

**A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE RECEPTION OF THREE LOVELIFE
BILLBOARDS IN RURAL TRANSKEI**

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ABSTRACT

One of South Africa's biggest NGOs, LoveLife, has attracted its share of controversy since its inception in 1999. Recently, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria which contributed 30% of LoveLife's annual budget, announced that it was withdrawing its funding of the NGO. Although the Global Fund did not provide reasons for the withdrawal of its funding, some local studies have questioned the efficacy of, in particular, the LoveLife media campaigns. This article provides an analysis of the reception of the three 2004 LoveLife billboards in rural Transkei. This is done in order to test the hypothesis that the 2004 LoveLife billboard campaign aimed at establishing a contemporary, trendy lifestyle characterised by an open, free and gender-equal sexuality, is bound to be ineffective amongst some social / ethnic groupings, because it does not:

- *Engage with perceptions regarding sexual intercourse and condom use at localised, culture-specific levels;*
- *Provide accurate and accessible knowledge in a culture-sensitive format; and*
- *Acknowledge culture-specific barriers to communication.*

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INTRODUCTION

Media campaigns are inevitably based on the assumption that some kind of change can be effected in the target audience, whether it is to buy a certain product, change attitudes towards lifestyle, political preference, etc. This belief in the power of the media to bring about change is borne out by an analysis of the evolution of theories relating to the communication process, media and its effect on society, and social theory from the 1930s to the present.

It is interesting to note that, in the wake of the Second World War, during which the concept of propaganda became broadly established as a means of “changing the hearts and minds of people” through the use of mass media, notably by radio broadcast, film and print, intellectuals became increasingly concerned about the “pernicious” influence of the mass media on societal values, indeed about the very fabric of society. For intellectuals like the literary critic F.R. Leavis (1895-1978) and social critic and philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), to name but two, mass media had a clearly debilitating effect on the critical and intellectual capacity of individual members of society. Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) saw the mass media, particularly in the guise of film, as transforming individuals into an unthinking mass, mindlessly marching to a tune. More recently Naomi Klein (2000) has continued this critique of the media, specifically in terms of international branding, within a Neo-Marxist / Cultural Studies framework.

It is not the purpose of this article to give a history of the evolution of media effects theory: what I am trying to do is to show that throughout its evolution *the assumption has always been that the media can, and does effect changes in social attitudes and, ultimately, behaviour*. This holds true for a range of theories and models, from the “hypodermic needle” model, to the reinforcement models (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), the pluralistic view of society (Williams 1961), the “re-discovery” of Marxism and the rise in popularity of New Marxism amongst scholars of Literature and Sociology (1970s to present), the integration of political economy and Habermas’ (1991) concept of the “public sphere”, expanded upon by McKee (2005). It lies at the bottom of attempts to explain the interrelationship between media and society and the way that this interrelationship is / has been manipulated and exploited by various power bases. The latest evolution in this “spiral of theories” (Boyd-Barret, Newbold & Van den Bulck 2002: 29) uses insights from cultural studies and social anthropology, and the so-called “new audience research” have gained wide acceptance. New audience research, as with most things, is hardly new, since in essence it builds on a well-established theory originating in the study of literature, namely reception aesthetics, also known as reception theory. Boyd-Barrett (2002: 25) describes new audience research as follows:

New audience research, drawing on ethnographic methodology, regards the processes whereby both authors and readers make sense of texts – their encodings and decodings – to be complex, culturally derived competencies, and that extend to the factors that bring individuals to texts in the first place. The process of “reading”

is influenced by many different factors: these include the structure of the text itself, the social context within which the text is read, the cultural affinities of the readers, and the way in which cultural factors influence their reading competencies, predispositions, opportunities, likes and dislikes.

This clearly echoes the basic tenets of reception theory, originating from the work of Hans-Robert Jauss in the late 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s the world renowned Italian author and scholar Umberto Eco expanded on Jauss's theory and largely contributed towards making reception theory the dominant literary theory through the publication of *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976) and *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (1979).

In essence, reception theory holds that the meaning of a text – be it a book, film, painting or graphic image – is not passively “received” by the reader; rather a meaning or interpretation is “negotiated” by the reader. The reader interprets the text based on his/her individual cultural background and life experience, knowledge of other texts and the conventions that govern them. In essence the meaning(s) of a text is not stable or fixed, but exists within the relationship between the text and the reader. A basic acceptance of “the” meaning of a text occurs when several readers agree on a shared meaning. From this it is clear that, should the audience consist of readers from diverse educational, cultural, political or religious backgrounds, different “meanings” will be generated, and some of these meanings might be in direct conflict with the intended meaning of the author of the text.

This partly explains the move by advertisers to target niche audiences: the niche audience shares an economic / cultural background and is therefore more likely to read the advertisement “correctly”, that is, there is a correlation between the intended and perceived meaning of the text. The ideal of a shared meaning (also a nostalgic yearning for life-meaning) finds its expression in the current advertising trend that moves away from a direct focus on the product, instead propagating an aspirational “lifestyle” in which the product provides “access” to what amounts to be a pseudo class whose “members” share the upmarket “lifestyle” signified by the product, whether it be a BMW car or Chivas Regal whisky.

Those who use media campaigns to advertise products or establish and maintain brands do so on the assumption that the beliefs, values and attitudes of members of the target audience can be changed, or at least reinforced. This belief in the power of the media to effect change in people is not limited to the world of commerce, but is also subscribed to by those agencies whose goals are not informed by a profit motive, but in terms of social responsibility.

As already briefly shown, media effects theory is a vast and ever changing field of critical enquiry. It is also controversial, and the only certain conclusions one can draw from it is that there are no categorical answers to the questions it poses regarding the power of the media to influence society and effect change in human behaviour. In spite of this, multinational corporations, governments, non-government agencies, etc.

continue to spend considerable portions of their budgets on media exposure in terms of ad-spend or campaigns that are to some extent dependant on media coverage for their “success”. One places success in quotation marks, for in most instances the effectiveness of a particular campaign cannot be measured, except in terms of some fairly subjective criteria (often developed internally as part of the project proposal), gauging “success” in terms of attendance of events or rallies, range and extent of media coverage, or feedback by survey or some other means. This belief in the power of the media is also subscribed to by those who do not have the financial power base from which to launch media campaigns, and who rely on sensation or acts of terror to arouse media interest and so gain media coverage.

In this article I would like to focus on the well-funded media campaigns of LoveLife, a South African NGO active in the field of sexuality education, with a particular focus on combating the spread of HIV/Aids through programmes and campaigns aimed at changing high-risk sexual behaviour amongst young people. This article builds on my previous research (Jordaan 2003) into LoveLife’s 2003 media campaigns where I critiqued, in particular, the NGO’s attempts to establish itself as a brand that used the aspirational model to create a lifestyle that young people would try to emulate. This approach was articulated in the following way on the LoveLife website (2003, <http://www.lovelife.org.za/corporate/index.html>):

LoveLife uses a broad based motivational youth development approach designed to shift young people out of the existing high risk patterns of adolescent sexual behaviour.

The 2003 campaign was critiqued in the context of current branding, and media effects theory, and the major criticisms against that campaign can be briefly summarised as follows:

In positing its aspirational lifestyle for young people, it tended to construct an unrealistic society that was *ideal* as well as *virtual* in that it exists only in terms of the following essentialist campaign posits about its ideal nature (while ignoring South African realities):

- South African society is free of racism (focus on harmonious “mixed” sexual relationships in its poster campaign of 2003).
- Gender equality exists within sexual relations (the “no pressure” posters that ignored the reality of unequal power relations between the sexes and failed to differentiate between cultural differences in this regard).
- Poverty does not influence behaviour (it ignores the fact that, if the gap between the existing mode of existence and the presented lifestyle (aspiration) is too great, it cannot engage the audience except in a way that eventually frustrates them).
- Individuals inherently possess the skills to negate peer pressure (the “no pressure” posters. Interestingly, it seems oblivious to the fact that an aspirational

campaign is exactly intended to create a “lifestyle” with sufficient mass to attract its “membership” through peer pressure).

One should make it clear, at this point, that one fully supports all initiatives to curb the HIV/Aids pandemic. The purpose of this article is therefore not a gratuitous critique of LoveLife per se, but an attempt to critically evaluate its poster campaigns in terms of contemporary media theory, coupled with a small scale investigation into the effectiveness of its poster campaigns based on its reception by a convenience sample in the Transkei.

In order to change behaviour, the intended message(s) of a media campaign has/have to be understood by the intended audience; they have to be able to make meaning of it, and this meaning must at least correspond with the intended message. This is no new insight, and has been a feature of the very earliest communication models. Bechan (2003:63-65) criticises the 2003 LoveLife billboard campaign for “carrying not only contradictory but vague messages”, messages of which the intended and perceived meanings are sometimes in total contradiction. For the message to be understood correctly, the mode in which it is transmitted (visual, in billboard format in this instance), *must take into account the variance of contexts of culture and identity* of the target audience, *specifically in terms of possible barriers to communication*.

“Getting the meaning” of a campaign is but the first crucial step, since access to the message (becoming aware of the information) does not automatically lead to acceptance of that information, and if it is not accepted, there is no chance of a change in behaviour engendered by it. Individuals change their behaviour only if:

- They have the knowledge that enables them to see the change as necessary or beneficial and
- They possess the appropriate interpersonal skills to effect such change, or
- The required change is already socially manifested to such an extent that individual change merely requires conformity (being “in”). In this regard I have already mentioned that for example, in persuasive messages based on the aspirational lifestyle model, once a significant number of the audience “converts”, the campaign attains a “critical mass” and exerts its own kind of “peer pressure” to attract new “members” to the propagated “lifestyle”. In recent years there has been a massive shift to “lifestyle” marketing, where the product (plus huge numbers of accessories) becomes but the gateway to a superior lifestyle.

The conclusion regarding the LoveLife 2003 poster campaign was that it was bound to be ineffective, since it used branding as instrument to change behaviour without taking account significant variances in culture, religion, belief systems and socio-economic contexts in South Africa. These would present insurmountable communication barriers for a generic campaign that used a single language and undifferentiated posters and billboards irrespective of community / geographical location. (See also Tomaselli 1997; Mohale & De Wet 2003.)

As already stated, change in attitude and behaviour cannot be guaranteed by media campaigns; however, if such change is to be at all possible, the audience must be able to make meaning of the campaign message(s), and these messages must be readily accessible *and* acceptable in terms of the audience members' belief and value system(s).

HYPOTHESIS

The 2004 LoveLife billboard campaign aimed at establishing a contemporary, trendy lifestyle characterised by an open, free and gender-equal sexuality is bound to be ineffective amongst some social / ethnic groupings because it does not:

- Engage with perceptions regarding sexual intercourse and condom use at localised, culture-specific levels;
- Provide accurate and accessible knowledge in a culture-sensitive format;
- Acknowledge culture-specific barriers to communication.

SCOPE OF THE ARTICLE

This article focuses on an analysis of the reception of the three LoveLife billboards displayed in rural Transkei during 2004 in order to test the hypothesis presented above. For the analysis, insights from reception theory and semiotics will be utilised.

The 2004 pay-off line "Love to be there 2010" and three slides (see addendum) were shown to the research sample which consisted of 28 qualified teachers who had been nominated by their schools to study towards the Advanced Certificate in Education (NQF level 6) in Life Orientation. The certificate is presented by the Faculty of Education of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and funded by the National Department of Education.

Permission was obtained to present the slides to the group of teachers who attended training at Flagstaff in the Transkei from 14 to 15 July 2004. They were required to answer the following questions, regarding the pay-off line and the three slides, using a single sentence in each case. The questionnaires were anonymous, and care was taken to explain to the participants that there were no "correct" or "incorrect" answers.

During the period 12 to 13 January 2005, five focus group sessions were held in order to analyse the results of the July study in Flagstaff, and to gain an understanding of why the posters were interpreted in that particular manner. This part of the research took place on the Summerstrand Campus of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The focus groups included 24 members of the original Flagstaff group, plus four other groups with an average size of 34 members each, drawn from the cohort of 218 teachers who attended a week long block release session of the Advanced Certificate in Life Orientation presented by the Education Faculty of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

DELIMITATIONS

This study interprets a limited number of media artifacts within the context of the stated priority of locally contextualised strategies to combat the HIV/Aids pandemic. The study sample comprised 218 teachers who are spread across the Eastern Cape. The LoveLife campaigns are predominantly aimed at adolescent and young adults, and it could be argued that the sample should have comprised learners from the 200 plus schools in the Eastern Cape who have teachers enrolled in the ACE Life Orientation. Logistically, however, this was not possible.

Conclusions arrived at are based on triangulating data gained through quantitative and qualitative methods, and the results speak clearly. This research can be further enhanced by expanding the sample to include learners from rural schools in the province. Further research into rural value and belief systems, as well as perceptions regarding HIV/Aids and current strategies to combat it, will complement this study.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO THE FLAGSTAFF GROUP ON 14 JULY 2004

Question 1: The 2004 pay-off line

What does the words on the poster “Love to be there 2010” mean to you?

Verbatim responses:

To be alive for a long time

Let us love each other

You are welcome in that society

Would like to be aware of what love life promotes

To be interested to be in a particular place

No answer

Like to be in that place / know more about love

To be part of the group

Loving of nature and also the people around you

Showing students who is love life games

Slogan for 2010 world cup (sport improvement)

She would love to reach or be there when 2010

The writing invites people to participate in the world cup

Welcoming 2010

I would love to live longer till 2010 and escape AID

They care, respect for people

Live responsibly, protective sex to avoid AIDS

Take care of yourself

Believe in yourself

Believe in yourself, environment what you are

Want to go to that place

The place is lovable, interesting and comfortable, light

Lovely place, attractive

To be in that world which is good

I want to live for a long time

It means longing to live a long life

The person would love to be alive and wants to explore and know the world or a certain place

Nice to be in the place

The above responses were interpreted against the intended message of the billboard, which is set out below:

Denotative: Want to be alive in 2010 (and experience the World Cup)

Connotative: Love responsibly in order to be alive in 2010 and experience the World Cup

Key denotative lexical items: be there = be alive

Key connotative links: Love to = want to, but also: Love to = Love responsibly in order to

This reading of the billboard is confirmed by the rationale for the execution provided by LoveLife (Corporate website 2004):

“combines the concepts of responsible personal relationships and future aspirations” & “also deliberately implies personal responsibility for one’s behaviour and the need for individual initiative in accomplishing life goals.”

Out of the 28 responses, the following approximate at least some part of the denotative and/or connotative intended meanings:

To be alive for a long time

She would love to reach or be there when 2010

I would love to live longer till 2010 and escape AID

Live responsibly, protective sex to avoid AIDS

I want to live for a long time

It means longing to live a long life

The person would love to be alive and wants to explore and know the world or a certain place

Score:

2 responses (7.14%) approximate the connotative meaning (responsible love to avoid death as a consequence of Aids)

3 responses (10.7%) approximate the denotative meaning (be there = alive)

Combined score: Only 17.86% of the respondents negotiated a meaning that approximates a “valid” decoding of the intended message

Question 2 (Poster depicting child’s drawing and black female pilot)

What does the picture say to you?

Verbatim responses:

Means development in technology

The sky is the limit

If you are enlightened you can be everywhere want to be

A youth who would like to be somebody with a bright future

To devise means of reaching that particular place

Children must be sent to school

Young ones are interested to know more about love

It tell us about life, people drawing

Integration of living organisms and non living organisms

Vodacom a good way of communication

South Africa is improving (going higher)

Shows the young girl who would like to have a future or would like to be a pilot

The picture motivates people about education

Know and accept HIV/AIDS and try to overcome it (deal with it)

Youth should be taught about AID so that they can escape AID

It show me that there is light after education

A young girl hoping to be a pilot some day

Let us unite to fight AIDS

Seen light

The picture shows that life is the most valuable thing

Go and explore nature and places

Tells me that there are nice, beautiful things to be found

The sky is the limit

Aware of HIV / AIDS

Importance of education

AIDS awareness to learners

Warns me against HIV/AIDS

Score:

Although 5 responses (17,8%) indicated that the billboard somehow had to do with education and/ or HIV/Aids, the majority interpreted the message in ways that did not at all correspond to the stated rationale, as per the LoveLife Corporate website (2004):

“The visual concept for the three creative executions juxtaposes a child’s drawing of an idealized future goal with a picture of a real person having attained that goal.”

Significantly, not a single response showed any evidence of an awareness of the significance of the child’s drawing which feature prominently in each of the 2004 creative executions. This aspect of selective perception was later investigated during the January 2005 focus group sessions.

Question 3 (Poster depicting pregnant woman & children)

What does the picture say to you?

Verbatim responses:

The child still to be born wants to also enjoy life

Pregnancy disturbs education of our children

If one is HIV positive one should prevent the young one

A child is choosing to be in the tummy than be outside the cruel world

A kid sympathising with her expecting mother

Pregnant woman delivering

Like to be pregnant woman

It tells us about the pregnant (...)

Tells us about pregnant woman

No answer

Protect yourself against HIV

Pregnant HIV mothers should be given Nevirapene

The picture shows pregnancy. Love life has something to do with teenage pregnancy

No answer

Safe sex and prevention AID in pregnant women

A pregnant woman

A young girl looking forward to becoming a mother when she gets old

Careful and responsible citizens can save our future leaders

Shows pregnant woman

It shows that life has its own hassles

Tells me of pregnancy and warns me of HIV/AIDS

Somebody likes to be somebody living in that period

Pregnant woman and sad

Means we are (incomplete answer)

Means that people practise sex

Love for children, caring mother

A poster of a person who is pregnant and who would love to live longer. But according to the picture I see I am not quite sure whether she will live longer or not, because I do not know her HIV status

Means lack of morals

Score:

Of the three posters, this one created the most misconceptions and even negative responses. Not a single response approached the stated LoveLife rationale: “Happy, stable relationships – a small child looking up at her pregnant thirty-something mother depicts the desire of teenagers for the idealized “two-parent and a home” stable family life depicted in the accompanying childlike drawing” (LoveLife Corporate website 2004).

Question 4 (Poster depicting young graduate)

What does the picture say to you?

Verbatim responses:

To care about life can lead to bright life or future

Education opens way of love life for our learners

No answer given

Love to be successful and an educated person in a progressive country

Attempt to reach a goal

Further your education

Love to be a graduate

Shows us a graduate, very happy

Graduated person, very happy

Graduated person

Because of OBE our kids are getting quality education

If you aim high you will achieve as long as you play safe in life

The picture shows the fruits of education

The government would like everyone to be well educated in the next coming years

Youth can't reach higher education if are not taught to be careful of AIDS

Success

Wishes of a young boy studying and obtaining a degree sometime in life

The future of our land lies on our preventative measures against HIV/AIDS

Shows academic progress

The picture shows that with education there is always a future

Achieve my goals through hard work

The person reached the place he has been wishing for

Graduating and happy

Means after all problems there is a success

We have to be educated

Attainment of goals through education

No answer

Would love to achieve success/ have academic qualification

Score:

This poster elicited the most responses that could be linked with the stated rationale of attaining education and success in life through responsible sexuality (avoiding HIV/Aids) but, even so, only two responses directly linked success/education and responsible sexuality. Most respondents (18) linked the poster with the importance of education. This result highlights one of the most important tenets of reception theory, namely that the interpretation of any given text is powerfully influenced by the meaning expectation of the interpreter (Jauss 1982) which determines what becomes “visible” to them and what remains “invisible”. Since the respondents are all teachers, the depiction of a graduate is far more “visible” to them than, for example, the female pilot of the first poster.

Another significant aspect is the extent to which the “love to” catchphrase has become imbedded in three of the responses, perhaps signifying how mediated repetition does lead to assimilation.

Provisional conclusions

An analysis of the interpretation of the three posters by the 28 participants reveals the following:

- There is a general awareness among the respondents that HIV/Aids impacts negatively on life expectancy and quality of life.

- This awareness is associated or linked with the LoveLife posters, but it cannot necessarily be attributed to knowledge generated by the campaign, since sexuality education and HIV/Aids forms an important part of the syllabus of the Advanced Certificate of Education the respondents are enrolled for.
- A significant number of respondents were able to identify elements of the poster (a graduate, a pilot, a pregnant woman), but none were able to integrate the verbal, iconic, indexical and symbolic signs in order to reconstruct a meaning or interpretation that approximates the stated rationale for the creative executions. In particular not a single respondent was able to link the children's drawings with the other elements of the posters, rendering a key aspect of LoveLife's stated rationale for the artistic execution of the poster campaign meaningless.

RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

As already indicated, focus group discussions were conducted to discuss aspects of the Flagstaff group's responses, as well as to pursue the respondents' evident inability to integrate the verbal, iconic, indexical and symbolic signs comprising the posters.

Clarification of unusual /unexplained responses

During the initial analyses of responses, the following were identified for discussion and clarification during focus group sessions:

Poster 2: Black female pilot

- Integration of living organisms and non living organisms
- Vodacom a good way of communication
- It tell us about life, people drawing
- It show me that there is light after education

Poster 3: Pregnant woman & children

- A child is choosing to be in the tummy than be outside the cruel world
- A kid sympasysing with her expecting mother
- It shows that life has its own hassles
- Means lack of morals

Twenty four of the original 28 Flagstaff respondents took part in the focus group discussion. It was explained to the group that, as before, there were no "correct" or "incorrect" responses, and that the purpose of the discussion was to try to understand how the different meanings were generated, and also to clarify some responses.

The response "integration of living organisms and non living organisms" left the group baffled for quite a while and no clear answer/rationale was provided. One member did suggest that the pilot and aircraft signified the way in which humans have become "integrated" with technology.

“Vodacom a good way of communication” initially created some laughter, until a member pointed out that, when the photo of the billboard was taken, a small Vodacom poster was inadvertently framed in the bottom centre of the LoveLife poster. The group was asked what the possible reason(s) was/were for focusing on this very insignificant part of the slide, and several members ventured that the respondent had probably recently obtained a Vodacom phone and was therefore more likely to see the Vodacom poster. This interpretation is in line with one of the central tenets of reception theory, namely the close correlation between personal circumstance, meaning expectation and meaning production.

“It tell us about life, people drawing” also baffled the group to some extent. The only explanation ventured was that the child’s drawing was being referred to. At this point the facilitator did not pursue the matter, as the whole question regarding the purpose of the children’s drawing in the creative execution of the posters was a topic that would be engaged with on its own.

“It show me that there is light after education” This response was included for discussion primarily for the (unintended) humour it contained. The group initially did not see the irony (education=darkness) and read the response as education provides light / enlightenment. The inability of the group to interpret the irony imbedded in the response confirms the tenet that the exclusive use of English in the poster campaign presents a barrier to understanding, as it is clear that even the English of a group of trained Xhosa teachers does not allow the nuances of expression and interpretation of their mother language.

The responses to poster 3 (pregnant mother and children) elicited the most controversy amongst the group. The first 3 responses clearly put pregnancy in a very negative light. Debate was initially guarded, since the depiction of the naked (white!) pregnant woman was considered a very sensitive issue. Several members of the group agreed that the poster was “immoral”. The group largely agreed that open discussion of sexuality was considered taboo in rural Xhosa society, and that when any reference to sexuality was necessary, it should be done in a veiled and metaphorical way. This response clearly shows that this particular LoveLife poster is not only confusing, but contradictory in its message to rural Xhosa people. Regarding the negative responses to pregnancy per se (as expressed in responses 1-3), group discussion revealed that wide-spread poverty and extremely difficult living conditions accounted for this viewing of pregnancy as a burden, instead of a joy as the (intended) message of the poster suggests.

Finally, the group was asked to debate the significance and meaning of the children’s drawings that form part of the creative execution of the posters. Although this issue had been touched on during the discussion of the response “It tell us about life, people drawing”, several members admitted to only becoming aware of the children’s drawings once specific reference to it was made. The ensuing discussion failed to provide an interpretation in line with the *LoveLife* rationale between the drawing and the rest of the poster, that is “The visual concept for the three creative executions

juxtaposes a child's drawing of an idealized future goal with a picture of a real person having attained that goal" (LoveLife Corporate website 2004).

The subsequent group discussions with the rest of the teacher cohort correlated to a great extent with the discussions of the Flagstaff group. Whereas the Flagstaff group consisted of 24 rural, Xhosa-speaking teachers, the other groups included teachers from different races, languages and cultures, and comprised people from rural as well as urban areas. The only major differences in response between the Flagstaff group and the rest of the cohort pertained to accepted norms in the "discussability" of sexual issues and the ability to integrate the various components of the poster into a meaningful message. No attempt was made to analyse the group discussions in terms of responses according to geographical location, culture, race or language, as this would go beyond the stated purpose of the research.

CONCLUSION

This study supports previous findings that the LoveLife poster campaign carries "not only contradictory but vague messages" and that "the visual messages also make no clear connection with the services the campaign provides" (Bechan 2003:63). Although the LoveLife logo is recognised by the majority of the 218 participants in this study, the 2004 poster campaign generates different and conflicting messages due to the fact that it does not cater for language and culture-specific differences in the South African population. The whole concept of LoveLife as a brand is problematic. While branding in recent years have moved to promoting certain "lifestyles" rather than a product, the product remains a key part of the promotion, in that it promises access to the particular lifestyle, however far-fetched the claim may be. LoveLife, on the other hand, has no readily identifiable concrete "product" or service, except condoms, as expressed by a member of the Flagstaff group.

In order to become more effective, the LoveLife poster campaigns will have to become differentiated in terms of addressing specific cultural groupings, using appropriate language and visual media that eliminates conflicting interpretation of the message. The poster campaigns should also form a definite link with LoveLife's "product", namely the services it provides through its clinics and youth centres. Fortunately initial research conducted on the 2005 poster campaign in the Transkei indicates some positive moves towards this.

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ADDENDUM

The following photographs of the posters in question were taken by the author in Bizana and Flagstaff.



