

The identifiable and realistic storylines and the focal content of the drama series, the sexual network, attracted and intrigued viewers. Either speaking for themselves or in general, many participants told of how people tend to think it is okay to have more than one partner, frequently change sexual partners, have someone 'on the side'<sup>16</sup>, engage in casual sex, not discuss sexual histories with partners, or have unprotected sex without knowing if one's partner is HIV positive or not.

*It is a thing that happens in our communities, we as the youth love to go to clubs and that is where we pick our partners. We change partners continuously we do not pay attention to the fact that there is a disease out there and it is killing us (Male, 25-29 years, urban and peri-urban, KwaZulu-Natal)<sup>17</sup>.*

---

*Like it showed them like if you live in your own world, you don't know what's happening to other people's lives, so it made them realise about going out. Like when you are in a club, you're going to meet this hot guy or hunky guy, you sleep with him and you don't know how many partners he has slept with, because sometimes we take people as we see them. We think he is perfect, but he's not (Female, 25-29 years, urban, Gauteng)<sup>18</sup>.*

Some female participants further described how *Intersexions* accurately portrayed how people often ignore the fact that they are at risk of being infected with HIV, either through engaging in casual sex or through ignoring suspicions their partner might not be faithful:

*F3: Yes, the cheating, clubbing, taking girls home when your girlfriend is not around, stuff like that. It always happens, each and every night it happens, but then we just choose to ignore it and we act like 'okay, everything is okay'. Even if you hear stories about your boyfriend, you just choose to ignore them.*

---

<sup>15</sup> Transcript IDI Female 18-24 Eastern Cape Rural 18th April.txt, 50742,51207

<sup>16</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, male, rural North West, txt, 11880,12657

<sup>17</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban and peri-urban KwaZulu-Natal, txt, 22183,22980

<sup>18</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban Gauteng, txt, 60716,61825

F6: So basically it's not that we're not ignorant, we choose to be ignorant. We're not ignorant.

F3: Because you'll be sitting alone and you're thinking about it and you realise 'this is wrong, and it's really happening', but then you'll be like 'no, let me just flip it' [brush it off] (Females, 25-29 years, urban, Mpumalanga)<sup>19</sup>.

## **Engagement with the concept of the 'sexual network'**

There were different levels of engagement or interaction with series' messaging which included: basic engagement with a message; reflection on the message; key moments of realisation; and realisation that would sometimes accompany action (e.g., conceptualising specific forms of action one might take, action that one will take, and action that has been taken – either by oneself, or by a family member, partner or friend who has viewed the series).

### ***New understanding of the network***

New understandings around HIV and AIDS overlapped significantly with participants' identification with and conceptualisation of the sexual network portrayed in the series. Critical reflection on the implications of the network led to new understanding and insight into the potential consequences of the hidden nature of sexual network. Many participants engaged with the concept of the sexual network and, in association, with concomitant risks of HIV infection and the importance of knowing one's partner well before commencing a sexual relationship.

Often people spoke about the reality of the sexual network and how it can potentially incorporate anyone. This was accompanied by an understanding and fear of the *non-discriminatory nature of HIV*. In different moments of reflection some participants spoke about how they would think about the chain of infection in everyday situations, such as when looking at someone who they were sharing a taxi with and considering whether they are sexually connected to them.

*The show is real but what I like most about it is that it doesn't have borders. Whether you are gay, rural, urban, rich, poor, educated or gay, straight; if you have unprotected sex you are vulnerable to be infected. The way the episodes were composed, people could identify and relate to whatever. Maybe this week it would be me or the next weekend it could be someone from Nongoma; I liked the way it incorporated everybody... I think the message was delivered and it shows that HIV doesn't have any borders. The scary part is how you meet a stranger on the road and think you don't know them only to find that they are former partners with your partner. That was scary even though I know about HIV and AIDS, but it scared me, I would be thinking days after that; sitting in a taxi, I would look at people and go 'maybe she has slept with someone I have slept with before' (Female, 30+ years, urban and peri-urban, Kwazulu-Natal)<sup>20</sup>.*

Participants had a strong understanding of how *the sexual network traverses geographical boundaries*. One participant described the network as being 'global' in this sense, through people having multiple sexual partnerships in different countries.

*Just how HIV can be contracted and the characters were different but related when it came to sex and each other. Sex is global. I can be flying to America tomorrow and make love to my boyfriend then when I get to America I get another boyfriend who probably has other sexual partners. Another thing is, he could have a boyfriend and girlfriends, then when I come back I may find that the boyfriend I left behind has been sleeping around. They are trying to make us aware of that (Female, 25-29 years, urban and peri-urban, Free State)<sup>21</sup>.*

Some participants engaged intensely with the idea of *sexual connectivity*, considering how they have not only slept with the person they are currently having sex with, but with all of their partners' sexual partners too. In one example, a participant reflected on how they are physically and sexually connected with people they have not even met:

---

<sup>19</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban Mpumalanga, txt, 70362,72198

<sup>20</sup> Transcript FGD 30+ Peri-urban and urban KwaZulu-Natal.txt, 20829,21971

<sup>21</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 Urban and Peri-urban Free State 17 May 11.txt, 28630,29110

*I watched it with my family and it was very nice because at the end there would be a debate; some people don't understand the word 'Intersect' and the meaning of this drama. You don't see people who intersect in real life that you could explain it to other people; if this person sleeps with this guy and he goes on to sleep with the other it is Intersexions because it rounds. I have slept with you but, you don't know because it wasn't physically with you but with the other person (Female, 25-29 years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>22</sup>.*

---

*What I loved most about this show is the fact that they show how this HIV can be transmitted from one person to the next. One may think it's far away from them and it might not even get to them. But it can come through different forms, and yet you can get it from a person that you never really thought had HIV (Female, 18-24 years, rural, Mpumalanga)<sup>23</sup>.*

In keeping with the understanding of the non-discriminatory nature of HIV, a point of information that several participants brought up, was that you can get HIV even if you have had few sexual partners, because of the risk posed by your partner's sexual history. There was a strong understanding of the sexual network concept in this regard:

*F6: The nurse was trying to tell Mandisa that even if she can count the people that she has slept with, with one hand but how many people have those people that she can count, slept with? You may find that she has slept with four people but those four people have slept with more than fifteen people, it also means that she has also slept with more than fifteen people.*

*F5: I think that one ad actually tells it like it is; that Scrutinize advert 'HIV to HIV victory' that is actually what Intersexions was all about, that the particular point of having slept with five people on one hand and there could be five but, there could be five from each of their hands.*

*F1: For me it meant that it doesn't matter who you slept with last; because she was worried that Mo was the last person she slept with, but it depends on if you used protection. It doesn't matter who was the last person you slept with, you could have been infected by the previous lover (Females, 25-29 years, urban and peri-urban, Kwazulu-Natal)<sup>24</sup>.*

Several participants made reference to human nature and human desires and how this might influence people not to think deeply about the sexual past of a potential sexual partner. In one focus group participants reflected on real life situations where they might come across a good looking person, and think they are 'perfect' without considering their sexual past:

*F4: Like it showed them like if you live in your own world, you don't know what's happening to other people's lives, so it made them realise about going out. Like when you are in a club, you're going to meet this hot guy or hunky guy, you sleep with him and you don't know how many partners he has slept with, because sometimes we take people as we see them. We think he is perfect, but he's not.*

*M3: ....At the end of the day, we are all connected.... Like sexually, or I don't know, say I can come from Soweto and sleep with her, how do I know she hasn't slept with M6 and M6 has slept with M1? [Laughter]..... For me, it was reality, basically (Female and male, 25-29 years, urban, Gauteng)<sup>25</sup>.*

In another, participants described how their own attitudes and behaviours around sex had been affected by viewing the series' ending, but also how difficult making safer choices can be:

*M2: I think the thing is, like with all the shows before that, you saw the characters, you know, being our human selves, sometimes you're arrogant, sometimes you're this or that, we're just moving about in our lives, and in the last episode, everyone is dealing with the after-effects of all of that and the confusion that it all brings. You sort of have to see that that is scary because you know that that is how I would respond as well if I found that I had it, or something like that, and just to see that confusion through the characters that are dating, especially if you do not know your status. So if you reflect it back to your life, where do I actually stand?*

---

<sup>22</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29yrs GAUTENG peri-urban 14 May 2011.txt, 12842,15297

<sup>23</sup> Transcript FG 18-24\_Rural\_ Mpumalanga\_13 May 2011.txt, 9326,9647

<sup>24</sup> Transcript 25 -29 mix urban peri-urban KwaZulu-Natal, txt, 32851,34224

<sup>25</sup> Transcript FG 25-29 Gauteng 19th April 2011, txt, 60716,64027



F1: Yes, it's like ooh, *Intersexions*. But it seriously guilted me, but it's weird because I came back from seeing my boyfriend today, actually, so I took a week extra vac [vacation] – don't tell my mom [laughter]. The final episode was the week before last, the first week of vac. I had sex yesterday.... after watching that episode together, it was just like oh now.... we must write a list of who you have been with....

F4: ....But you find that it's a situation with a lot of people. I can name five friends right now off the top of my head who are sleeping with their boyfriends without a condom and it's one of those ya, but I trust him, type things. Some people are ignorant. I had a friend who didn't want to watch *Intersexions* because she was just like 'no'. She was like 'I'm not going to watch this. My boyfriend and I trust each other, I know I'm the only one, and what not', but everybody knows that she is not the only one (Male and females, 18-24 years, rural, Eastern Cape)<sup>26</sup>.

### **Internalisation of the message**

Participants demonstrated different levels of engagement with the concept of the sexual network and several participants reflected on the implications of this in relation to their own lives and the lives of people they know. Much of the pleasure of watching *Intersexions* was derived in the audience's discovering a new truth which they could apply to their own lives. Although they must have heard it many times before, the realisation of their own position within a sexual network was not only shocking, but deeply interesting too.

A number of participants reflected on how watching *Intersexions* 'opened their eyes' and led them to reflect on their own life and relationships, and ask questions such as , 'does my boyfriend do this'<sup>27</sup>? There was a sense that some viewers felt a new awareness regarding the consequences of what happens in 'everyday life', which was portrayed in the series. Several described how they 'saw themselves' in different characters in the series, either because they are currently in the same situation, have been in the past, or recognise the potential to be 'doing that'.

*I wouldn't compare it with anything that I have watched before, it was not about sex or AIDS for me; it was about understanding life.... We are hiding AIDS and we don't want to see that we only open our eyes only when it has one of us; but they were giving us the picture of what is happening and 'where are you in this' and you can say 'I am there' or 'I was once there' (Male, 25-29 years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>28</sup>.*

Some participants spoke about how the network made them reflect on their own relationships and how they do not know what their partner is doing sexually when they are not together. Several participants expressed uncertainty about their partner's fidelity in their relationship and their responses indicated that they were increasingly aware of the extent of the sexual network that they might now be attached to, through their sexual partner:

*I think she is only mine... but like now, I'm here in town, I don't know what she is doing there, if she is spreading the disease. So, things like that, it shows the network in me, the network, how the virus goes (Male, 30+ years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>29</sup>.*

Some participants experienced intense moments of reflection on the complexity of the network, their own sexual histories, as well as that of their sexual partners. The participant above, who was questioning his partner's fidelity, spoke about hearing the 'voice' of HIV in his head for a day and a night and was prompted to draw his own sexual network:

*That virus was talking there. I said no to someone, and then we discussed whatever we discussed about it, but I said eish, and when I looked at the girl I was in love with, because that voice stayed with me the whole night and the whole day, and trying to take a pen and paper,*

---

<sup>26</sup> Transcript FGD 18-24 Eastern Cape 18<sup>th</sup> April, p.37

<sup>27</sup> Transcript IDI 18-24 years, rural Eastern Cape, txt, 8658,9457

<sup>28</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29, urban Gauteng, txt, 28301,29162

<sup>29</sup> Transcript IDI male 30+ peri-urban Gauteng, txt, 17804,18208

trying to write what that guy was saying, and making a circle, making blocks, A to D, of people and the voice, how it goes (Male, 30+ years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>30</sup>.

### **Interpersonal communication about the sexual network**

The most common point of reported interpersonal communication appeared to relate to heightened concerns about infidelity. As the interconnected nature of the sexual network gradually sunk in, participants described discussing with friends whether their partners were faithful or cautioned each other about the possibility. A female from Gauteng recalled discussing the connections between Mo, Mandisa, Kabelo and Lindi with her friends, and likewise, whether they could all be seeing the same person:

*We were talking about how possible it was that we could all be seeing the same guy without knowing; that scene really left us a bit stressed (Female, 18-24 years, urban and peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>31</sup>.*

In the same group, a male shared how he discussed with friends the revelation in episode 18 that Molete and his son Ntando had shared a sexual partner, understanding the possibility that they too could also share sexual connections and not be aware of it<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, a male explained how he watched the final docudrama with a group of men, who reportedly spoke for hours about the 'network' and how the virus could connect all of them:

*M: I think that's the only part we discussed for more than two to three hours, looking at the virus itself, the narrator, and we said no, look, we are six here, guys, and we are in love and being in love with two persons, you, you are next to me, this one is not around, and then I have sex just like that, and then it spreads and it will end up all of us being positive.*

*Interviewer: So you actually started to talk about the sexual network in that room, or potential network in that room.*

*M: Yes, because we were looking at, I was in love with Ntombi and he didn't know that I am in love with Ntombi, then he became in love with Ntombi. Ntombi to Simphiwe, just like that, then it is in a circle, now the virus has rounded all of us (Male, 30+ years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>33</sup>.*

A female from the Eastern Cape also alluded to how *Intersexions* drove home the concept that HIV spreads through sexual networks, but felt that it was not sufficient in motivating her friend to take preventive action in her own relationship:

*F: Ya, today I was talking to my friend, we were coming from town and talking about another guy and she stopped and said 'ha, we [will] all die with HIV. He is positive, but he is not stopping having sex with girls and he wants younger girls'. She said, 'he is spreading it. What if my boyfriend goes with that girl he slept with, because he doesn't use condoms? He even said it himself'...*

*Interviewer: And they don't use a condom in their relationship?*

*F: No, they don't.... She is in denial.*

*Interviewer: Do you think she's at risk?*

*F: She is, but I don't know what's wrong, or maybe she is too afraid to know her status, because she doesn't even want to test (Female, 18-24 years, rural, Eastern Cape)<sup>34</sup>.*

Others described cautioning friends whose partners they suspected might be cheating or who engaged in sexual risk behaviours themselves. A rural male from the Eastern Cape told how he tried to 'open his [friend's] eyes,' that he must watch his girlfriend 'because in the middle of the night, I

---

<sup>30</sup> Transcript IDI male 30+ peri-urban Gauteng. txt, 17804,18208

<sup>31</sup> Transcript FGD 18-24 Gauteng Urban and Peri-urban 14 May 2011.txt, 3304,6028

<sup>32</sup> Transcript FGD 18-24 Gauteng Urban and Peri-urban 14 May 2011.txt, 3304,6028

<sup>33</sup> Transcript IDI Male 30+ Gauteng.txt, 20590,20969

<sup>34</sup> Transcript IDI Female Eastern Cape Rural 18th April.txt, 44107,44958

see her... moving. He didn't believe me'<sup>35</sup>. Another male described cautioning a friend about the risks of having multiple sexual partners, after watching *Intersexions* with his girlfriend:

*M: Sometimes when I go out with my girlfriend, she would sometimes bring her friends and my friend would also bring his girlfriend. But the next time when we go out, he would bring a different girl and I would say to him 'you see what you are doing bro, it is not right'.*

*Interviewer: He is 'intersexting?'*

*M: Yes! (Male, 18-24 years, peri-urban, KwaZulu Natal)<sup>36</sup>.*

Other participants discussed how they or their friends decided to test, or at least realised they should know their status as a result of watching *Intersexions*. Watching the final docudrama appeared to make a number of viewers feel uncomfortable, as they reflected on their past sexual risks. One person referred to how watching the series may have perpetuated his friends' anxiety about testing, leaving them even more scared of being HIV positive and still not wanting to test<sup>37</sup>. A male from peri-urban KwaZulu-Natal recalled how the docudrama made some of his friends 'shaky', apparently due to their increased HIV risk perception:

*M: The last episode I did discuss it with my friends because they were a bit shaky when the voice was talking.*

*Interviewer: They were shaky? What do you think got them shaky, was it the voice itself or what the voice was saying?*

*M: I think it was the guilt inside them... because if you are innocent you wouldn't shake (Male, 18-24 years, peri-urban, KwaZulu-Natal)<sup>38</sup>.*

A male focus group participant recalled discussing episode 16 with his friends and how it was best to stick to one sexual partner, as the truth will always come out:

*M: I remember I was watching it with one of the guys and the episode was with Duma, and we realised and discussed the fact that even in real life all secrets end up coming out.*

*Interviewer: Did you talk about that, and did you have secrets to worry about?*

*M: Sometimes when you have more than one partner you know that one of those three might be seeing someone else beside you, and if you're not careful, they might get infected and they will know that and the truth will come out... the best way is to stop doing all these things (Male, 18-24 years, peri-urban, North West)<sup>39</sup>.*

A participant described how a female he knew decided she should be tested, as she had 'slept with DJ Mo' and 'Kabelo', meaning with someone who had multiple sexual partners:

*Four days ago, when the girl broke with the boy, she said 'no, I must go and test, maybe this boy has infected me. I slept with DJ Mo'. So, I don't know if she went to test, but she was talking about that. 'DJ Mo, I left DJ Mo and I left Kabelo' (Male, 30+ years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>40</sup>.*

## **Influence on behaviour**

In addition to increased knowledge and self-reflection, there were several self-reported accounts of demonstrable behaviour change that participants linked directly to watching *Intersexions*. New understanding about the sexual network often led participants to reflect on concrete forms of action including communication with one's sexual partner, testing, partner reduction, and using condoms to protect oneself. Regular viewers who participated in this evaluative research, reported taking responsibility for consistent condom use by ensuring that they always have condoms with them and

---

<sup>35</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 Eastern Cape Rural 18th April.txt, 57146,57891

<sup>36</sup> Transcript IDI Male 18-24 Kwa-Zulu Natal 07 May 11.txt, 1804,2301

<sup>37</sup> Transcript IDI Male 18-24 Kwa-Zulu Natal 07 May 11.txt, 3425,3600

<sup>38</sup> Transcript IDI Male 18-24 Kwa-Zulu Natal 07 May 11.txt, 12803,13857

<sup>39</sup> Transcript FGD 18-24 North West Peri-urban 20 April 2011.txt, 44725,45466

<sup>40</sup> Transcript IDI Male 30+ Gauteng.txt, 81438,81847

not leaving this to their sexual partner; making conscious attempts to set personal limits, such as having set rules around alcohol intake and undertaking not to have sexual intercourse when under the influence of alcohol; acutely realising the potential negative health consequences of having multiple concurrent sexual partners and in some instances, expressing the desire to reduce the number of sexual partners, reporting an actual reduction in the number of sexual partners, or a heightened awareness of the need to always have sex with a condom with partners.

### **HIV testing**

Some of the personal contexts of behaviour change included an account of a female who ended her relationship with her boyfriend during *Intersexions* as he refused to go for an HIV test despite knowing that his ex-girlfriend had died from AIDS:

*I've got personal experience. It was actually during the Intersexions period. I dated someone who I knew from my childhood, and who I knew whose girlfriend died of HIV and AIDS. I have always insisted in using a condom with this guy, because I just cannot take that risk. I always insisted that he takes an HIV test and he just never does. So, during Intersexions I dumped the guy.... I said, 'you need to get an HIV test', he didn't, and I said 'I'm dumping you'.... I had to take a very firm decision. He had to get an HIV test, and if he didn't get an HIV test.... Not that I was planning to have sex with him without a condom, but he had a partner that was HIV positive, right, and I do not know if he was HIV positive or not. But he owed it to me to prove that he wasn't (Female, 25-29 years, urban, Gauteng)<sup>41</sup>.*

For some participants, exposure to the *Intersexions* television series caused them to reflect on their own lives and exposure to HIV risk.

*Firstly, let me be honest, I never go for a test of HIV and AIDS. Now, it motivated me that I should, so that I can know my status and whatever, you know. I had a guilty conscience because I didn't and I couldn't even care about HIV and stuff... even though I wanted to know more about HIV and AIDS, and I had my sister who passed away from HIV. So, it motivated me and I even went for a test afterwards (Female, 25-29 years, rural, Eastern Cape)<sup>42</sup>.*

Relating to the characters or storylines appeared to influence the personalisation of risk, which was followed by testing for HIV.

*F: What happened after the episode...I sat down and said, 'you know what, I'm going to test', because I was just like 'okay, if this is how it happens, then where am I in this situation? Where am I'? Then I just started looking back.... Just to think of it, you thought that he's cheating and then that person that cheated had someone, and that someone had someone. It's just exactly the very same way that the virus spreads. It rotates within us as we're rotating.*

*Interviewer: ...Did you go for a test?*

*F3: I did.... the one from the N11 scene, the N11 lovers. The one's got a baby, the other one's got a baby as well, and the other one has got the truck driver as well as the husband, and it's how things are. It actually reflects the life that we live in. It's something that happens on a daily basis.... the N11 episode, the Duma one. It just touched me, and I was like oh my gosh, and this is what we do. Nevertheless, we all know that AIDS is there, but still we go through that role.*

*Interviewer: Did you test after that episode?*

*F3: I did, after that I did.... because it really touched me (Female, 25-29 years, urban, Mpumalanga)<sup>43</sup>.*

Another participant meaningfully described how she and four of her friends all decided to test for HIV the day after the final episode was aired. 'Mr. V' appears to make them take the threat of infection as a result of the sexual network more seriously, having previously ignored the invitation to test at school:

---

<sup>41</sup> Transcript IDI 25- 29 Female Gauteng.txt, 23381,25291

<sup>42</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 rural Eastern Cape, txt, 7909,8361

<sup>43</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29, urban Mpumalanga urban, txt, 19363,20970

At school we had discussions on the previous episode and stuff like that, but then it's like we joke about AIDS, like 'no man, and whatever, AIDS this, AIDS that', but then it's like after that virus, like the last, last episode, that's when okay.... at school they introduced peer education and encouraged us to go and test, and we were like 'no, we are definitely not going there' and all that stuff. After the last, last episode where the virus spoke, the following day we came to school and like 'uh-uh guys, we've got to go and get tested'. As much as there were seven of us, five of us did go and test and then the other two refused, but that was fine.... It started off with my friend, it was like 'okay guys, eish, I've been around and stuff and all of that', and then the point where I think number eight mentioned, I think the part stood out where 'okay, I'm sleeping with this one person, here I'm thinking he's my only one and all of that, but then again, has he thought of the people that this person has slept with'.

So I think that was the one thing that stood out with one of our friends, so that influenced us in the way that 'okay, yes, I've also done this', and then you go about thinking 'oh my gosh, maybe this person was doing this and this'. From experience you know that okay guys cheat, girls cheat also. But you know that my friend, this guy, I've seen him with this person and that person and that person, so you kind of like think okay, and then that's when we decided that we should go. Eish! [laughter] It was scary, it was freaky, because we were like guys, it's a matter of life and death, and we were like 'okay, if I find out I'm like this, my friend is like I'm going to kill myself', and the other one was saying 'no my friend, there are people who have been living with this'. At the time I was listening to Criselda Kananda and I was very inspired by her. I was like 'no man, there are people like her who have been with this thing for years' (Female, 18-29 years, peri-urban, Western Cape pre-testing group).

### **Condom use**

Engagement with the series acted as a catalyst for viewers to reconsider the need to use condoms and to always have protected sex. Four females reported having taking actions to ensure they always had protected sex which they linked to exposure to *Intersexions*, for example, reflecting how:

*It was very strong. It was very deep.... Because it shows that somewhere or another there is some link of AIDS. I might be sleeping with you, but I don't know who you are sleeping with and you don't know who's sleeping with whoever you are sleeping with you know? It takes you back. It's complex. It's like saying 'who is your mom's mom's mom's mom' etc. You never knew where it started. To me it was deep, it makes you think. Seriously it makes you think. Every time it makes you think. It makes me think every time it spoke, it makes you think. Like hey but you end up counting and saying...that line makes you want to use condoms all over again. Which is hard sometimes.... But sometimes we all need a reality check. (Female, 30+ years, peri-urban, Free State)<sup>44</sup>.*

Four females reported having taking actions to ensure they always had protected sex which they linked to exposure to *Intersexions*. For two of the participants, episode 26 was specifically referred to as the episode that led to a change in their condom use behaviour. A female respondent described her realisation that her partner may not be trustworthy in the following way:

*Although I would say I trust my partner I am not totally sure that he is trustworthy... so I try to make sure that if we are to engage in a sexual act we always use protection. The last episode freaked me out and the voice that they used for HIV; when it says 'I can get you' it made me traumatised actually. The voice always comes back to my mind.... I always make sure that I use protection (Female, 18-24 years, peri-urban, Kwa-Zulu Natal)<sup>45</sup>.*

### **Communication between intimate partners**

Other behaviour change included recognising the importance of knowing one's sexual partner well and communicating about sexual histories as a way to improve relationship quality and ultimately avoid becoming one of the vulnerable chains in a sexual network. Both males and females described speaking more openly with their sexual partners as a consequence of watching the show. A male found out that an ex-partner of his was in hospital and HIV positive; after watching the first episode with his girlfriend, they spoke about 'our ex's, where are they, who are they'.

<sup>44</sup> Transcript IDI female 30+, peri-urban Free State, txt, 29962,30811

<sup>45</sup> Transcript FGD 25 -29 mix urban peri-urban KwaZulu-Natal, 27827,28320

*I did speak about it with my boyfriend... DJ Mo didn't have someone to speak about his lifestyle, so I always tell my boyfriend that 'if you don't speak to me, you will end up like DJ Mo' because we have to be honest with each other (Female, 25-29 years, rural, Eastern Cape).*

Four participants reported that since watching *Intersexions*, they had been communicating more openly with their intimate partners. One participant related that although he still perceived himself as a 'player', *Intersexions* (with the help of his girlfriend) had brought home the importance of knowing one's partner, including his/her sexual history (despite his resenting this at some level):

*M: It changed my behaviour in a way. Like I kind of kept my style and the people I know, but if you are a player, then okay, they're showing the player ways, they are warning girls, 'guys do this. Beware of 1) if he comes home late, 2), 3), 4), 5) [points]'. I'm like 'okay, if they show these things on TV, I need to change my ways before my woman starts, you know [laughter], starts questioning'. I'm like 'okay, I'm not going to do 1), I'm going to do 2) and 3) only', you know, one part. One part did change that, okay sharp, you need to be careful, get to know the person, get to know their sexual partners before you... and all that stuff. But it kind of cramped my style in a way, because now, my girlfriend, she talks.*

*Interviewer: Talks what?*

*M: She's like 'let's talk', you know, open, feelings, like that stuff [laughter]. 'How many partners have you been with before', you know, 'Would you ever cheat on me? Did you watch that episode with the truck driver?' I'm like wow, wow! [laughter] So ya, it did change my behaviour in a way, you know, being [more] honest and open (Male, 25-29 years, urban, Gauteng)<sup>46</sup>.*

### **Partner reduction**

Though there were many descriptions, self-reflections and even disclosures during the evaluation research about having multiple partners or being unfaithful to a sexual partner, there were almost no reports of participants changing this behaviour completely. A 48-year male participant, living openly with HIV, spoke about how *Intersexions* had highlighted for him the emotional and physical consequences of an intersecting sexual relationship and that this had him not only reflect on how many people he may have infected because of having concurrent partners, but also, made him able to empathise with the partners of the sexual partners he had been with. The participant talked openly about having had more than three overlapping sexual partners in the past six months – significantly fewer than prior to being exposed to *Intersexions*.

*I've got a few partners.... More than three.... As I said, especially at the end of Intersexions, the narrator makes me...he changed my mind. Like I am somebody who is informed about HIV, the way he expressed it, I think now, I know I'm HIV, but it's now getting in my body, if you understand what I mean? ....I will change. Not to say I will change, I have changed. I don't know if it's because I'm experienced in the field, but I have changed because I feel empathy for other people, whereby I am in love with somebody, although I am using protection, but what about the partner of that person? (Male, 30+ years, peri-urban, Gauteng)<sup>47</sup>.*

There were several examples where participants described knowing others who had made changes in their behaviour in order to reduce their number of partners. In the following example, the participant had a discussion with a male friend about sexual networks, and her friend had said of the series that it was an 'eye opener' for him, to the extent that he had deleted all the girls' telephone numbers he had on his cell phone, in an effort to reduce the temptation of calling them for a one-night stand.

*I have this other guy friend and we talked about this thing last week, so he told me that after watching the whole of Intersexions, he started deleting the girls' numbers that he slept with, on his phone. Like he started from A to Z, he deleted everyone, because he didn't want to think of*

---

<sup>46</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 Gauteng, 55752,59211

<sup>47</sup> Transcript IDI Male 30+ Gauteng.txt, 53183,54143

*calling them again for maybe a one-night stand or something like that (Female, 25-29 years, urban, Mpumalanga)<sup>48</sup>.*

For several participants who recounted their experiences or reflected on their behaviour in relation to multiple and concurrent sexual partners, common were descriptions of the difficulty of changing this behaviour. Participants' descriptions each contained indicators of change, for example, self-realisation, questioning own behaviour, voicing of desired behaviour, which evidences how changes in behaviour are incremental, take place over time and occur within an individual and interpersonal context that is complex.

In one example, a male participant described how he was particularly affected after watching the DJ Mo episode, as it mirrored his own behaviour of which he had not been entirely conscious of:

*As much as it was happening to me, I didn't say 'okay, let me stop'. I just went to the guy, I'm like 'dude, I'm dating the same chick'. The guy is like 'hey, she doesn't know. She thinks she's playing us, so we might as well continue'. So, that's one thing that I don't know.... I didn't realise what I was doing, but after.... I watched the [DJ Mo] episode, I needed the episode to sink in and started to think 'am I living my life in a bad way or what?' (Male, 25-29 years, urban, Gauteng)<sup>49</sup>*

The male participant went on to describe how his realisation that he and another guy were both having sex with the same girl, slipped in and out of his consciousness; he described how he went and spoke to the other guy and how he then 'forgot' about it, followed by internal questioning about the consequences or 'reality' of his behaviour. The participant linked these processes to *Intersexions*, expressing that the series had helped him to think about certain things.

*Yes, I thought about my own life. It's just for me it was that now it's time to actually check myself, the way I'm living my life. That, as much as you think that you are actually living your life in the perfect way, but there are certain things that I want to show you that no, you know what? It's because you're actually thinking that you're living your life because you're in your own bubble or you're in your own space.... with *Intersexions*, I had a chance to actually evaluate certain things and say well, that might be real or this might not be, but it actually helped me (Male, 25-29 years, urban, Gauteng)<sup>50</sup>.*

There were two other examples of participants who described that despite having knowledge of the risks of having concurrent sexual partners, that changing this behaviour was difficult for them. In both examples, peer pressure was referred to by participants as the factor that influenced them in continuing to engage in risky sexual behaviour.

## **Conclusion**

The way in which *Intersexions* broke traditional drama series conventions, leaving the audience to 'work out' messages for work for themselves, contributed to the significant impact the series had on its regular viewers. This impact took various forms, including personal reflection, identification with characters and storylines, and extended to key moments of realisation that sometimes accompanied conceptualising specific forms of action one might take or that had been taken in order to reduce risks of HIV infection.

Many participants extracted key messages about a complete transformation of values around relationships and lifestyle. This included challenging the lack of trust and communication that was said to be common of contemporary sexual relationships, calling for a more balanced approach to one's own life as a starting point for changing relationships with others. Some participants engaged with the issue of lack of trust in relationships and rather than falling back on increased condom use as the answer, calling for a change in relationship values and communication so that one is able to

---

<sup>48</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 Mpumalanga urban, txt, 41080,41609

<sup>49</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 years, urban Gauteng, txt.,7663,8816

<sup>50</sup> Transcript FGD 25-29 Gauteng, txt, 8818,10074

trust that one's partner is faithful. This differs from the fatalistic approach that was quite common amongst participants as they expressed their understanding of the sexual network concept: that one can never be certain of one's sexual partner's history or current behaviour, so it is better to protect oneself at all times.

Reflecting back on the series' overall educational objectives, it is possible to state that the series met most of these in terms of its messaging and succeeded in communicating meanings beyond these objectives. Many participants grasped the concept of the sexual network and concomitant risk of HIV infection, through insights into the consequences of different forms of sexual behaviour and an enhanced understanding of the nature of HIV and the sexual network in particular. These understandings were formed through intense reflection on how sexual networks function and their implications on personal HIV risk, ultimately building a more complex and multi-faceted knowledge of HIV and AIDS. Reflections were indicative of a dialogical process whereby participants transferred the meanings derived from the series, storylines and characters to their own everyday lives and social contexts, developing actionable forms of knowledge that sometimes led them to change their behaviours in some way.

## References

- Halperin, D.T. & Epstein, H. (2007) Why is HIV prevalence so severe in southern Africa? The role of multiple concurrent partnerships and lack of male circumcision: Implications for AIDS prevention. *South African Journal of HIV Medicine*, 26, pp. 19–25.
- Johnson, L.F., Dorrington, R.E., Bradshaw, D., Pillay-Van Wyk, V., & Rehle, T.M. (2009) Sexual behavior patterns in South Africa and their association with the spread of HIV: Insights from a mathematical model. *Demographic Research*, 21(11), pp. 289-340.
- Pettifor, A.E., Hudgens, M.G., Levandowski, B.A., Rees, H.V., & Cohen, M.S. (2007) Highly efficient HIV transmission to young women in South Africa. *AIDS*, 21(Supplement 7), pp. S861-S865.
- Rehle, T., Hallett, T.B., Shisana, O., Pillay-van Wyk, V., Zuma, K., Carrara, H. & Jooste, S. (2010) A decline in new HIV infections in South Africa: estimating HIV incidence from three national HIV surveys in 2002, 2005 and 2008. *PLoS ONE*, 5(6): e11094. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0011094.
- Steffenson, A.E., Pettifor, A.E., Seage, G.R., Rees, H.V. & Cleary, P. D. (2011) Concurrent sexual partnerships and HIV Immunodeficiency Virus Risk Among South African Youth. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 38(6), pp. 459-466.