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Department of Media Studies

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Contemporary Representation and Imaginings of Family, Partnering and Love among Black South Africans in *Date My Family*

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Media Studies

Supervised by Professor Nicky Falkof

March 2019

Declaration

I confirm that the work submitted is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise. I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others. I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

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Candy Sithole

June 2019

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Chapter One**:**

Introduction

This study examines contemporary representation and imaginings of the black South African family structure in the popular reality dating television programme, *Date My Family*. The programme is a significant study of how reality television values intersect with discourses on and around family, and experiences of ideal romantic partnering and love. These are fundamental and interrelated practices on which social and cultural systems rely. The study considers the programme's predominant display of black South African families to determine how the seemingly stable notion of the family is actually unstable and far more complex than it seems. It further aims to discuss current dynamics – the relationships and practices – within black South African families and how their members negotiate ideas of romantic partnering and love, as well as the ways in which *Date My Family* captures this.

Date My Family – broadcast on local channel, *Mzansi Magic* – is a reality dating television programme about a bachelor or bachelorette who is in pursuit of a potential partner and, eventually, love. The protagonist is first introduced to a panel of immediate and extended family members and close friends of three potential partners. This meeting comprises a sit-down with each family involving a conversation about the potential partner, and consuming a three-course meal prepared by the family. Before this encounter, each family is asked to provide a menu detailing the meals that they intend to serve. The programme is narrated by a black male voiceover artist, Sjula Dlamini, who comments frequently throughout. During the time in which the protagonist interacts with the families, the potential partner represented by the family remains unseen, sitting in a separate room. He or she is able to observe the meeting from a monitor and follows the conversation through a set of headphones. In the selection process, all three families and the potential partners of each are required to stand outside their homes awaiting a car that either confirms a first date or that signals rejection. For the former, the bachelor or bachelorette will be in the car that arrives at the house and for the latter, a bottle of wine is in the back seat of the car. A decision about which potential partner to choose is made by the protagonist based on the families' behaviour and description of their relative or friend. The protagonist then takes his or her chosen partner on a date in an attempt to know them further. Both parties decide whether or not to proceed to a second date, and perhaps more dates, and possibly a romantic relationship, thereafter.

Date My Family has notable socio-cultural impact – it is a top trending topic on major social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter every Sunday when it is broadcast. Viewers using Facebook engage in conversation about the programme by either mentioning it in their posts or by using hashtags similar to those found on Twitter, such as #DateMyFamily, #DMF and #dmfmzansi during and after the hour it is broadcast. On Twitter, the number one topic on the trending list is the hashtag #DateMyFamily. The programme has received considerable attention and adoration from its viewers since it first aired in 2016. *Date My Family*'s popularity and success have allowed it to enter its sixth season to date. While the format of the programme is interesting, the participants it attracts are the true highlight. *Date My Family* has had some controversial characters, and awkward family and first-date encounters. Audience members often take to social media platforms to comment on and debate about these moments, and others in the programme. Some episodes and their respective participants have been the topic of online publications, such as *ALL4WOMEN,* who listed the most shocking *Date My Family* episodes, in which participants were rude, dishonest about their personal and social lives and careers, and seemed to express unrealistic demands of their potential partners (Venge, 2018); *TimesLIVE* reported on Twitter's furious reaction to an episode in which the male potential partners were accused of body-shaming the bachelorette and for being sexist (Kekana, 2019); and *City Press* wrote on the entertainment value of the programme – its meaningful and relevant content, but also that it truly reflects some of the realities of family and dating experiences among South African men and women (Marshall, 2018). Consequently, it is clear that *Date My Family* is an important cultural text worth watching and examining.

The programme challenges the normative ways in which we imagine that relationships happen. Meeting the family of one's significant other for the first time is often considered meaningful – an encounter that typically occurs following a degree of familiarity and comfortability within the relationship. In *Date My Family*, the bachelor or bachelorette instead meet the family of a potential partner first. Furthermore, its content is locally specific, allowing it greater cultural relevance as it targets a primarily black South African audience, and raises specific questions about the black family structure as well as the nature of interrelated social practices – romantic partnering and romantic love – in relation to the programme's representation of blackness. The notion of blackness and how it manifests within *Date My Family* is important to consider because traditional reality television and reality dating television programming has been dominated by Western perceptions and practices of family, romantic partnering and romantic love. This is not to present the black community as a single entity but it is interesting to note

the ways in which the programme navigates and comments on these practices through predominantly black South African participants.

Rationale

Since its emergence, television has both reflected and influenced societal values, attitudes and practices (Morgan and Signorielli, 1990; Morgan and Shanahan, 1997; and Morgan, Leggett and Shanahan, 1999). Moreover, the medium has evolved to include multiple programming models and the recent addition of reality television – a genre of television that describes apparently "unscripted programming featuring ordinary people as contestants, participants and subjects" (Ouellette, 2016: 4) – is a fascinating study of how "life has become stagecraft – a blending of reality and mass mediated experience" (Rose and Wood, 2005: 284). Reality television's integration of popular entertainment values, societal representation, multi-cultural content and a "claim to the discourse of the real" (Murray and Ouellette, 2004: 3) is among the founding premises of this research. The genre alters conventional depictions of life on television and seems to offer audiences insight into the intimate space of its subjects. The emergence of reality television has introduced "new, more 'realistic' portrayals of individuals' everyday lives" (Bennett, 2014: 18). Significantly, it is also perceived to offer an "untraditional array of ways for constructing selfhood through the kind of talk that it features" (Aslama and Pantti, 2006: 168).

The current trend of reality dating television – the sub-genre to which this study refers – includes diverse programmes, ranging from those that "follow couples on light-hearted, sexually-driven dates to semi-serious competitions for marriage proposals" (Zurbriggen and Morgan, 2006: 2). These programmes "portray nonactors in dating situations with the camera acting as an observer of real-time events" (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg and Smith, 2007: 490). Ferris *et al.* (2007: 490) continue, "… viewers act as voyeurs, watching the edited dating situation unfold as it is filmed live." The range of programming in this sub-genre is available to South African audiences but is largely comprised of "international shows and local re-workings of global franchises" (Smit, 2017: 2). As a locally produced reality dating television programme and among the first of its kind, *Date My Family* portrays local imaginings of romantic partnering and interrelated social aspects – family and the aspiration to romantic love – in some ways that do not follow conventional displays of family life and romance in similar programmes in the reality television and reality dating television genres.

The wide circulation and continued relevance of reality television, despite its short tenure on television, has led to a constant study of the subject. It is important to consider that this genre is in constant flux and consequently remains heavily contested. For Biltereyst (2004: 119), reality television's emphasis "on everyday life, on strong reality claims, authenticity, intimacy and first person speech has made it possible" for it "to shed new light onto various kinds of social and moral issues". Some points of debate and contestation, especially in the study of the genre, typically centre on "*identity politics* ('I,' manifestation of the self), *interpersonal relations* ('I and the other'), and the *relationship between the individual and the wider societal environment* ('I, the other and society')" (Biltereyst, 2004: 119). Scholars such as Ferguson (2010) and Skeggs and Wood (2012) draw attention to questions around its obsession with familial display and representation, though they are still to address how it "debates and reshapes the family" (Taddeo, 2010: 123). There is not much research available on the subject of reality television in South Africa or Africa. However, Smit (2016, 2017) examines South African reality television, representations of fatherhood and nation in the local reality television programme, *Forgive and Forget*, and the re-evaluation of the wedding through the local reality television programme, *Our Perfect Wedding*, respectively. My study adds to existing research as it focuses on contemporary black South African families through *Date My Family* (how it represents and imagines the dynamics within these, and how the participants position themselves within these) and the socio-cultural implications thereof. Furthermore, these

Television in general has played a vital role in the construction and representation of ideas around family. Morgan, Leggett and Shanahan (1999) present two distinct Western concepts of family portrayal on television, namely structure and function. By structure, Morgan *et al.* (1999: 50) refer to "how television families are arranged in terms of the presence and number of children, divorce, remarriage, single parenthood and so on", and by function, they mean "what families do to their members". These televised portrayals of family play a significant role in social control and change. Regarding social control, Morgan *et al.* (1999: 53) suggest, "the messages of television are produced by cultural and economic elites" and tend to "strengthen dominant, mainstream cultural conceptions". Regarding family life, this often reflects a Western/ European traditional, suburban nuclear family structure. However, they also note that more recent debates about the relationship between television and familial representation centre on images that overstate and idealise what it is like to be a member of a non-conventional family (1999: 53) and in this way, contribute to social change. Familial representation has become a popular theme in reality television. Taddeo (2010: 138) writes that

because “family opens up such a space of performed identity, it is not surprising that television has always been one of the key battlegrounds for familial ideas”.

The study of family in reality television has since been dominated by a preoccupation with Eurocentric ideas. Such ideas posit past or present European superiority in family formation, household structure and child well-being. Taddeo (2010: 124) notes that the modern family form – used to describe a nuclear model with “a male breadwinner, female homemaker, and dependent children” – was “naturalised as universal” and “upheld as a dominant cultural ideal”. Taddeo (2010) also notes that a gendered division of labour within this family unit was traditionally only an option for the white middle class, whose male household heads could access the family’s earnings. *Date My Family*, however – a programme centred on the African family – pictures a different familial form and updated or shifted norms, and addresses issues of gender role renegotiations within the family unit. The programme encourages a discussion of important features of this social unit in African communities, namely romantic partnering and romantic love. It is a valuable contribution to the study of familial display in reality television as it pictures some revised presentations of socio-cultural practices, attitudes and identity.

One of the notable features of *Date My Family* is the recurrent absence of a father figure in the families that appear on the programme. This representation destabilises a traditional conception of families that often emphasises the importance of the father in the family – particularly as the dominant figure. Therborn (2004: 13) identifies multiple common features of an African family institution, three of which are relevant to this study, namely “strong patriarchal traditions,” a “great cultural weight given to fertility and lineage,” and “social and cultural patterning through kinship”. A strong patriarchal tradition has the father as the dominant figure and we see *Date My Family*’s comment on this through repeated paternal absence. This study further explores the programme’s representation of the role of the parent or older generation in the romantic partnering of the child generation as well as strong patriarchal traditions that seem to emerge, and the possible disempowerment of these traditions. Each notion reflects a key premise in the study that connects *Date My Family* to newer arrangements of family structure, romantic partnering and romantic love.

Date My Family caters to, and is representative of, contemporary black South African familial and emotional experiences as it is produced within a current and local context and resonates with black people existing in this context. In the context of South Africa, Mhlambi (2009: 18) notes that “before the introduction of black television, black people were channelled into

viewing white films, mostly Hollywood mediocrities that never related to them". What results from *Date My Family* – a programme broadcast on the local channel, *Mzansi Magic,* whose target audience is black South Africans – is a text that allows viewers to "test out their own notions of the real, the ordinary and the intimate against the representation before them" (Murray and Ouellette, 2004: 8). The bachelor or bachelorette who first meets the family of a potential partner before making a decision on who to select for a final date not only reverses common practices in the process of romantic partnering, where one typically meets the family of their significant other at a later stage, but portrays a shift away from Western norms in current imaginings of African kinship. The young black men and women (the bachelor and bachelorette, especially) display greater independence as they take it upon themselves to find a partner on a reality dating television programme. This action suggests a lesser emphasis and dependence on the parent or older generation, particularly in relation to some traditional notions that perceive the child generation as typically dependent on the older generation for romantic partnering, and as individuals who must honour and obey the older generation.

This research adds to several important studies, later discussed in the literature review, on family representation, contemporary and popular cultural imaginings of romantic partnering, and paternal influence in an African – a South African – context. Lesejane (2006: 173) explains that in southern African tradition, "The father figure has historically been a highly respected figure who is seen as active in his children's lives and also a community leader." This figure, Lesejane (2006: 179) continues, is "somebody who cares for, nurtures, leads, guides and is a role model in the family and community". In *Date My Family*, the recurrent absence of a father figure challenges these notions, suggesting a seeming disempowerment of black South African fathers as husbands and as patriarchs. It also suggests a shift away from traditional ideas that emphasise the importance of a paternal voice or opinion in key decision-making processes in the child generation.

This study aims to outline the ways in which *Date My Family* is a comment on contemporary renegotiations and imaginings of black identity through the family structure, as well as the relationships that exist within this institution. The programme presents how imposed Western ideals of family roles and support are heightened resulting in some misrepresentations of current happenings or imaginings in the local context and more particularly within the black community.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

In this section, I have selected literature that highlights and discusses the following themes: reality television as the mediated portrayal of particular socio-cultural units and practices, and its impact on society; Western and African conceptions of family structure and dynamics; romantic partnering through ideas of courtship and marriage; and Western and African perceptions and practices of romantic love.

Date My Family can be understood as a cultural product or text. Hirsh (1972: 127) defines cultural products as "'non-material' goods directed at a public of consumers, for whom they generally serve an aesthetic or expressive, rather than a clearly utilitarian, function". Cultural products reflect a particular culture's perspectives and the consumer is able to interpret the product in a meaningful way. The programme is broadcast on *Mzansi Magic* – a South African channel that is widely known and celebrated for its airing of locally produced content. As a reality dating television programme, *Date My Family* portrays current ideas of romantic partnering and romantic love, where both practices form integral parts of the family institution. It portrays some perceptions about the nature of these components in relation to black South African families. The programme's focus on the aspect of family is a common trend in reality television (Taddeo, 2010). It is a culturally relevant text that features young men and women whose aspirations include finding a significant other and eventually, romantic love. These participants first interact with the different families – their attitudes, values and practices, before they are introduced to a potential partner. Through this process, the programme is able to create and express relatable perspectives for members of black South African families, who form a large proportion of its viewership.

Reality Television

The reality television phenomenon is a fascinating site in television programming with great cultural relevance. Ouellette (2016: 4) describes reality television as "an ambiguous term that encompasses the swatch of ostensibly unscripted programming featuring ordinary people as contestants, participants and subjects". There are shared conventions and other variations of the term through sub-genre formulations, but the line between reality television programmes, documentaries and fictional television programmes is more difficult to determine. This is largely due to the ways in which reality television combines and borrows from these television

forms. Ouellette (2016: 5) suggests that theoretical approaches to this genre should not be concerned with what exactly reality television is but with "how and why reality television is produced, signified, marketed, and operationalised on and through television", as well as with "examining the cultural work that reality television currently does".

Reality television has transformed television culture. Skeggs and Wood (2012: 21) note that: "Broader debates about 'cultural value' which surround reality television programmes are often shaped by notions of 'quality' which are themselves couched in discourses of social hierarchy and class." For Stiernstedt and Jakobsson (2017: 2), "the cultural significance of reality television is based on its claim to represent social reality" and thus cannot ignore questions of social class. Couldry and Littler (2011) and, Ouellette and Hay (2008) have criticised the genre for its continued representation and reproduction of class divisions. According to Stiernstedt and Jakobsson (2017: 4), it has been noted that reality television portrays working-class people negatively – "most clearly elaborated in relation to so-called makeover formats, in which middle-class people often propagate middle-class norms to working class people, and sometimes go as far as ridiculing or humiliating them on camera". Thus, in most reality television programmes, the concept of class can inform the narrative.

The style of reality television programming is similar to the documentary tradition. More specifically, "the use of handheld cameras and lack of narration" mimics "observational documentaries and carries with it an implicit reference to the form's original promise to provide direct access to the experience of the observed subject" (Murray and Ouellette, 2004: 7). The relationship between reality television and the more traditional documentary style of television is important when thinking about the genre as a social and cultural symbol. Skeggs and Wood (2012: 2) note, "The public project of documentary was generally seen to work in the interests of informing the citizen rather than the consumer." The introduction of reality programming represents a restyling of the documentary. Several studies on reality television have centred on its claim to represent the real. Corner (2002: 1) suggests that

> the new forms of reality television and their various morphings with game-shows, soaps, lifestyle make-overs, etc., are indicative of a 'post-documentary culture' where the entertainment drive towards diversion and a performative playfulness upset the categories of the 'real', the 'social' or even the 'public' which were once hard-fastened to the documentary form.

Cultural texts, especially television, play a crucial role in the formation of "idealised citizen subjects" and are "instrumental as resources of self-achievement in different and politically significant ways" (Ouellette and Hay, 2008: 472). Thus, television is an important site through which audience members are able to shape and guide themselves, and their personal interactions and associations with others. For Bachmann-Medick (2012: 99), "Culture as text became a *chiffre* for the insight that social life itself is organised through signs and symbols, as well as through representations and their interpretation." Thus, cultural texts are objects, behaviours and actions that reveal and transmit cultural meaning. Reality television has "proliferated in the context of deregulation, welfare reform and other attempts to reinvent government" and has become the "quintessential technology of citizenship of our age" (Ouellette and Hay, 2008: 472). The context of a contemporary and post-apartheid South Africa warrants an interest in this type of cultural product, particularly among the black community as its members navigate current representations and happenings. The genre expands beyond broadcasting apparent realities to become the "entry point into a broader menu of customisable entertainment and self-fashioning opportunities and requirements" (Ouellette and Hay, 2008: 472). Compared to conventional programmes on television, most reality fare depicts ordinary people engaging in unusual (wilderness survival, global travel) and usual (dating, home decorating) activities, offering viewers a chance to compare and contrast their own lives with those of the programme's protagonist (Rose and Wood, 2005: 284). To simply view reality television as minor entertainment is a failure to recognise the extent to which the genre is concerned with self-government and how, in that measure, it creates a zone for the construction of everyday discourses of citizenship (McCarthy, 2007: 17). Reality television allows one to construct a way of being or belonging in the world, to measure oneself against the content it displays and to apply this to their personal, communal and social experiences.

Reality television programming has become an effective means of integrating apparent realities into popular entertainment displays. This increasingly popular television form is an important contemporary text through which ideas of selfhood, community and being are continuously produced and reproduced. A basic definition of reality television denotes "unscripted shows with non-professional actors being observed by cameras in preconfigured environments" (Kavka, 2012: 5). A more nuanced definition seeks to "supplement the internal features of reality TV texts with information about the critical discourses and cultural economies in which they are embedded" (Kavka, 2012: 5). For Murray and Ouellette (2004: 2), the latter definition also signifies "an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties

than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real". Some ideas in this study coincide with an argument made by Murray and Ouellette (2004: 3), which suggests the pairing of popular entertainment with apparent discourses of reality

> has made reality TV an important generic forum for a range of institutional and cultural developments that include the merger of marketing and 'real life' entertainment, the convergence of new technologies with programmes and their promotion, and an acknowledgement of the manufactured artifice that coexists with truth claims.

Reality television provides a multi-faceted viewing experience that affects the socially and culturally complex notions of reality and artifice as it attempts to blur this distinction. Holmes and Jermyn (2004: 1) state that the genre seems to address "the ways in which broadcasters are seeking to attract audiences in the multichannel landscape, the ways in which television is harnessing its aesthetic and cultural power and an increasingly multimedia experience, the way in which it resonates so extensively in the cultural sphere".

While it is not the only socio-cultural theme represented in reality television programming, the subject of family has become one of the genre's predominant areas of representation. Examples of successful international reality television programmes about famous and non-famous families include *The Osbournes*, *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, *Jon and Kate Plus 8* and *One Big Happy Family*. Familial display in reality television reflects continuously evolving ideas of the family in context-specific cultures: amongst the examples above, Bruce Jenner (step-father and father of the well-known Kardashian/Jenner sisters) of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* has since undergone a sex change and the family has claimed difficulty in adjusting to the apparently changed dynamic; and Jon and Kate of *Jon and Kate Plus 8* have since divorced, with Kate now starring in her own programme, *Kate Plus 8,* which details her transition to single-parenting. The idea that the family is in constant flux has led to a number of reality television narratives that capture "a sense of anxiety and ambivalence about evolving family life" (Taddeo, 2010: 124). Reality television can present newer arrangements of the family as well as reflect and reshape existing ideals of this unit. In their reflection of diversity within the family, reality television programmes capture this "sense of anxiety and ambivalence". The above literature contributes to a further understanding of how reality

television and reality dating television are important sites of social and cultural influence in society as well as the ways in which the genre and sub-genre achieve this.

Family

Studies of family systems often suggest that "while there is a very wide range of variation in their superficial features there can be discovered a certain small number of general structural principles which are applied and combined in various ways" (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, 2015: 2). A basic definition of family suggests "an inter-generational social group organised and governed by social norms regarding descent and affinity, reproduction, and the nurturant socialisation of the young" (White, 1991: 7). The significance of this definition lies in the fact that "it views the family as a social institution with both ideational and concrete dimensions" (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 13- 14). Social analysts often describe the modern family unit as "a nuclear unit with a male breadwinner, female homemaker, and dependent children" (Taddeo, 2010: 124). The family institution can be "multidimensional in nature in that it affects and is affected by the various social, economic, cultural and political institutions which together form the social structure of any society" (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 1). The changes in the family structure and function are fundamentally influenced by the changes in its environment. These changes in surrounding institutions are a result of two main sets of factors, namely endogenous (internal) and exogenous (external) (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 1). Adegboyega (1994) argues that environmental factors influence the form (nuclear, extended, etc.) that a family takes in different parts of a country or continent. Amoateng and Richter (2007: 2) also note some social pressures and "immense economic, demographic, political, legal and religious innovation" as factors that contribute to change in the family institution.

There are notable differences in family structure (formation, practices, values, beliefs and attitudes) of African and black South African families, and Western families. African families are often comprised differently to Western groupings: the former are commonly associated with the idea of the extended family and the latter are commonly referred to as the elementary or nuclear family. Some changes in African and black South African families are attributed to the colonial project and its extension in South Africa, apartheid. In South Africa, these systems were institutionalised through mechanisms such as "land expropriation, political disenfranchisement of the majority indigenous populations, and the institutionalisation of wage labour through industrial development" (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 2). These developments

resulted in significant changes in the social structures of society – processes such as urbanisation, industrialisation and consequent apartheid-imposed restrictions caused by the colonial project, impacted the structure of family and household patterns in society, especially among Africans who were most burdened by such policies (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 3). For example, urban-bound migration impacted the African family life in many ways:

> First, in rural areas the absence of males, who predominated in the migratory labour system, meant either the postponement or complete avoidance of marriage among Africans. Second, in cases where marriages were contracted, economic necessity meant that the husband/ father left his wife and children behind to participate in the migratory labour system, a situation that led to such family patterns as female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, and unstable household composition... (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 4).

Thus, the South African family structure signals vital occurrences in South African society. The repercussions of colonialism and, later, apartheid are apparent in the current formation of a majority of black South African families and households. This observation informs a key premise of this study that presents *Date My Family* as a current representation of, and comment on, the families who appear on the programme.

The notion of the extended family in African culture often includes a common acceptance of extended family members into the basic family unit – extending beyond immediate family members to include people such as aunts, uncles, cousins and close friends. A more formal definition of extended family refers to "a section of lineage – a man and his sons with their wives and minor children or a woman and her daughters with their husbands and minor children" (Mair, 2013: 2) and is not limited to the description of the grandparent, parent and children but can include siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews, and their families. Amoateng and Richter (2007: 5) note that it has been suggested in early empirical studies that through modernisation, the extended family gave way to a more nuclear unit following some societal developments. According to this observation, the size of the family was relatively large before industrialisation but as society developed, the extended family unit became more nuclear. However, a study conducted by Simkins (1986) on family patterns in black and white domestic organisation in South Africa, failed to note "any significant difference in the household patterns of black people living in metropolitan, urban and rural areas" (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 6).

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there have been several changes evident in the political, social and economic spheres that have had great effects on family structures and processes. Some of these changes include the introduction of economic reform to improve social equity and income distribution through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and a transformation agenda aimed at the inclusion of previously marginalised groups, plus the improvement in delivery of social security, education, welfare, health and housing (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 7-8). These changes have somewhat affected the family form – nuclear or extended – and demonstrate that the evolution of family and household is more complex than previously conceived. For example, consider the role of the state: a large number of people were denied access to the country's resources due to apartheid policies. "This politics of exclusion gave rise to a huge problem of dependency through engendering widespread poverty..." (Amoateng and Richter, 2007: 8-9). This led to a large number of dependents – elders, extended family members and children – and increased unemployment or an inability to support the needs of the family.

Western conceptions of family and marriage cannot be excluded from this study because they have world-wide implications – they are often present and referenced in cultures or societies around the world. This is attributed to the West's impact globally – its conceptions, practices and values extend to countries and cultures who have histories connected to it through colonisation or immigration. A typical assumption of the Western family structure is that family is formed by a conjugal couple: "they are somewhere along a predictable trajectory, from birth into a simple two-generation conjugal nuclear family household, to death as part of the disintegrating remnant of what was once another two-generation conjugal household" (Russell, 2004: 13). In short, "The Western family is short-lived and self-liquidating" (Goldthorpe, 1987). Russell (2004: 15) further states that in this conjugal system, "descent is conceived as flowing simultaneously and equilaterally from what are colloquially described as 'both sides of the family'."

There are notable differences in Western and African family systems. However, it is important to consider that people live within a social world in which Western and African ideas can co-exist. While the context of *Date My Family* is local, its portrayal of family life may be applied to a broader understanding of Western and African familial and kinship idioms. At the centre of familial tradition among the white South African community "is the conjugal couple, who are strongly expected to set up their own independent household in which they alone will rear

their own dependent children to maturity" (Russell, 2004: 7). In the African tradition, "descent rather than marriage is the central principle; in southern Africa, patrilineal or agnatic descent, i.e. descent from father" (Russell, 2004: 7). For Therborn (2004: 19) the subject of family is at the centre of African social life due to a "weakness of other institutions and social clusters, of the state, of specific religious institutions among holders of African beliefs, of classes, castes and nations". Characteristic of Sub-Saharan African family systems are a "distinctive marriage and descent pattern in spite of religious pluralism and enormous ethnic diversity", and "a great respect for age, elders, and ancestors, including the considerable importance accorded to rites of passage into adulthood, and age groups as bases of rights and solidarity" (Therborn, 2004: 18-19). In reviewing traditional conceptions of the family unit in both Western and African contexts, the current representations and influences of the practices and values of either can be better understood.

Romantic Partnering and Romantic Love

The role of romantic love in partnering and, eventually, marriage is often dependent on the way in which the idea of these social practices is arranged and represented, and in what context. Romantic love plays a significant role in the process of romantic partnering that might lead to marriage. One perception, reported by Coppinger and Rosenblatt (1968), emphasises the acts of being and not being in love as signals of the beginning and end of a marriage, respectively. It also suggests that romantic love manifests in the partnering process. Oppong (1980) discusses African romantic partnering at a particular moment in history, before the current saturation of globalised mass media. She defines romantic love as "the bond which may produce a level of stability in marital relations" (Oppong, 1980: 197). She further notes that modern trends in African courtship (participation of kin, monogamy and consensual undertakings) are based on older, European models that emphasise the desire for monogamy and a companionate marriage - "breadwinner-homemaker marriages marked by the gendered division of labour, and their success increasingly came to be measured by emotional satisfaction – the satisfaction spouses derived from being good providers, good homemakers, and responsible parents" (Parker, 2005: 79).

A common question among scholars writing on African family, kinship and marriage systems is whether love in African societies and their intimate relationships has the same kind of emotional bond as it does among Europeans or in the West. Shumway (2003: 3) writes, "The

idea that romance is specific to the cultures of Europe and the West is not new." Karandashev (2015: 8) notes,

> Some scholars view romantic love as a Western invention not found in other cultures. Western societies are preoccupied with romantic love as the idealisation of love. The hero of the American movie is always a romantic lover.

More specifically, Stone (1989) presents the idea of romantic love as non-existent in non-Western countries and cultures, except perhaps for the elites of such countries and cultures who have the luxury of cultivating it. Recent studies, especially those pertaining to Africa, which will be discussed later, indicate a different idea.

In some imaginings of the coupling and marriage process in traditional African societies, the role of elders in choosing partners is emphasised, as well as the rights and duties of spouses as opposed to their emotional attachments (Oppong, 1980: 198). This is important for this study because it highlights the traditional value of the older generation influencing partner selection among the children's generation. It is generally imagined that the older generation is better suited for this decision as they "do not see why a choice based solely on the mutual attraction of the couple should be advocated as the ideal" and thus their personal and emotional detachment in judgment "is more likely to select a spouse with the right qualities" (Mair, 2013: 4). This is significant for *Date My Family* because it is based on the idea that family members are better at choosing a partner than the individual seeking a romantic partner. The programme is an adoption of this traditional notion, and this is a key aspect of this study's analysis. Interestingly, Goode (1963: 174) notes that historically, "romantic love played a larger part in traditional African family systems than is generally conceded", although "most communities were successful in preventing it from weakening the power of the elders to arrange marriages for the child generation."

Tocco (2010: 977) writes, "Like people around the world, contemporary Africans are concerned about finding, losing and keeping love", but the lack of exploration on the subject of love in Africa "was often reinforced by the cultural ideologies of Africans, who tended to emphasise the importance of social exchange over personal affect in marriage during anthropology's formative years". Cole and Thomas (2009) suggest that the younger or child generation claim that intimate passion differentiates them from the older generation. They note that "many urban Africans felt both eagerness and uncertainty with regards to love – implying

that it was a new emotion, particularly in relation to marriage" (Cole and Thomas, 2009: 11). This is not to say that love itself is "new" to Africans but that love as a commodity in romantic partnership and as a social condition is becoming a part of popular culture and thus of ideas of how society works.

Contemporarily, there exist mass media representations and models of idealised romantic love with which young Africans identify themselves and through which they perform their romantic experiences. Hirsch and Wardlow (2006: 14) argue that "companionate marriage – the ideal that situates emotional closeness as both the foundation and goal of marriage – has become a key trope through which many across the globe now claim a modern identity". This statement suggests that romantic love extends beyond individual feelings – it is also about being modern; existing and experiencing as a citizen of a global world. Giddens (1991: 115) writes, "Post-traditional relationships are consciously constructed, analysed or broken up according to how the participants are feeling … an intimate partnership of two equal 'soulmates' becomes important for members of modern society," and "communication between equal partners ensures the couple are always oriented towards mutual satisfaction". He views this practice as one in which people's actions within romantic relationships are typically oriented towards the attainment of personal satisfaction. There is a general consensus about an idealised notion of romantic partnering, marriage and romantic love between companions:

> First, they must love each other deeply and choose each other unswayed by outside pressure. From then on, each must make the partner the top priority in life … Parents and in-laws should not be allowed to interfere in the marriage … Married couples should be best friends, sharing their most intimate feelings and secrets (Coontz, 2006: 5).

Narratives of love permeate our lives: "novels and films so predictably include a love story as at least a subplot that most people do not think to inquire into the significance of this repetition" (Shumway, 2003: 2). It is in predominantly fictional genres such as these that love has been most commonly depicted. Shumway (2003) argues that the narratives about romance that have been produced and reproduced in cultures across several societies have changed. It is not only through literature that these changes are noticeable but through the actual practices themselves – of romantic love, of romantic partnering, and of marriage. In *Date My Family*, we do not immediately see romantic love being practiced although it is implied that the bachelor or bachelorette enter the programme with existing ideas about the attainment of love through the

process of romantic partnering. This study looks at the ideas or romantic love that the programme's participants have and share through the show, and how these compare to common narratives of romance. The literature reviewed in this section, particularly that taken from Oppong (1980) is significant in that it assists in an understanding of traditional and white conceptions of courtship and marriage that either inform, misinform or renegotiate black contemporary imaginings and happenings.

This section has reviewed beneficial literature for a critical analysis of the ways in which each of the themes – family, romantic partnering and romantic love – is relevant to, and significant for, the study. It is important to look at the historical and contextual notions of Western and African family life to understand contemporary representation and imaginings of each and, more specifically, the black South African family. The practices of romantic partnering and romantic love are crucial to family life – a system typically dependent on these for social, cultural and economic meaning and value. The above literature also expresses a fluid interrelation of the presented themes and how they all work together in the programme to depict, seemingly, an understanding of black South African family life and the dynamics that exist therein.

Chapter Three:

Theoretical Framework

This study uses three key theoretical concepts, namely identity, race and representation. These are all complementary concepts. Race forms a crucial part of identity and perceptions of both are often produced and reproduced through representation. Together, these concepts determine the opportunities and challenges faced by an individual in the world. One may identify culturally, socially, politically and economically, and such identities are typically associated with power and value systems, and ideology. The media is a predominant form of communication that uses representations through a variety of texts or mediums to convey particular ideas related to race, culture and identity in society. Thus, the study draws from these specific theories to understand the ways in which contemporary representations of the black South African family and culture manifest in *Date My Family*.

Identity

Identity refers to the fact of being – who one is, how one comes to think of oneself in relation to others in the world, and how one is distinguished through qualities, beliefs, attitudes, practices, and so on. This is an important concept for my study because identity plays a crucial role in the choices one makes as well as how one behaves – it provides meaning. I observe and analyse *Date My Family* in this way – what identity do the participants undertake and what are the social and cultural implications thereof? Stets and Burke (2000: 225) note that "The core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance." These expectations and meanings create a set of values or ideals that determine behaviour. McCall and Simmons (1978: 1) add, "The naming within identity theory includes all the things (including self and other) that take on meaning in relation to our plans and activities." Identity theorists such as Freese and Burke (1994) have referred to the meaningful relationship between people and tangible and intangible things, to include the idea of resources (that which sustains one's processes of interaction) as a key factor in identity processes. Notably, Stets and Burke (2000: 225) write, "Much of the meaningful activity within a role that is governed by an identity revolves around the control of resources; this feature, as much as anything, defines social structure." The idea of the control of resources was introduced by Freese and Burke (1994) who describe it as role performances that extend beyond just symbolic interaction to include

sign interactions: “Persons manipulate signs (resources) and symbols in the situation to bring sign and symbolic meanings to match the sign and symbolic meanings held in their role-identities” (Stets and Burke, 2003: 19). Subsequently, Stets and Burke also suggest that

> In general, one's identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles. Thus, although the basis of self-classification is different in the two theories (group/category versus role), theorists in both traditions recognize that individuals view themselves in terms of meanings imparted by a structured society (Stets and Burke, 2000: 225-26).

The introduction of terms such as ‘social structure’ and ‘structured society’ by the above authors can lead to some thoughts regarding identity within the social context. These terms suggest an ordered way in which society functions and the implications thereof. This leads to questions about how one positions oneself in society and how social, cultural, political and economic aspects of that society affect one’s perceptions and experiences of being. In social identity theory, one’s social identity is the awareness that one is a part of a social group. Stets and Burke (2000: 225) define a social group as “a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category”. Furthermore, through a social comparison process, people who are similar to the self are referred to as the in-group while those who differ are referred to as the out-group (Stets and Burke, 2000: 225). Hogg and Abrams (1988) identify two significant processes that are involved in the formation of social identity – self-categorisation and social comparison – that have different consequences. Stets and Burke (2000: 225) elaborate:

> The consequence of self-categorization is an accentuation of the perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members, and an accentuation of the perceived differences between the self and out-group members. This accentuation occurs for all the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant inter-group categorisation. The consequence of the social comparison process is the selective application of the accentuation effect, primarily to those dimensions that will result in self-enhancing outcomes for the self.

In general, having a certain social identity is the process of being like others in the group and sharing similar perspectives. Another aspect of identity in society is cultural identity.

Hall (1990: 223) poses at least two ways of perceiving cultural identity. The first position defines cultural identity in terms of "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history and ancestry have in common". From this definition, cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and cultural codes of a group of people with "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes" of actual history (Hall, 1990: 223). The second position suggests that, "As well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; - or rather, since history has intervened – 'what we have become'," and that "We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side" (Hall, 1990: 225). His second position emphasises that cultural identities undergo continuous transformation: "Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (Hall, 1990: 226).

From the above theory, it is important to note the formation of two different identities in society – the social and the cultural. It is also implied that the individual or personal identity is commonly formed within these identities. While social and cultural identities denote group thought or self-categorisation in relation to a shared action, history or perspective with a group, it is also accepted that these identities are in constant flux. In *Date My Family*, the predominant display of black South African families is a good indicator of the social and cultural identities that the participants have taken on, as well as how these individuals navigate the groups and environments in which they find themselves. Importantly for subsequent theories, Hall (1990: 225) notes that, from the understanding that cultural identities are in constant flux, the nature of the colonial project can be understood: "The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation." *Date My Family* draws on common notions about South African identity – an identity which, in large part, is a consequence of the country's history and the colonial project. This also demonstrates the way in which race and identity are closely intertwined.

Race

Race can be described as the condition of belonging to a particular group typically based on ancestry and the physical characteristics and qualities associated with it. It is a term often used synonymously with the colour of one's skin, and has implications that include the division and segregation of societies in which the white "European" class is favoured, followed by other "lesser" classes. Malik (1996: 3) states that a definition of the term is difficult to conceptualise because of its contentious nature: "We use certain physical characteristics – such as skin colour – to define a race but ignore others – such as hair texture," showing that "the creation of race is the product of social need, not biological fact". Simply reducing the concept of race to a distinction of skin colour ignores other, important social factors – behaviours, attitudes, institutions and outcomes – that determine its perception and reception. Race can thus be understood as a social construct. As a social construct, it refers to "the meanings we attach to real and/or imagined biological and/or cultural markers", and when understood this way, "one is able to recognise the hierarchies of power and privilege embedded within racialised structures of meaning" (Erasmus, 2005: 9-10).

Haney-Lopez (1994) insists that race must be viewed as a social construction. That is, human interaction must be seen as the root and constant basis for the categorisation of race. In his work, Haney-Lopez highlights four significant features of the social construction of race:

> First, humans rather than abstract social forces produce races. Second, as human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations. Third, the meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly. Finally, races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation (Haney-Lopez, 1994: 197).

The process by which meanings of race arise is referred to as racial formation. In this conceptualisation, "race is not a determinant or residue of some other social phenomenon, but stands on its own as an amalgamation of competing societal forces" (Haney-Lopez, 1994: 197). Racial formation includes both the emergence of racial groups and their continuous degradation in social thought.

People in different places and times have held countless perceptions about the nature of humanity, and racism – "the grouping of people on the basis of physical appearance for the

purpose of social discrimination" (Perry, 2007: 2) – is embedded in several societies. One cannot exclude this notion from a discussion of race. Racism is a cultural pattern and is also deeply rooted in Western Europe and North America. It has had terrible social consequences that extend globally – the colonial project in the Americas, Australia and parts of Africa and Asia, and the extension of this project through the apartheid regime in South Africa. A basic characteristic of the persistence of racism is to do with the advantages it affords those who accept the idea. Perry (2007: 17) writes, "Among other things, racism is a state of mind that favours those on the strong end of power disparities," and, for those on the receiving end of racism, "institutionalised racist policies and established discriminatory practices not only cause immeasurable suffering in the lives of individuals, but they instil damage that can extend collectively over generations". Contemporarily, this damage is evident, as the repercussions of racism are still experienced among those who did and do not benefit from it.

Racial meanings have and continue to impact on people's lives significantly. In the context of South Africa, Erasmus (2005: 10) uses the terms "black(ness)" and "white(ness)" not to denote skin colour but to refer to "the ways in which hierarchical structures of meaning attached to skin colour have shaped people's material lives as well as their perceptions of themselves, of others, and of the world around them". It is important to note that these meanings are not fixed – "people struggle over these meanings and they change over time and from one context to another" (Erasmus, 2005: 10). Erasmus (2005) explains this statement through the example of the apartheid regime in South Africa. As a racist system, it maintained that white people were guaranteed power and privilege by virtue of being white. Subsequently, "struggles over who is to be considered black in South Africa today are struggles over what it means to be black and about who imagines themselves to have control over these meanings" (Erasmus, 2005: 10). This suggests that race is reduced to its association with skin colour, having little consideration of other important physical features and aspects of identity, and emphasises the notion of race as a social construct – as meanings created by society to perpetuate particular and dominant discriminatory ideologies.

The political and social structures that were created by the history of oppression in South Africa have influenced how black people in particular conceptualised their identities – how they defined themselves within the oppressive system, and the psychological effects thereof in a post-apartheid society. In his work on race and blackness, Lively (2000) offers an extensive exploration of the term "blackness". Racialism, he suggests, is a term describing "primitive

European colour prejudice that equated blackness with ugliness, evil, danger and sexual transgression" (2000: 14). There are other words and figurative meanings of the term "black" that are often associated with its negative perceptions, and so negative imagery and stereotypes of blackness and of being black are perpetuated. Here, it is important to note how engrained these negative perceptions of blackness are, and how they have extended beyond the European context, particularly in the instances of the colonial project in Africa and Apartheid in South Africa. Fanon (1952) analyses the damaging psychological effects of colonial racism, suggesting that it can lead to mentally disturbed behaviour. He refers particularly to cultural assimilation, a process whereby the colonial power's culture replaces that of the natives, damaging those who are or have been colonised. Hall (1996: 445) states that racism "operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalise the difference between belongingness and otherness". Some of the apartheid regime's greatest successes include its emphasis on difference and division, and its ability to create and reinforce a negative self-image and -definition among those that it oppressed, namely those considered as members of the black community. As a means of asserting its oppression of black people, apartheid "legitimised oppression through the labelling of certain categories of people as inferior, blacks, and others superior, whites, thus justifying a separatist and oppressive system of 'development'" (Deyi, 2013: 4).

The prolonged dominance of the white, oppressive government during apartheid came to an end in April of 1994 with the first democratic elections held in South Africa. The changes that resulted marked a formal end to the regime:

> This political transition resulted in many dramatic political, social, economic, ideological and personal changes" and "these changes have, in turn, had a substantial impact on South Africans' individual and group identities as well as the perceptions of power relations amongst various racial groupings (Puttick, 2011: 3).

An argument that remains prevalent in South African discourse on race is the idea that the country has since become a democratic nation.

> This idea of inclusivity – first conceptualised by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as 'the rainbow nation' – has become axiomatic in contemporary South Africa,

> where both black and white citizens claim a position in a country in which individuals and members of groups identify their similarities and differences as a means to unity (Shabangu, 2015: 53).

While segregation and racism have been outlawed in South Africa, Mtose (2011: 325) highlights that "the experiences of many black people who continue to suffer or suffered the effects of racism suggest that racism is alive, active, pervasive and no less damaging" in post-apartheid South Africa. Experiences of racism are a current and frequent reality for a majority of, if not all, black South Africans. In addition, Shabangu (2015: 53) argues that "Rainbowism has limited explanatory power in the face of empirical evidence in the form of the lived experiences of black people who come into contact with a white world, and South African non-whites in particular, who continue to experience their blackness (non-whiteness) relative to a hegemonic whiteness." Thus, the consequences of apartheid persist – ideas of blackness and whiteness and their respective connotations still affect each group's current way of existing in South Africa. Despite the implementation of policies such as Affirmative Action, Black Economic Empowerment and other such progressive policies (Foster, 2006), racism has continued to manifest in multiple ways.

Representation

The concept of representation is common in cultural studies and media studies. Hall's (1996: 444) definition of representation denotes the idea that "events, relations, and structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning". Additionally, Hall (1997: 17-19) notes two systems of representation: the first is the system "by which all sorts of objects, people, and events are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations which we carry around in our heads" and the second "depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organised into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts".

He also states that identity is one of the consequences of the politics of representation. For Phoenix, Howarth and Philogene (2017: 22), "there is an everyday politics at stake in processes of identity and representation, particularly in their points of connection". Hall (1996: 445)

states that we tend to think about identification as a simple process, concerned with fixed "selves" which we either are or are not. He continues,

> The play of identity and difference which constructs racism is powered not only by the positioning of blacks as the inferior species but also, and at the same time, by an inexpressible envy and desire; and this is something the recognition of which fundamentally displaces many of our hitherto stable political categories, since it implies a process of identification and otherness which is more complex than we had hitherto imagined.

Another aspect in the politics of representation is to do with ethnicity. Race and ethnicity differ in that the former denotes one's physical features while the latter includes cultural factors such as ancestry and language for a more nuanced representation and perception of the race to which it may refer. Ethnicity acknowledges "the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" (Hall, 1996: 447). The concept is important for this study because some of the participants attribute their perceptions of, and attitudes towards, romantic partnering to representations of their cultural and ethnic background. Thus, "Representation is possible only because enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time" (Hall, 1996: 447). The media is important in the notion of representation to understand how events, relations and structures in society are presented and circulated, as well as the impact thereof.

It is important to note that the media do not present reality, and instead represent it through offering a selection of it. In the mediated society in which we live, a lot of what is considered important is based on information created and circulated by media institutions. Brooks and Hebert (2006: 297) state that,

> Much of what audiences know and care about is based on the images, symbols, and narratives in radio, television, film, music, and other media. How individuals construct their social identities, how they come to understand what it means to be male, female, black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American – even rural or urban – is shaped by commodified texts produced by media for

> audiences that are increasingly segmented by the social constructions of race and gender.

For Hall (1989: 68), "perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact… we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process and, always constituted within, not outside, representation". Suggested here is the idea that media practices "represent topics, represent types of people, represent events, represent situations" – a majority, if not all, of society's concepts operate as a system of representation (Hall, 1996: 7). Representation is intimately connected to the media. Furthermore, for Hall (1996), the question of communication and language completes the circle of representation. He describes shared conceptual practices that we inhabit, and that closely related to these are the ways in which different languages – written, spoken, electronic, digital, musical, facial, bodily and many more – are communicated to other people. Hall (1996: 11) writes, "Language externalises – it makes available and accessible as a social fact, a social process – the meanings that we are making of the world and of events." The ideas of language and representation are important for this study because *Date My Family* presents black South African families whose members, along with the voiceover artist, often communicate in their respective home languages.

The environment in which we live is comprised of countless events and situations, and a multiplicity of socio-cultural groups and individuals. In order to understand and navigate these complexities, it is important that one establishes a means of simplifying the environment – making it more familiar. One such way is through social representations and what these mean for the individual and the individual in society. Social representations denote

> … processes of collective meaning-making resulting in common cognitions which produce social bonds uniting societies, organisations and groups. It sets focus on phenomena that become subjected to debate, strong feelings, conflicts and ideological struggle, and changes the collective thinking in society. As a theory of communication it links society and individual, media and public (Hoijer, 2011: 3).

The participants in *Date My Family* subscribe to social representations of family, partnering and romantic love. These are "systems of values, ideas and practices" that function to "establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social

world", and that "enable communication to take place among members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual group history" (Moscovici, 1973: xiii).

Representation is predominant in media and has wide circulation and influence. It is also in this way that people are able to construct an image and definition of self as the ideas presented in media are produced and reproduced. A key aspect through which people have come to identify themselves and distinguish themselves from others – in large part due to a divisive history – is through race groups. Altogether, these concepts constitute lived experiences and offer a valuable means for me to examine these experiences. Each theoretical concept – identity, race and representation – has presented a systematic means of better understanding the behaviours and experiences of the young, black South Africans and the families that feature on *Date My Family*. These theories serve as concepts that are all interrelated and that will validate and inform the dynamics that exist within these families and how both the families and the protagonists come to think of and practice ideas of romantic partnering and romantic love by highlighting key relations amongst these themes.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This study conducted a textual analysis that drew on visual and verbal discourse in *Date My Family* to examine its representation of the black South African family. This method was used to analyse the varied and meaningful moments in seven episodes of Season Four that represent how the participants are positioned within society. These moments refer to notions on and around the key themes identified for this study – family, romantic partnering and romantic love – and that are related to the families presented through the programme's visual narrative. I selected these episodes over those of other seasons as these were the most recent and relevant at the time. My research was conducted in a moment of high and significant social engagement with the programme, especially over social media platform, Twitter. I captured data by recording, viewing and transcribing the selected episodes over a period of four months. I then conducted a thematic analysis to organise and analyse my findings, and to further validate my examination of the ways in which black South African families are currently represented and imagined in *Date My Family*.

Textual Analysis

Date My Family is a popular cultural product worth decoding through the signs (anything that is able to impart meaning) contained within its text. As components of social circumstances, texts can bring about significant social, cultural, political and economic changes and these changes are able to impact on and alter one's beliefs, values and practices. Fundamentally, a text refers to a communication unit that people can engage with; that which produces meaning and from which people are able to make meaning about themselves and their society. However, media texts – the form of text at the centre of this study – are "objects produced with the explicit intention of engaging an audience" (Burton, 2010: 6). Furthermore, media texts are available in a number of forms within media and across media. The impact of texts on social relations is a very important premise for this study – "the connection between text and meanings is also about the relationship between media and audiences, or between media and society" (Burton, 2010: 7). *Date My Family* is a media text that is viewed by thousands of South Africans when it is broadcast, and presents the black South African family in relation to current perceptions of it in the context of South Africa. It is important to consider the context in which texts are produced – Burton (2010: 9) elaborates:

> The text is everything. This may be seen partly as a need, for example, to look at the conditions of production that make the text, or at the nature of the audience in relation to what is made of a text. But even as commodities, texts exist in contexts, as do the readers who produce meanings from the text and who may be influenced by it. This sense of context and its influence is complex and far-reaching.

Texts are organised in various ways and for various reasons, and textual analysis attempts to pay careful attention to this.

Textual analysis is one of the main methods employed by media researchers to understand how meaning is formed from media texts. Textual analysis describes a "methodology – a data-gathering process – for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and how they fit into the world in which they live" (McKee, 2003: 1). The aim of textual analysis is to "describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts," and significant considerations of textual analysis include, "selecting the types of texts to be studied, acquiring appropriate texts, and determining which particular approach to employ in analysing them" (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 1999: 1). There are various methods of textual analysis – it is a general term that encompasses different and specific methodologies. Burton (2010: 10) lists examples of these methodologies: *linguistic analysis* may focus on "the potential style of address"; *content analysis* "attends to the repetition and frequency of features, their proportions within the text, and consequent assumptions about significance"; *ideological analysis* looks at "meanings about power, and may well seek to reveal contradictions between ideological positions which inform the text"; *narrative analysis* "has its own kinds of inflection and concerns – structure or reader positioning"; and finally, *discourse analysis* "seeks out specific uses of language which signal a certain kind of discourse which has certain kinds of assumed meaning about its subject." These methods are employed depending on a variety of factors such as the type of text analysed and on what the researcher seeks to find from or make of it. The approach I undertake is influenced by the paradigms of ideological and narrative analysis that fall within this broad umbrella of textual analysis. It also draws specifically on visual and verbal discourse.

Discourse Analysis

I used textual analysis and more specifically discourse analysis because I reference visual and verbal discourse in *Date My Family* to make meaning of its representations of black South African families, and the dynamics therein. Foremost, discourse can be defined as "a system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992: 5). It "'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself," and also "'rules out,' limits and restricts other ways of talking; of conducting in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it" (Hall, 2001: 72). Essentially, discourse does not just describe things, it does things (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 6). Discourse is also interpreted in a particular way by particular people in particular societal and institutional contexts:

> If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognise you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity) here and now, then you have pulled off a discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer) (Gee, 1999: 18).

It is important to connect discourse and power– for Hutcheon (1991), discourse serves as an instrument of power. In addition, Pitsoe and Letseka (2013: 24) note that "power is a tool for the social construction of reality". For Foucault (1998: 100),

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it… we must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.

Thus, discourse can be understood as both a means and an expression of power – "the role discourse plays with regard to the distribution of power and the maintenance of social structures is closely related to its involvement in the shaping of meaning and the production of truth" (Estermann, 1999: 9). In this sense, discourse serves to control the experiences of social realities and society's conceptions of these realities as well as validating dominant power relations by presenting them as the norm.

Discourse analysts "do what people in their everyday experience of language do instinctively and largely unconsciously: notice patternings of language in use and the circumstances (participants, situations, purposes, outcomes) with which these are typically associated" (Trappes-Lomax, 2004: 133) – they are interested in who uses language and how, why and when it is used. I focus on how these analysts are then able to produce information about what their analyses have revealed, in the form of descriptions, explanations and interpretations. This is achieved through discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis, broadly defined, can refer to the study of language viewed communicatively and vice versa. A more detailed definition includes "reference to concepts of language *in use*, language *above or beyond the sentence*, language as meaning *in interaction*, and language in *situational and cultural context*" (Trappes-Lomax, 2004: 134). Van Dijk (1997) also makes a similar and important distinction, that language can be written, spoken or printed – "each kind of language use… has distinct properties; for example, the communication may be passive (as in when an individual reads a newspaper), more active (as in e-mail communication), or fully active (as in face-to-face dialogue)" (Bavelas, Kenwood and Philips, 2002: 103). In addition, Van Dijk (1997: 5) writes that "instead of simply saying… that discourse is a form of 'language use,' we need to spell out what this means, for instance by describing what such language use consists of, what its *components* are, how these components are *ordered*, or how they may be combined into larger constructs."

Nunan (1993) takes a different approach to the definition of discourse – he uses text to mean "the written or taped record of a communication event" and discourse to denote "the interpretation of that event in the context in which it occurs" (Bavelas, Kenwood and Philips, 2002: 105). Thus, for him, the difference between text analysis and discourse analysis is that "the former is the study of formal linguistic devices that distinguish a text from random sentences, whereas the latter is also the study of such devices but is conducted by the researcher with the intention of coming to understand the purpose and function of the discourse as well as the context in which it developed" (Nunan, 1993: 20). To simplify, discourse analysis is to do with regularities in language, the people who use the language – what they mean by it and in what ways it is arranged – and the context in which all of this occurs. Although definitions of discourse analysis differ across research, there is typically some commonality in the distinctions made, when describing the respective positions of each. Another aspect of discourse analysis is visual discourse analysis. According to Albers (2007: 83), this term is

generally "concerned with a theory and method of studying the structures and conventions within visual texts, and identifying how certain social activities and social identities get played out in their production". Discourse analysis on visual texts points to a small part of the overall context of the text – this text however, "must be examined within a larger whole, the context, situated meanings, discourses, intertextuality, and structural features" (Albers, 2007: 86).

Discourse analysis is important for my study as it aims to show how verbal and visual communications in *Date My Family* are interpreted – how they are made, unmade and transformed across time and in social engagements. Discourse analysis applies words and phrases (and more) to realities and social identities in order to uncover the workings of the world and the people in it. I aim to examine *Date My Family* in this way.

Thematic analysis

I have arranged my findings in the form of a thematic analysis. I identified three important themes in *Date My Family,* namely family, romantic partnering and romantic love. An advantage of a thematic analysis is that "it is a method and not a methodology… this means that unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective" (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017: 3352). Thus, the aim of a thematic analysis is "to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of it" (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017: 3353). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest two levels of themes, namely semantic and latent. The former denotes that which is "within the explicit surface or meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant said or what has been written", while the latter "starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84).

The themes I identified in *Date My Family* signalled the most prevalent notions in the programme that contribute to a unifying vision. These themes pose several and valuable considerations about society and ways of being in society, particularly in relation to members of the black community. Thus it was important to analyse these as a means of understanding

the experiences portrayed in *Date My Family*. Braun and Clarke (2013: 4) view a thematic analysis as "theoretically flexible because the search for, and examination of, patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences or practices." Furthermore, this theoretical independence allows for a means of qualitative analysis that largely does not rely on other approaches for its effectiveness. Braun and Clarke (2013: 4) elaborate:

> Thematic analysis is suited to a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives, and is useful as a 'basic' method because: it works with a wide range of research questions, from those about people's experiences or understandings to those about the representation and construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts; it can be used to analyse different types of data, from secondary sources such as media to transcripts of focus groups or interviews; it works with large or small-data sets; and it can be applied to produce data-driven or theory-driven analysis.

A thematic analysis is a useful method for this study because it contributes to the understanding of the ideas that it mentions – some Western, African, traditional and contemporary understandings of family, romantic partnering and romantic love – that are included to meaningfully interpret *Date My Family*'s portrayal of these in relation to the black South African family and context.

Recording, Viewing and Transcribing

A sample of seven episodes from Season Four of *Date My Family* was selected for recording and viewed over a period of four months. I refer to these episodes as Episode 5, Episode 6, Episode 7, Episode 8, Episode 9, Episode 10 and Episode 11, respectively. At the time of selection, these were the latest episodes from the most recent season of the programme, thus containing the most relevant content. My decision to record the episodes proved to be a helpful way of preserving the material – it could be accessed at any moment for re-evaluation or other purposes. Furthermore, the act of recording – the options of stopping, starting, pausing, fast-forwarding and rewinding – is a useful way to memorise information and to review objective evidence of the activities carried out, behaviours performed, statements made, results achieved and events that have happened throughout the programme. I began my data-capturing process by watching the episodes consecutively to ensure the consistencies in the themes that began to

stand out, and to ensure that there were sufficient and meaningful examples from the episodes. A critical analysis of the text required an attentive and consistent viewing pattern. I opted to watch two episodes per month to allow myself adequate time to transcribe each.

During the process of transcription, I typed out the comments made by the voiceover artist and the conversations that took place in *Date My Family*. I could then easily transfer valuable quotes from the transcript to the study. I also noted visual, verbal and audio cues that enhanced the delivery of some of the moments in the programme. These signals – the way in which the camera angled a shot, the facial expressions of the participants, the overall physical appearance of the participants, the tone of the participants' voice and other such signals – were instrumental in validating some of the key premises in my study. Edwards (2014: 3) suggests that transcription "plays an important role in research on spoken discourse, distilling and freezing in time the complex events and aspects of interaction in categories of interest to the researcher. He continues, "When well-suited to the theoretical orientation and research question, the transcript enables the researcher to focus efficiently on the fleeting events of an interaction with a minimum of irrelevant and distracting details" (Edwards, 2014: 3). The use of transcription provides a documentation of the moments in the programme that relate to the primary concerns and themes of this research. As the episodes were viewed, both the significant and fleeting moments were documented for further and more in-depth analysis.

The methods described above are all necessary and complementary; they are useful for my study because each is conducted in a specific way to ensure optimal means of gathering data (recording, viewing and transcribing) and later, analysing it (textual analysis, discourse analysis and thematic analysis). Through these methods I was able to interpret certain moments in *Date My Family*, relating them to broader socio-cultural ideas in the context of South Africa.

Chapter Five:

Analysis

Three particular themes in *Date My Family* were identified for in-depth analysis. These recurrent displays are related to ideas of and around family, ideal romantic partnering and ideal love. As a cultural text, reality television has significant social and cultural implications and relevance, becoming a "quintessential technology of citizenship of our age" (Ouellette and Hay, 2008: 472). Consequently, it is also an important text through which perceptions of selfhood, community and being are frequently constructed and re-constructed. In *Date My Family*, the audience is introduced to the different families of potential partners – their attitudes, beliefs and values. The singletons interact with these families and, in so doing, try to determine how a potential partner has positioned themselves within their immediate and extended communities as well as the socio-cultural impact of this on their selfhood – more specifically, how they engage with ideas of romantic partnering and love, as these are all interrelated units on which multiple social and cultural systems also rely.

The following analyses explore the impact of black social and cultural identity on the decisions, ideas and functioning of the primary participants in the programme, namely the singletons and the potential partners. These participants often comment on their personal and familial background as well as their ideal perceptions of romantic partners and, eventually, their experiences and expectations of love. This observation is connected to a larger representation of the context in which these families exist, and further introduces topics of traditional and contemporary ideas of family, predominant maternal presence and influence, absent fathers, the importance of romantic partnering to and in the family, and idealised romantic relationships and experiences of romantic love.

The title sequence of *Date My Family* is a significant point of reference throughout this chapter as it signifies the projected outcome for, as well as the overall message of, the programme. This animated sequence is also connected to each theme identified in this study. The sequence depicts a light blue background with cartoon-like figures in a darker shade of blue. These figures depict a family of four – a mother, father, daughter and son – reflecting a common traditional conception of the nuclear family. These figures seem to meet the daughter's partner as they are shown welcoming a young male figure into their home (see *Figure 1* below). This male figure then joins the family at a table where a meal has been prepared. This short display

is essentially a summary of the programme's format. It reflects the primary environment in which the audience learns about the families, singletons and potential partners simultaneously. For Moisio, Arnould and Price (2004: 363), there is symbolism in homemade food – it is considered "an authentic creation of family… meals become a central site for making family meanings". One of the main features in *Date My Family* is a menu that each family is asked to provide. A family member typically discusses the three-course meal, sometimes offering reasons for their choice of a particular dish – how it best reflects or relates to the family; what significance it has. The singletons often comment on their eagerness for these meals and seem to form some ideas about the type of family they will visit based on the menu. Additionally, there are several camera shots of the family members preparing the meals that they will later share in the first part of the programme.

At the end of the title sequence is the name of the programme in bold, white font with a large, pink heart in its centre. The heart – a symbol of love positioned this way suggests the possible attainment of this emotion as the central, intended outcome of the programme. Beneath this heart is the family once again, this time with the figures also in pink, and the father and mother figures standing on either side of their daughter holding her hands (see *Figure 2* below). The parents seem to be standing in a manner reflecting support, perhaps indicating the value of familial support throughout the programme.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The animated figures in the title sequence of the programme all have hairstyles commonly associated with African men and women – afros and dreadlocks – suggesting that *Date My Family* targets a predominantly black South African audience. This is a direct display of some characteristics of black identity and of the particular socio-cultural group the programme seeks to connect with or bring attention to. The voiceover artist often speaks in isiZulu with accompanying English subtitles, and the families, singletons and potential partners tend to

communicate among themselves and to the camera in their respective home languages. This form of communication accommodates the different and multiple ethnic groups who watch the programme, amplifying its cultural relevance within the black community.

In the seven episodes analysed, each begins with a black male voiceover artist, Sjula Dlamini, who introduces the programme – its name, what it is about and what it hopes to have accomplished by its end. He states, "Welcome to *Date My Family* – South Africa's number one trending show. On this show, bachelors and bachelorettes share meals with three different families with the aim of knowing and selecting their final dates." Here, Dlamini references the programme's considerable socio-cultural impact as a popular television programme at the fore of multiple social media conversations under the hashtag #DateMyFamily, when it broadcasts. The programme's self-referential comment on itself as a cultural force indicates a vital awareness of its own power and impact. Thus, the representations that the audience come to see are an important site for meaning-making and socio-cultural influence. As a top trending topic on social media, *Date My Family* invites widespread interaction among its audience across the country and possibly the continent. These audience members comment on the programme – laughing, criticising, empathising – and in so doing, highlight the ways in which *Date My Family* becomes an important cultural product that the black community is able to interpret in multiple, meaningful ways. When he introduces the programme, Dlamini directly mentions two of the three themes – family and romantic partnering, while the third theme – romantic love – is implied.

The programme's continued use of the terms "bachelor" and "bachelorette" references a particularly Western set of ideas. These terms are derived from the West (from old French) and were later popularised in American English, and are used to denote young, single, unmarried men and women respectively. The idea of the bachelorette is much more recent – "its first use is dated 1935 and not long after, in 1973, the word was also used to denote a living space for unmarried women and parties thrown for a soon-to-be-wed woman" (Nieuwets, 2015: 30). Its usage has become more prevalent due to popular culture and "is aimed to put single women on the same footing as male bachelors" (Alhumaid, 2017: 129). The use of the term in *Date My Family* suggests post-feminist agency and empowerment that also reflects how the programme views itself as modern. The programme still draws from some Western notions of singlehood and romantic partnering. These terms – bachelor and bachelorette – also feature in the names of the popular and successful American reality dating and relationship television programmes,

The Bachelor and *The Bachelorette,* whose plots revolve around a single man or woman with several romantic interests from whom they are expected to select a wife or husband, respectively. *The Bachelor,* in particular, stands as one of the first of the genre (reality dating television programming), and while *Date My Family*, a recent addition to this group of predominantly Western programmes, references some aspects of Western conceptions of romantic partnering and ideals of love, its local and culturally relevant display highlights some significant differences.

Family

This section discusses the black South African family structure in *Date My Family*. More specifically, it analyses the dynamics that exist within the families that participate in the programme – how they are currently formed, the gender roles and relations that exist outside and within these families, and some ideas they hold about family values, beliefs and attitudes, especially in relation to traditional Western/European, and African conceptions.

In *Date My Family*, the panel of family members is typically comprised of the potential partner's siblings, mother, aunts, cousins and/or friends. This composition is not indicative of the traditional nuclear family, often described by social analysts as the modern family unit (Taddeo, 2010). Instead, it reflects a family structure commonly found among Africans – the extended family. The figures in the title sequence of *Date My Family* reflect a nuclear family unit although the programme itself displays a shift away from this through the diverse arrangement of its panel of family members. There is great contradiction in this format as the programme's creators are seemingly still strongly influenced by normative images of family despite different representations of it throughout. This can also signify continuously evolving ideas of familial display in reality television in context-specific cultures. Conceptions about family suggest some differences in the structure of Western and African families. The title sequence in *Date My Family* borrows from more Western ideas of the family – the nuclear unit – that tends to emphasise a perfectness in this formation, while the "reality" of the programme is a less linear display of this particular structure, especially in the context of Africa and South Africa. *Date My Family* primarily presents black South African families, and the audience is further introduced to the multiple local cultures and behaviours of each.

For McAdoo (2007: 8), "family, as a basic unit of universal human community, is the essential focus from which core human and cultural values are transmitted and cultivated". Moreover,

she describes this unit as one of the most important and strongest in the black community in general. One cannot discuss the black family outside of the world in which it lives and is located. Given this, black families can be analysed and understood as "institutions with historical traditions that set them apart as 'alternative' formations that are not identical to family structures found among other groups" (McAdoo, 2007: 30). Amoateng (2007: 33) notes, "Family theory and research from the middle to the late twentieth century can be understood in terms of its ideological roots… for instance, the independent and isolated nuclear family commonly identified with Western societies was idealised." In apartheid South Africa, this model of family was used to justify the status quo, displaying a great commitment to Western conceptions of family life. Thus, this family model – independent and isolated – was idealised and emphasised in apartheid South Africa. Amoateng (2007: 33) suggests that, because of this ideology and the perpetuation of this Western ideal, "the African family was portrayed as a morally declining institution, which deviated from the nuclear family in terms of two key defining features – marriage and co-residence of members". This meant that research on black South African families typically focused on "'dysfunctional' family patterns such as polygamy, extramarital sexual relations, illegitimacy, delayed marriage, teenage pregnancy, and female-headed households" (Amoateng, 2007: 33). This sort of research focus highlights perceived problems in the black family and some of these topics have persisted in contemporary research.

Some examples that portray how the families on *Date My Family* are arranged beyond the nuclear unit are taken from Episode 5 and Episode 7 of Season Four. These episodes reveal a multiplicity of familial relations that exist between black South Africans. In Episode 5, the bachelor Lakhanya meets the families of three women – Ruth, Phindi and Andzisani. When their family members are introduced, the panels are comprised of a grandmother, mother, female friend and male friend; a sister, brother and best friend; and a sister, a female friend and two male friends, respectively. In two separate instances, after each family has provided a description of their daughter, Lakhanya comments on how well the families have managed to describe each woman. For Ruth's family he states, "Her family described her very well in the sense of the qualities I am looking for," and for Andzisani, "They described her how I think my family would describe me." These statements describe a sense of familiarity and closeness amongst the members of the panel – a connection perhaps reflective of an immediate familial or biological bond among them all. This draws attention to the idea that these family members who do not necessarily appear, either physically or biologically, to be family, are able to perform the actions expected of family members quite well. It destabilises the idea of normative

family structures, allowing for members beyond those who are immediate as well as friends to be welcomed and accepted into the primary family unit.

Another moment is when Prince, a male friend of Ruth's, interacts with her grandmother and mother when each family member speaks about or describes Ruth. When he describes her he smiles fondly, speaking confidently of her and often looks to her mother knowingly. This look suggests that Prince and Ruth's mother have perhaps established a bond and are both familiar with Ruth and her behaviour in a way that they can both agree on. At a later moment when the family is setting the dinner table in preparation for their meeting with Lakhanya, Prince and Ruth are playful and she jokingly calls on her mother to reprimand Prince, saying. "Mother, please control Prince!" Here, Ruth affords her mother the role of a shared maternal and authoritative figure for herself and Prince. Furthermore, in Episode 7, Masego, a friend of the potential date Kopano, refers to Kopano's mother as "mama." In this context, it is a vernacular term that denotes "mother" which is also used as a term of fondness and respect in addressing Kopano's mother. In the above examples, the mothers are given, and take on the responsibility of, children who are not biologically theirs by means of a special, close and familiar relationship. That these friends are meaningful to their biological children validates their choice to accept them as their own and for the friends themselves to feel welcomed as a part of the unit. The idea of a shared maternal figure can be connected to the sharing of her family values, attitudes and behaviours with these "extended" members.

Episode 6 of *Date My Family* further portrays the acceptance of extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins and close friends into the basic family unit. It also introduces a cultural aspect – ethnic background – and its impact on ideas of family and romantic relationships. The bachelor, Tshepang, meets the families of his potential partners, Pearl, Mokgadi and Boitumelo. The three panels are comprised primarily of close friends, most of whom are women. These close friends seem to possess a significant amount of knowledge about the potential partners as they often engage in contentious discussions or make remarks conflicting with actual family members. In the moments where Tshepang meets the families of Pearl and Boitumelo, we see their family members argue among themselves about what their preferences are or might be. Implied is a close bond between biological and non-biological members and the potential partners. While Anele seems to speak the most about her sister – her personality, history and preferences – it is Pearl's friend, Simangele, who continuously disagrees with the rest of the family, particularly Anele, who seems to think that Pearl and Tshepang are well

suited for each other. Her tone carries conviction as she states, “For Pearl, I don’t think Pearl will like him.” This tension reflects earlier notions of a close bond that exists between biological and non-biological “family” members and the potential partners, and that sees them arguing and correcting each other about personal information. At dinner, Anele comments that all the women in her “family” relocated from Durban, KwaZulu Natal, to Johannesburg, Gauteng, because they grew up together. The particular phrase she uses – “grew up together” – can refer to trustworthiness, unspoken yet seemingly tangible bonds and knowingness that have been established among these women in their formative years and that have progressed throughout their years of friendship thereafter.

In Pearl’s family, all members of the panel are women – her sister Anele, best friend Ramona, cousin Masithembe, and friends, Sphindile, Velile and Simangele. The predominantly female panel is later connected to a strong matriarchal presence and influence within these family units as opposed to the traditional and typical conception that sites men in these roles. Lesejane (2006: 173) states that in southern African tradition, “The father figure has historically been a highly respected figure who is seen as active in his children’s lives and also a community leader.” Some recent studies, such as Clowes, Ratele and Shefer (2013) on the topic of hegemonic fatherhood and the provider/protector role that this implies, suggest that socio-economic circumstances during apartheid and in post-apartheid South Africa have prohibited a majority of black fathers from successfully fulfilling this role. Some examples of these circumstances include high unemployment and low income, which resulted in a sense of hopelessness among black fathers, and a continuation of existing poverty and migratory labour that saw many black fathers relocate for work and, in some cases, never return home. In *Date My Family*, we see a manifestation of this reality within the black community in contemporary South Africa. There is a predominant and active female presence within these families and a notable absence of the father figure whose role also seems to have been afforded to other men in the immediate or extended family unit.

In Episode 6, a further manifestation of the extended family unit, and a consideration of some concepts regarding gender roles and responsibilities within the family, is visible through Boitumelo’s family. Her panel of family members is comprised of her brother, Muzi, and female friends Lerato and Kopano. Following their meeting with the bachelor Tshepang, Boitumelo’s friend Kopano proves to be fiercely protective of her – her facial expression is typically disapproving and unimpressed, and her body language intimidating and unwavering

when she frequently leans forward and toward Tshepang to ask him a question or make a statement. This display can be connected to a negative stereotype of women, more specifically black women, that deems an opinionated or questioning black woman as angry or aggressive. The "angry black woman" mythology describes "aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean and hell raising" black women (Ashley, 2014: 27). However, Boitumelo's brother, Muzi, comments, "The girls (Boitumelo's friends) are hard on him because they care about Tumi. They don't want to see her go through a heartbreak or a disappointing relationship that'll waste her time." From this statement, we are able to learn about Kopano's true intentions which are quite the opposite of what her mannerisms might have suggested.

Boitumelo watches the interaction from a separate room and she is approving of, and encourages, Kopano's line of questioning towards Tshepang, remarking, "Keep it coming!" as Kopano asks seemingly difficult questions regarding commitment, his age and whether or not he owns a car. Boitumelo is also visibly interested in these answers, which introduces the consideration of an apparent preoccupation with gender roles and expectations within families and romantic relationships – that what men own reflects their level of success or financial stability in order to provide for both the family and in a relationship. When asked if he has his own apartment, Tshepang discloses that he still lives with his family. His response is met with looks of disbelief from the panel and Boitumelo, who states, "I still live with my family. I'm a girl. Maybe that's okay with me." This references a traditional idea of gender roles in society and within the family that expects men to be work-oriented so that they can establish their role as the provider. This notion also placed women under less pressure to leave their family homes in pursuit of work and independence but pressures them to aspire towards nurture-oriented positions within the household that would see them as the caretaker of the family's basic needs. Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher and Koch-Schulte (2000: 140) emphasise, "Men's primary role is that of breadwinner and decision-maker, and women's primary role is that of family caretaker."

Muzi frequently remarks that Tshepang, a twenty-nine-year-old man, does not seem to have had many successes. The idea of gender roles typically favours male superiority in all societal realms – and in this instance, men as primary providers, with higher incomes and financial stability expected. This observation begins to raise questions concerning perceptions of the male role in households and families, and in romantic relationships. We later see a shift in this

role through the absence of superior patriarchal figures in families and households that are headed by superior matriarchal figures. These observations thus consider the traditional and expected performances of gender roles, simultaneously indicating that they are also fluid and constantly in flux. More specifically, they point to changing gender roles and relations in the household and family. A key observation by Narayan *et al.* (2000: 141) is that "when men's roles are directly linked to income earning potential, any threat to earning potential becomes a threat to gender identity and spills into gender relations." High unemployment or a failure to secure (good) employment and labour migration are among the key threats. When confronted with such a situation, men may respond with defeat and neglect their families. Narayan *et al.* (2000: 158) note:

> Women had households for several reasons, among them migration of male members, divorce, and men who are present but not contributing financially to the household. Male migration that leads to the creation of female-headed households around the world is usually for certain seasons, but sometimes for longer, leaving women to fend for themselves and their children.

In *Date My Family*, it is evident that a number of the families in the programme experience changing gender roles. The family is not perceived as a stable unit but as one constantly affected by external, social factors.

In its title sequence, *Date My Family* presents the image of an ideal family unit – a mother, father and their two children. I noted earlier an apparent promise or expectation of this image through the families in the programme. It becomes evident as the programme progresses and through subsequent episodes that the programme itself does not maintain this image. The families within the programme extend beyond this basic unit and often seem to lack male members. In the eight episodes analysed, there are men on some of the panel of family members although their number is limited. These men are brothers, cousins or close friends of the respective potential partners, and are typically outnumbered by women on the panel. The women who appear on the programme include grandmothers, mothers, aunts, cousins and close friends while there is an absence of what are considered to be the stronger or more important male figures such as the grandfather, father and uncle. Instead, this role, it seems, has been transferred to the brothers, cousins and close friends. In episode seven, the bachelor, Joseph, mentions and emphasises the value of an older, more respected figure – in this instance, the grandmother he meets – as he states, "I see the grandmother will be in attendance, I'm a bit

worried about that. I didn't think I'd meet any elders in any of the families – more especially, a grandmother." These representations question the current role of the father – an evident fluctuation in the importance of this role and how the content of this role seems to have shifted. Furthermore, they suggest that the role of the mother or grandmother encompasses more than that of the domesticated and care-giving tradition – they too can be perceived of as primary providers and respected figures within the household and family.

In the episodes analysed, the audience is introduced to sons, brothers, uncles and cousins of the bachelor or bachelorette, and the potential partners. There is often no reference made to the father or grandfather in the programme. Traditionally, it is these figures who hold the dominant positions in societal realms and are perceived as integral parts of social and cultural functioning – the grandfather as the elder, the father as the next in line to head or lead social and cultural groupings. On their respective panels in *Date My Family*, the male members typically attempt to assert themselves authoritatively – they become protective of their relative or close friend when commenting on them in conversation or to the camera. One such example is from Episode 9 where the bachelorette Kholiwe meets the family of a potential partner, Solly. Solly's friend, Sello appears to do most of the talking, often controlling the conversation and answering most of the questions Kholiwe has, whether directed towards him or not. When making the final decision on who to select for the final date, the singletons do consider the male figures who assert themselves in the manner described above but do not regard them as key influencers. This decision by the singleton is predominantly influenced by the more respected maternal members of the panel. In *Date My Family*, there is an evident shift in the power position commonly given to and associated with fathers in the family and household. There is emphasis on maternal members as the guides, leaders and nurturers.

In Episode 7, Joseph meets the three families of his potential dates Rethabile, Kopano and Goitsi. In Rethabile's family, the panel is comprised of her sister, Emma; her brother, Tlamelo; a female friend, Lerato; and a male friend, Siyabonga. Before the family meets the bachelor, they have a brief discussion about the ways in which they would like to represent Rethabile and the types of questions they should ask. Rethabile's tone is of assurance and trust as she responds, "You understand what I want and me exactly…" Her male friend, Siyabonga, seems to take charge of the situation, stating that he will be the one to ask the more serious and important questions – "I'm going to ask two questions from this guy, okay? And then I will space out. I'll find out where he is in life and possibly, what is his plan with you." There is a

great importance placed on these questions and Rethabile encouragingly agrees with who will be the one to ask them as she exclaims, "You see! You see? You are reading my mind." This is an example of a situation in which the male friend assumes the protective role typically associated with the father. It also suggests a closeness between Rethabile and Siyabonga – he is "reading her mind" in a way that reflects a bond between siblings. Siyabonga is regarded as playing multiple roles in this moment. Furthermore, there are still manifestations of normative gender and family beliefs, although in unexpected ways, in the varied family groupings portrayed in *Date My Family*.

During the meal, the family asks Joseph about any past relationships he might have had. He mentions an incident when a relationship came to an end because of the woman's brother. This statement reflects the way in which the role of the father is undertaken by male family members and friends, and extends in various situations, particularly in those they think requires protecting female family members and friends. Joseph states, "What actually caused the problem is her brother" – a statement the family is evidently surprised by and become curious of. Joseph continues, "He had some thoughts in his head and then he started threatening me – more like he was over-protective." In this story, the woman's brother appears to have been in a far more influential and dominant position than the father figure, again indicating a shift in this role – the father is no longer viewed as the primary protector.

Before Joseph meets the family of his second potential partner, Kopano, he admits that he is nervous about this particular meeting because her grandmother will be in attendance. In the moments leading up to this meeting – the family preparing the meals and setting the dinner table, all while engaging in a conversation about the upcoming meeting – we see Kopano's grandmother as a talkative and charismatic woman clad in a bright red dress with lace detail. Kopano's mother, however, appears reserved and pensive. When Joseph enters the family's home he finds them all seated silently at the dinner table as he approaches timidly. He first offers a general greeting to the table and Kopano's grandmother smiles warmly while her mother is indifferent. Moreover, we see the greater amount of respect he seems to direct towards Kopano's grandmother while he greets the family. He maintains eye contact with her, speaking in her direction as he continues to extend his greetings and finally, gifts a bottle of wine to her as he says, "Grandmother, thank you for welcoming me in your home." In this moment he addresses and acknowledges only her. The importance of the role of the elders in this family is continuously emphasised and much respect is given to these women –

grandmother and mother – of the house. In the introductory process, Kopano's brother Kealeboga acquaints Joseph with the members at the table, stating their names, but when he introduces Kopano's mother and grandmother, he refers to them by their social roles as opposed to introducing them by name. Kealeboga then asks, "Joseph, please inform the elders where you're from", wanting Joseph to continue directing the conversation towards these women.

An elder is typically someone who heads or leads familial, cultural and social groupings and there is often a greater importance given to the male figures in that regard. Traditionally, the role of elders within the family and household was to "advise, direct and lead their families and societies in those practices, rituals and ceremonies that ensured their survival, existence and continuity" (Nhongo, 2004: 1). In the above example of Joseph's encounter with Kopano's family, there is a clear absence of an older, male, authoritative figure and instead, Joseph recognises the two women in this position – he automatically refers to the family's home as that of the grandmother and is seemingly most respecting of and intimidated by her. The continued absence of men in families seems to have allowed more space for the development of matriarchal families.

The subject of culture – more specifically in relation to a particular ethnic group – also features in a conversation with Pearl's family. This is another aspect of identity established within the cultural sphere. Hall (1990: 223) defines cultural identity as a "shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry have in common". This identity reflects common historical experiences and cultural codes of a group of people with constant and unchanging frames of reference and meaning. Culture is an integral part of the black family - "(South) Africa is inhabited by various ethnic nationalities with their different languages, modes of dressing, eating, dancing and even greeting habits" (Idang, 2015: 2). These can differ across the various ethnic groups that exist in South Africa and are thus practiced, valued and represented differently. There are nuances in the different cultures that determine the ways in which individuals from each perceive of family and resultant practices, attitudes, values and beliefs. Anele, Pearl's sister proudly states, "Zulu girls! Have you ever dated a Zulu girl? You will see flames! Once you date a Zulu girl, you'll never go back." Here, Anele states their shared cultural identity – Zulu. She alludes to an existing perception of Zulu people, more specifically, women. Also implied is the impact of this particular culture on ways of behaving romantically – the phrase Anele uses ("You will see flames!") insinuates that a man who

pursues a romantic relationship with a Zulu woman is likely to experience difficulties in that regard, such as strongly held opinions and emotions. Here, she perceives of Zulu people (family) and culture as uncompromising and passionate. Anele makes these comments out of seemingly dominant perceptions that have been formed and perpetuated about Zulu people and are likely to have been reinforced through her upbringing and by her family.

Another important observation comes when we start to meet the bachelorettes of the season. In these episodes, there are more men than women on the panel of family members although there remain none that represent a grandfather, father or uncle figure. In Episode 8, the bachelorette Vanessa meets the families of her potential partners, Sphiwe, Luther and Ronald. These panels are comprised, respectively, of a male friend and two male cousins, a mother and three male friends, and two male friends and a female friend. In several instances, the potential partners refer to the male members on these panels as "brothers". On her way to meet Sphiwe's family, Vanessa comments, "I'm on my way to meet Sphiwe's family. I'm nervous – they're all guys so I'll be the only female there." This moment is a display of nervousness at the thought of being in a male dominated environment. While the men in this particular family do not hold an authoritative position commonly associated with that of the father or an older male figure, by virtue of being men they seem to still have some form of influence on how people, more specifically women, respond to them. Vanessa also hints at there being no relatable person in that space, and moreover at the connotations of men who are traditionally considered to be stronger, more aggressive and commanding, among other such masculine traits.

Her nervousness may also stem from and adds to the idea of close friends being accepted into the basic family unit – the potential partner holds his friends in high esteem and so they do play vital roles in his decision-making processes. This panel is comprised solely of Sphiwe's friends, though they each seem to carry the presence and importance of the primary male figure in the household, being the father. During this lunch meeting, Vanessa often looks down at her feet – another indication of her nervousness. The men on this panel either sit back with one leg bent and crossed over the other, lean their elbows on their knees or sit with their legs spread, each of them changing into these positions at different moments throughout the interaction. At the end of this, and having watched it from a separate room, Sphiwe comments, "My brothers did a great job." Interestingly, none of Sphiwe's biological family members are on this panel, questioning traditional conceptions of value afforded to such members in this process.

In the same episode, Vanessa also meets Luther's family. Luther's panel of family members is comprised of his mother and three close friends. While they are seated at the table, there is an air of dominance as his mother commands the attention of those around her and the conversation appears to be as restricted and mindful as in the episode where Joseph was introduced to Kopano's grandmother and mother. The men are respectful of Luther's mother and she validates this respect when Vanessa asks about her son and she mentions some of the ways in which she has raised him – to cook and take care of himself despite this role being predominantly issued to the women in the family and in society in general. Luther and his friends speak to his mother in low and careful tones and they all refer to her as their mother. At the end of the episode, Vanessa does not select Luther as the one with whom she will go on a date although her remarks on the overall interaction with his family are of respect, particularly towards his mother: "Your family structure is very strong. I like how you were raised – your mother has strict rules. I like that. That means when you head your own family, you would make a great father." In this moment, Vanessa implies that Luther would have learned a positive role as a father not from a father figure as commonly expected, but from his mother instead. Here, *Date My Family* comments on the idea of male children in families who are products of single mothers, divorced parents or absent fathers, and how they may not have had a crucial example of manhood growing up. However, the programme also demonstrates that households and families headed by women are and have been successful in raising their children.

In Episode 9, the audience is introduced to another bachelorette, Kholiwe, who meets the families of Mbuyiselo, Zuko and Solly. As in previous episodes, the panel of family members is comprised of a larger number of men although they are still limited to the brother, cousin and close friend. Notable throughout all these interactions is the timid nature of a majority of these men. The women on the panel seem to be much more outgoing, inquisitive and knowledgeable. The potential partners often task the women on the panels to represent them well and to ask what they consider to be the most significant questions. While there is a high number of men on the panel, it is the women on whom the potential dates rely to reflect or portray a positive image of them. In one scene, before Solly's family is set to meet the bachelorette, he walks up to the only woman on his panel of family members and shakes her hands in assurance, simultaneously telling her that he is placing his complete trust in her. He also implies that she is more likely to relate better to the bachelorette than his male family members. At this, she smiles confidently, straightening her back as they all wait for Kholiwe

to arrive. These scenes reflect how crucial the role of the women is particularly in representing the men and the family.

Date My Family captures the continuously changing structure of the family. In the programme we see a varied arrangement of what is considered to be the panel of family members. This panel extends beyond the typical nuclear family unit to include members who are not immediate or biological. This representation is also reflective of some contemporary imaginings of the black family structure, especially the idea of the extended family and female-headed households and families. In several instances, the friends of the potential dates refer to their mothers as *mama* and their grandmothers as *koko* or *gogo*, all of which are terms of fondness, endearment and respect in black South African cultures. Furthermore, there is a stronger and greater female presence throughout the episodes analysed. The grandmother is often the highest regarded figure in the household, and this display validates the shift in gender roles – the idea that matriarchal families are prominent today. The representation of an authoritative male figure in the family and household extends only as far as the brother or cousin in the episodes. This suggests a disempowerment of the father as patriarch; the figure in the family and household who typically guides the decision-making process. Thus, we see fatherhood and possibly "grandfatherhood" as a social role whose importance and content shifts over time.

Partnering

This section seeks to explore current perceptions and practices of romantic partnering among black South African men and women, and how these are displayed in *Date My Family*. The programme's format – the singleton who meets the family of their potential partner first – raises some questions about how the programme challenges traditional notions about the order in which stages of romantic partnering should progress. Two common topics of conversation between the singletons and potential partners are the ideal romantic partner and what they expect from a partner. Here, we become aware of their respective ideas about romantic partnering and how these might compare to traditional ideas and to Western/European and African ideas. A notable consideration throughout this section is that romantic partnering extends beyond the element of love or romance as we see, for example, a preoccupation with the socio-economic status of the male participants that introduces other topics such as gender roles and expectation within these partnerships.

For Brown, Feiring and Furman (1999: 3), "romantic relationships are a particularly important class of romantic experience". There have been attempts to expressly define romantic relationships. One such example is Tennov (1979), who writes, "Romantic relationships are often characterised by an intense, overwhelming desire for proximity and contact with a romantic partner that, when fulfilled, results in blissful feelings of joy, fulfilment, and even ecstasy." Brown *et al.* (1999: 3), however, note some constraints on definitions of romantic relationships and instead "point to characteristics or features that are prototypic of these relationships and thus could be included in a definition". They provide three characteristics: "First, romance involves a relationship, an ongoing pattern of association and interaction between two individuals who acknowledge some connection with each other;" "second, romantic relationships are voluntary in Western cultures" – romance becomes a personal choice, with such relationships being tenuous – and "third, there is some form of attraction, often (but not necessarily) intense or passionate in nature" (Brown *et al.*, 1999: 3). Typically, the aforementioned characteristics are what differentiate romantic relationships from other close relationships, although

> … the particular way in which these features manifest or the degree to which they are central to the relationship is likely to vary over the course of a particular relationship, from one relationship to another, from one developmental segment of adolescence or young adulthood to another, from one cultural context to another and from one historical era to another (Brown *et al*., 1999: 4).

This study notes that romantic partnering in South Africa might be impacted on by familial expectations, either partner's financial status, and tradition, suggesting that the above idealised Western ideas about relationships become more conditional.

The title sequence described earlier reflects a primary aim of *Date My Family,* in a display filled with relevant symbolism of romantic partnering. In this cartoon-like display, the bachelor meets the family of his potential partner. The daughter looks on from a room in the house away from her family and the bachelor. The bachelor then shares a meal with the family and the daughter, still in another room, is depicted with a glass against the door in an attempt to hear the ongoing conversation – an act representative of both her interest and curiosity. Finally, the bachelor and daughter are shown meeting each other, seated on the couch, and the family unexpectedly comes up from behind them, as though hidden behind the couch during their interaction. This moment is reflective of what typically occurs at a more comfortable and

familiar point in a romantic relationship, where a significant other from the child generation is introduced to the family and, more importantly, the parents of their partner. It is also a reference to the continuous, inescapable and impactful presence of the family – specifically the older generation in romantic partnering, although my analysis also shows a newly recognised independence of the child generation in this process. This final image of the young man and his new partner seated on the couch, with her family behind them seemingly pleased with the outcome, becomes enveloped in a heart signifying that the outcome of this process is either love as an aspiration or love found. The image within the heart fades and it becomes the heart symbol seen in the middle of the font used for the title of the programme as well as the visual that the audience most commonly identifies the programme by. Specific to the theme of partnering is the idea that this process is perceived to occur in a particular and ordered way. The content of the programme goes against the representation in its title sequence, suggesting that this process is in fact much more complex and can be affected by various socio-cultural and economic factors that alter the order in which a connection is established.

My analysis of romantic partnership within *Date My Family* begins with an assessment of the role of the older generation and how this manifests in the process of partnering. Traditionally, the parental role is a valued and respected one in romantic relationships where it has often been parents who greatly affect partner choice in the child generation. In the (South) African context, it is typically imagined that the older generation – parents and elders – is better suited to selecting partners for the child generation (Mair, 2013). This role is however, unusually displayed in *Date My Family*. Not only does the programme depict the process of romantic partnering in reverse, with the singleton meeting the family of their potential partner first, it displays two ways in which the role of the parent can be considered. There is significant influence from the older generation, although the weight of this influence is seemingly much less than its more traditional conceptions, particularly in African societies (Ekane, 2013). This display can be considered representative of the context in which *Date My Family* finds itself, as it is a contemporary cultural product. It is the decision of the singleton to participate in the programme, ideally with the primary intention of finding a potential partner. The potential partners that audience members come to meet at a later stage are selected by the producers based on the requirements presented to them by the bachelor or bachelorette. The singletons thus enter the programme with preconceptions of who or what their potential partners should be (and are confident in these requirements) although they are subjected to the family members of these potential partners who – to an extent – impact on their final choice of potential romantic

partner. In this way, *Date My Family* becomes a platform to showcase or stage ideas of romantic partnering in the family unit and what that process is perceived to entail – the ways in which an ideal partner is conceptualised by both the parents and children – especially among black South African communities.

The bachelor or bachelorette begin the official process of the programme. They introduce themselves to the audience, providing personal details, character traits, their job description and what it is that they seek in a partner. While this introduction is underway, pictures of moments from their life – some shots with family and friends and some selfies – appear on-screen so that the audience has a brief insight into their personal lives. This introductory moment can be likened to, and symbolic of, the introductory stage of the dating process, though done unusually – the audience does not meet or learn about the potential partners until much later in the programme. They will also know personal information about the bachelor or bachelorette that the family of the potential partners will only gain when they meet him or her. Here, *Date My Family* allows the audience the opportunity to get to know the singleton, evoking feelings of attachment, relatability and familiarity, sooner than the families of the potential partners. The programme attempts to address aspects of the real by establishing this connection – allowing an audience member to begin to see themselves and those around them in one or some of the participants. Audience members can also form an opinion or experience that is either different or relatable. They are afforded a sense of importance in being the first to receive such valuable information about the bachelor or bachelorette, and continue into the programme with foreknowledge and, perhaps, already having established their own ideas of the singleton that may impact on how they come to think of them when they begin to interact with the family members and potential partners as the programme progresses. In this way, the audience is able to relate to ideas and practices of romantic partnering.

The audience is then introduced to the potential partners before the bachelor or bachelorette meets their family. In this introductory process, the potential partner also presents information about themselves in a format similar to the bachelor or bachelorette – personal details, character traits, their job description and what they too are looking for in a partner, while images of them appear on-screen. Usually, after these visuals of the potential partners come visuals of their respective families preparing the meals they will be sharing with the bachelor or bachelorette. The bachelor or bachelorette tends to attach romantic ideas to food. They often comment on an ideal romantic partner who is able to prepare a meal well or who has the ability to cook better

than them, hence the careful attention these singletons pay to the meals that they will consume in their meetings with the different families. In Episode 8, Vanessa is impressed by the meals that Sphiwe's family has prepared as she comments on how she thinks each member incorporated their personality into the preparation: "All of them gave a lot of them and him (Sphiwe) within it – I liked that a lot." She selects Sphiwe for the final date. In the same episode, she disapproves of the meals served by Ronald's family, expressing her disappointment in the lack of creativity of some of the dishes, and towards its end, Ronald is the first of the potential partners rejected. In Episode 9, Kholiwe meets with Solly's family. One of his friends, Patrick, asks her if she can cook and if she is willing to eat their traditional meal – mopane worms – as a part of the meals that they intend to serve. Patrick states that she should be able to eat their traditional dish as a sign of respect for their Tsonga culture. Here, the participants show very clear ideas of what they think constitutes a "good" partner.

A great amount of emphasis is placed on the meals that are prepared throughout the programme because they are how the bachelors or bachelorettes come to meet the families of their potential partners – over lunch or dinner. These meals are crucial sites of meaning-making for the singletons and their perceptions of a potential romantic partner. The meals are often displayed with close-up and lengthy visuals as the voiceover artist comments on the proceedings. The programme highlights the preparation of these meals – hands chopping the vegetables, the stirring of meat in a pot and the setting of a table. These shots are significant in creating both suspense and anticipation of the crucial moments when these meals are served and the bachelor or bachelorette is seated with the families, and ready to lunch or dine.

These meals symbolise both a reflection of the potential partner and their family, and a valuable contribution to the final decision made by the bachelor or bachelorette in their selection of a potential romantic partner. The singletons often comment on the meal choice after the families have presented it to them. In Episode 5, the bachelor Lakhanya comments, "The food sounds really good, I hope they can make a lasagne as good as mine – we'll see about that." However, in another episode, Episode 8, the bachelorette, Vanessa, is visibly disappointed in the meals she finds will be served during her meeting with the family of one of her potential dates, Ronald, as she comments, "The menu is a bit disappointing." There are several moments in *Date My Family* where food is either mentioned, alluded to or shown. The meals shared are central to the programme as they also offer valuable insight into the family of the potential partners – their culture or cultural preferences, personality, range of skills, and knowledge –

that the singleton may subscribe to should they choose to pursue a romantic relationship with that person. The singletons' continuous comments about these meals are a further indication of the role of food in perceptions of family, and more specifically a romantic partner: it is typically assumed that a partner learns how to cook from their family. In the programme, food is regarded as a representation of culture, lifestyle, taste and warmth, through which the families suggest what kind of partnership one can expect.

The notion of parental consent is re-introduced in some moments in the episodes analysed, when the potential partner asks one of their family members – typically the authoritative member of the group (mother or grandmother, or brother) – what type of bachelor or bachelorette they hope to meet. In Episode 5, the potential partner, Ruth, helps her family members prepare the table for the upcoming lunch date with the bachelor, and she asks her grandmother, "What kind of man do you expect to meet today?" Her grandmother responds, "I'd like to meet a well-mannered and clean man." Before this moment, when the bachelor is first introduced to the families, one of his comments on Ruth's family is that he looks forward to meeting her mother the most because she seems like she might be closest to Ruth. Ruth's panel of family members is comprised of her grandmother, mother and two close friends – one male and one female. Ruth asking her grandmother what type of man she hopes to meet is indicative that the role of the older generation in romantic partner selection remains respected. While the protagonists of the programme – the singletons – have the agency to make an individual choice, *Date My Family* also demonstrates that romantic partnering is always embedded in family relationships. This observation further addresses how we can consider romantic partnering in relation to blackness. Brown *et al.* (1999: 3) note, "Romantic relationships are voluntary in most Western cultures," suggesting that such relationships are based on personal choice and can be tenuous as a result. In the above example however, it is evident that although romantic inclinations and feelings are voluntary in the child generation, the older generation is an intrinsic part of that generation's process of romantic partnering. This further suggests that the hybrid mix of cultures and expectations that South Africans live within impact on how they navigate romantic partnering and on how their choices reflect these different aspects and pressures of society.

I again refer to Brown *et al.* (1999), who list three characteristics typical of a romantic relationship. The process of romantic partnering is also a good indicator of how these characteristics manifest as well as how important they are. Brown *et al.* (1999) highlight that

romance involves a continuous interaction between two individuals – a relationship; that such relationships are typically voluntary in Western cultures; and that some form of attraction must be present. The aforementioned comment made by Ruth's grandmother, in which she describes the type of man she hopes for her granddaughter, considers two of these three characteristics – that there is a greater display of agency and personal choice where the singletons are concerned although the older generation remains an intrinsic part in the child generation's process of partner selection, and that the idea of attraction and of an ideal romantic partner exists. These ideals of romantic partners, particularly in terms of appearance and social standing, become prevalent in the comments made by members of the respective panels. These comments are often made away from the singletons and to the camera following a scene where the singleton and family have met. The potential partner who watches from a separate room also either comments on, or visibly reacts to, the bachelor or bachelorette's appearance.

In Episode 5, when Prince – one of Ruth's friends – opens the door to greet Lakhanya, there is a visual of Ruth alongside this interaction on-screen, and the audience sees Ruth's face light up with a smile when the door opens to reveal Lakhanya. Her reaction indicates that she is impressed by the man presented to her family and that some attraction to the physical appearance exists. Ruth's mother appears on screen and comments, "Lakhanya looks like a nice guy – your regular nice guy. He looks fine to me." She has only just met him and has not had the opportunity of an extensive and in-depth conversation with him but this is her first impression and comment about him based on him having been presentable to the family. This emphasises the importance of appearance and other superficial details of a potential romantic partner. The bachelor only then begins to tell the family about himself. The words Ruth's grandmother and mother use to describe Lakhanya – "neat" and "nice" – are important. In both instances, they are not phrased in ways that imply intense or passionate attraction, and instead connote respectability. These words are considered in relation to ideas of an American notion, respectability politics, that are "rooted in resistance to racist imagery of black people, particularly black women who adopted self-presentation strategies that downplayed sexuality and emphasised morality and dignity to reject white America's stereotypes of them" (Pitcan, Marwick and Boyd, 2018: 163). The term also includes definitions that denote "a discursive strategy which constructs a representation of black lower-class people as the uncivilised Other and the black elites as respectable and civilised as the white middle-class, thereby justifying black claims to citizenship and bourgeois privilege regardless of race" (Kaneko, 2003: 106). Furthermore, "the black elites' concept of respectability was signified by notions of proper

gender roles in Victorian culture... – race was inseparably entwined with class and gender matters" (Kaneko, 2003: 106).

In the above example of *Date My Family*, respectability is employed by members of a marginalised group, more specifically black South African women, to suggest that their male counterparts are typically accepted into society on the basis of a "neat" and "nice" appearance. By simply looking at his outfit and how presentable he was, Ruth's mother was able to deduce or make the assumption that Lakhanya is a well-behaved man, suitable for her daughter. Lakhanya's choice of outfit is also an intentional one, that he may be deemed acceptable and worthy by the families especially and the potential romantic partners that he meets. This observation refers to the broader issue of black identity, particularly in relation to black South African men, who are typically perceived as angry, aggressive, dangerous and "hood," among other such negative descriptions (Ratele, 2013). It appears that some black men have adopted a dress code that deflects negative attention or projects status – they choose to dress in a way that disarms the blackness. This is not necessarily a fashionable style of dress, but items such as tailored suit jackets, shirts, trousers and black denim jeans are typically selected to portray a respectable image. Thus black men can take on external expectations to present themselves in a more respectable manner.

A majority of the comments made on the appearance of the bachelor Tshepang in Episode 6 are based on the styling of his hair. The panels in this episode are comprised primarily of women who comment on the "untidiness" and "childishness" of his appearance because of this hairstyle which is made up of dreadlocks that have been tied together in larger sections. Their association of his hairstyle with negative character attributes is again linked to ideas of respectability. Dreadlocks form an important part of black South African identity (despite the hairstyle's origins in other black cultures) and in how particular sub-groups identify themselves as well as how they are identified by other black communities and in broader society. The politics of natural (black) hair and the ideologies around it impact on both black identity and romantic partner selection.

One of the potential partners, Pearl, has a panel of family members who are perhaps the most expressive about Tshepang's appearance. When he meets the family, Pearl, who watches from a separate room, appears alongside the visual of this interaction so that her reaction can be gauged and she immediately comments, "He's okay – just don't like the hair." After Tshepang introduces himself to the panel, Anele and Phindile – Pearl's sister and friend, respectively –

appear on-screen and are also disapproving, as Anele comments, "His hair though…" Following this display are Velile and Simangele, Pearl's friends. Simangele shakes her head while commenting, "The hair! Never ever ever ever ever!" For Mercer (1987: 34),

> Hair is never a straightforward biological 'fact' because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally 'worked upon' by human hands. Such practices socialise hair, making it the medium of significant 'statements' about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or do not. In this way, hair is merely a raw material, constantly processed by cultural practices which thus invest it with 'meanings' and 'value'.

Where race structures, relations and power are concerned, hair also becomes a symbol of racial (and ethnic) difference. Hair is thus perceived within the framework of racial ideologies – "Classical ideologies of race established a classificatory symbolic system of colour with 'black' and 'white' as signifiers of a fundamental polarisation of human worth – 'superiority/ inferiority'" (Mercer, 1987: 35). Differences in aesthetic value – beautiful and ugly – can also be attributed to the perceptions and ideologies of hair that further seek to intensify existing binary oppositions. Dominant ideologies depict black natural hair as tough, untidy and untamed, among other negative social and psychological meanings and connotations. Dreadlocks can be described as rope-like, matted strands of hair. This hairstyle is rooted in spiritual affiliations rather than skewed contemporary, mainstream suggestions of drug-use (marijuana) and dealings (Chawane, 2014). Other negative perceptions of dreadlocks view them as dirty, frightening and disgusting. Thus, wearing one's hair in the dreadlock hairstyle can distort another's opinion and impression of one as evidenced by the bachelor, Tshepang, in this example. His appearance is a hindrance to his opportunity for romantic partnering – his hair does not conform to the expectations of respectability that underpin partnering in the programme.

It is usually black women who suffer as consequence of prejudices about hair. In the above example of Tshepang's hair, we see that the debased hair belongs to a black man and that black women are responsible for the negative comments about it. This observation is connected to a statement by Kaneko (2003: 106), noted earlier, in his description of respectability politics – that it can also be a strategy "which constructs a representation of black lower-class people as the uncivilised Other and the black elites as respectable and civilised as the white middle-class". Thus the example also deals with respectability and its internalisation within and among

members of the black community, and how it is further linked to ideas of class. We are not given much information about Tshepang's socio-economic position but Pearl's family liken him to some stereotypes of members of the lower class – they describe him as unkempt and their facial expressions at times are looks of disgust. On the basis of his hair and by allowing themselves to be in a position to comment so negatively about his hair, Pearl's family views themselves as better than Tshepang. Here, there is a connection to classism within the black community and how images of what is deemed socially acceptable and valuable, particularly in the case of romantic partnering (physical appearance), are aligned with perceptions of European or white middle-class romantic ideals (of men) – attractive, clean and neatly cut or styled hair, well- or stylishly dressed, with an attractive face and figure, and tall. These ideals imply that one is expected to look like one has or will one day have wealth.

It becomes evident throughout Tshepang's interaction with this particular family and noted in some moments with the others that the members are disappointed in his appearance and are concerned about how the potential partner they represent may receive him. In Episode 11, bachelorette Thamtham expresses the importance of appearance for the singleton too. In her introduction to the audience, some of the first comments she makes about what she seeks in a potential partner are, "He must be handsome, of course! If he's not handsome, it's a bit of a problem… Clean! With a bit of a beard." She delivers these descriptions in a tone that implies that these requirements are non-negotiable. The term "clean" is frequently used to describe singletons and potential partners and is predominantly used by women in their descriptions. I draw again on respectability politics to consider the way in which young black South Africans seem to emphasise the requirement for, and importance of, a clean-looking romantic partner. Traditional conceptions of the black community present a marginalised group that is often regarded negatively. "Black," the colour used to describe this group as well as their skin colour, is commonly associated with evil, death, impurity and dirt – all negative connotations that were perpetuated by Western, European cultures and whose effects are still prevalent in contemporary society (Lively, 2000). Additionally, there is a connection between hygiene and colonialism – McClintock (1995: 226) writes,

> Colonial travel writers, traders, missionaries and bureaucrats carped constantly at the supposed absence in African culture of 'proper domestic life,' in particular Africans' purported lack of hygiene. But the inscription of Africans as dirty and undomesticated, far from being an accurate depiction of African cultures, served

> to legitimise the imperialists' violent enforcement of their cultural and economic values, with the intent of purifying and thereby subjugating the unclean African body and imposing market and cultural values more useful to the mercantile and imperial economy.

The singletons and potential partners who constantly refer to the requirement for a clean and attractive romantic partner make it seem as though it is abnormal for one to be clean, and also seem to position themselves and their romantic expectations in line with European/Western standards. These standards emphasise strong and prominent physical features in men such as being clean-shaven or well-shaved and groomed, a strong jawline, muscular, well-dressed, and of a good height (preferably taller than the women), among other such "attractive" features.

A seemingly important question that is continuously asked by the authoritative figure (grandmother, mother, uncle or brother) and directed towards the bachelor or bachelorette is, "What kind of girl or guy are *you* looking for?" This question not only signals a shifting of power from the older generation to the child generation by allowing the singleton to make this decision for themselves, but it also allows them to prioritise their romantic partner requirements and expectations by deciding who it is that they want – what characteristics they deem important for successful romantic partnering. Another question frequently asked to determine the possible compatibility of the bachelor or bachelorette with a potential partner is, "What do you do for a living?" This question is used to measure the seriousness of the bachelor or bachelorette in proceeding with the process of romantic partnering – their suitability, worthiness and social and socio-economic status. In this instance we come to see more ideas of what these participants consider to be an ideal romantic partner. The bachelor or bachelorette and the potential partner and their family members are interested in the information about whether or not the other is employed because they possibly have preconceived requirements and expectations of the type of romantic partner they would like. More importantly, this observation points to what it means that one's job or financial status is such an integral part of the requirements for a suitable romantic partner. Hartwell-Walker (2018:1) attributes this curiosity of partners intending to pursue a romantic relationship to wanting to "see if it is possible to handle what may be uncomfortably different financial status, differing values about money, or different assumptions about what is and what is not each other's business". She notes this concern to be a crucial step in romantic partnering and in developing a romantic

relationship. In the local context, black South African families typically offer cross-generational support, perhaps validating the emphasis on knowing one's financial position.

In Episode 6, the bachelor Tshepang is once again the subject of intense scrutiny when he meets with the family of the final potential partner, Boitumelo. This panel is comprised of her brother and female friends who continuously measure his willingness to commit to a serious romantic relationship against the age at which he chooses to do so. While seated in the lounge, the family ask him his age, to which he replies, "twenty-nine." At this, they all visibly gasp in shock and one of Boitumelo's friends comments, "Twenty-nine? You've been sleeping on your life." The latter part of her statement, "sleeping on your life", is taken from a popular culture phrase, "sleeping on yourself", that is typically used to describe moments in which one undermines one's greatness or potential. Here she intends it to suggest that Tshepang has not optimised some opportunities in his life especially regarding his socio-economic and romantic relationship statuses. In a shot away from this lunch meeting, Kopano comments to the camera, "The age thing kind of made me feel a bit sceptical. At twenty-nine you should kind of have your love life in order." Boitumelo's brother, Muzi, also weighs in: "I'd get worried if I was twenty-nine and single." Boitumelo's family show great disapproval of Tshepang as they continuously criticise the status of his romantic relationship or lack thereof. In these moments, they also introduce the idea of gender norms in society and how these constructs have influenced their understanding of masculinity.

To consider gender norms is to consider both gender identity and gender roles. Gender identity denotes "how a person views him or herself with respect to masculinity or femininity and how this view of the self leads to the enactment of, or resistance to, socially attributed gender roles" (Leavy and Trier-Bieniek, 2014: 5). Furthermore, Leavy and Trier-Bieniek define gender roles as the behaviours that are deemed socially acceptable for men and women. In the above example, Boitumelo's family show that they all share similar ideas about socially accepted behaviours for men. Masculinity denotes the cultural and social expectations of men, and traditional characteristics are made to seem correct and natural (Craig, 1992: 3). The ideals of maleness encouraged by masculinity intimate several characteristics. These include "violence and aggression, stoicism (emotional restraint), courage, toughness, risk-taking, adventure and thrill-seeking, competitiveness, and achievement and success" (Donaldson, 1993: 643). For Boitumelo's family, Tshepang does not fulfil the masculine characteristics of achievement and success. They imply, through condescending and sarcastic tones, facial expressions and

mannerisms that Tshepang is at an age where he seems to lack in achievement and success, especially regarding his romantic relationships. Muzi maintains a stern facial expression throughout the interaction, quietly expressing his disapproval in this way while the women on the panel predominantly lead and guide the conversation. As the only other man in this meeting, he too is unimpressed by these revelations. Kopano is the most expressive of the family: her outgoing and outspoken personality allows her to say what is on her mind. Her facial expressions tend to emphasise the comments she makes, and in one moment we see Tshepang shy away first from her, and then from the camera. At times, he is visibly overwhelmed by the questions he receives and the condescending tone in which they are asked – he nervously swallows and wets his lips, he ashamedly looks to the floor and he rubs his palms together in discomfort. These moments of restlessness suggest that Tshepang is perhaps aware that he may not fulfil traditional and social constructs of what it is to successfully be a man. Furthermore, the family is led to question his character and past romantic relationships in an attempt to determine if there might be other social or cultural issues at fault.

In another episode, one of the potential partners, Goodness, states in her introduction to the audience, "I'm looking for somebody who is, first of all, employed because I am employed. I'm looking for somebody who is not living at home because I'm living at home." She only then goes on to say, "I'm looking for somebody with a big heart, I'm looking for somebody who is confident…" Financial stability becomes another feature of the conceptualisation of an ideal romantic partner among these young black South Africans and also seems to play a large role in romantic partnering. These young adults perceive that what their romantic partner does, financially, impacts them – their finances matter for their relationship outcomes and well-being. This request is predominantly made by the women who appear on the programme. Men are expected to provide economically despite the fact that the majority of the female participants were pursuing or had obtained a tertiary education and degree or were currently employed – for example, Andzisani is a two-time cum laude graduate and Ruth is a wardrobe designer. For Tofts (2013: 46), such expectations of men "place them in positions where they have to take responsibility for women's well-being and security and this puts a lot of pressure on them to obtain jobs which are well-paying and to keep these jobs". Given the current economic context and socio-economic background from which the vast majority of young black South Africans emerge, employment is often difficult to secure and to maintain. For men, these expectations may be psychologically harmful – "they may experience identity insecurity

and may feel that they will not receive or are not deserving of acceptance and love from society and from romantic partners" (Tofts, 2013: 46).

The topics of employment and financial stability in *Date My Family* lead to considerations of class. Typically, the class that one comes from in society influences the choices that are available to them in ways that can affect the outcome of their life. Wright (2003: 1) outlines five important positions and questions he thinks are necessary for an inclusive definition of class, namely: *class as subjective location* (how individuals locate themselves and others within social structures); *class as objective position within distributions* (how people are objectively positioned in distributions of material inequality); *class as the relational explanation of life chances* (what explains inequalities in economically-defined settings and material qualities of living); *class as a dimension of historical variation in systems of inequality* (how the variations across history in the social organisation of inequalities should be characterised and explained); and *class as a foundation of economic oppression and exploitation* (what transformations are required in order to eradicate economic oppression and exploitation in capitalist societies). Ideas of class manifest in *Date My Family*, an explicit example being Tshepang. As with several other participants in the episodes, we are not provided exact and accurate information about their respective socio-economic statuses, but the employment positions they list, the hobbies or outdoor activities they enjoy, how they are dressed, the houses and areas in which the meetings take place, and the expectations they have of a potential partner all typically indicate their views on class and, sometimes, their socio-economic positioning.

Goodness' comment, "I'm looking for someone who is not living at home because I'm living at home," also shows how gender roles are considered – it seems acceptable for her to want a romantic partner who has his own house or apartment while she remains in her parent's home. By comparison, when asked about his living arrangements, Tshepang responds that he is still living at home with his parents. Goodness' friends approve of her comment when they meet with the bachelor as they continuously mention that she seeks a romantic partner who is more independent, while Tshepang's response is met with shock and surprise from Boitumelo's family. These instances show that men are still constructed as being responsible for their romantic partner's well-being and women as deserving of being in a position where their basic needs are catered to. Such acts of financial sacrifice from men may lead women to feel special, important and worthy of love and attention.

In *Date My Family*, where the display of romantic partnering is concerned, there appears a preoccupation with ideas of the ideal romantic partner. There is emphasis on the physical appearance and financial suitability of the bachelor or bachelorette and, later, the potential partners. The family members on the panels presented in each episode are visibly curious about, and interested in, this information as they consider whether or not their son or daughter will be suited to the bachelor or bachelorette despite the final decision not being made by them. These concerns are connected to aforementioned notions of the politics of respectability as well as the gender norms, roles and identity that position young black South Africans in the way that *Date My Family* presents them. The singletons decide for themselves how to commence the process of romantic partnering based on the information they receive from the families that they meet. Although they are formally introduced to the potential partner of their choice at the end of the programme, they also see the other potential partners that they did not select on a device displaying pre-recorded footage of these men or women, who go on to explain to the bachelor or bachelorette why they would have been the better choice. The singletons do not seem to regret their final choice once they are shown this footage, which also displays their confidence in their romantic partner selection. The idea of the role of the parent and their influence is a significant consideration in this analysis as the programme seemingly challenges the great importance placed on this in romantic partnering processes. The power to decide on a potential romantic partner ultimately lies with the bachelor or bachelorette. The bachelor and bachelorette and the potential partners hold views about romantic relationships and partnering that are presented in the programme as a comment on contemporary society, more specifically black South Africans. These views reflect how they have responded to and positioned themselves in society as a result of social, cultural and economic influences and constructs.

Romantic Love

In this section, I discuss the role that the idea of romantic love plays in *Date My Family* – what this means for the participants and how they have come to have such perceptions. Moreover, I relate ideas of love to the current circumstances (social, historical and economic changes) of these young black South Africans and how they negotiate representations, meanings and acts of and around the emotion. I note moments in the programme where the participants discuss or indicate social (race, family and friends), cultural (popular culture and religion) and economic (class) factors that have influenced some of the ways in which they expect, give and receive romantic love. For Smelser and Erikson (1980: 121), “Beliefs about love permeate people’s

hopes for themselves, their evaluations of experience, and their sense of achievement in the world." The programme's framing of love as a primary aspiration mirrors some real-life concerns of and among young Africans, as expressed by Tocco (2010). *Date My Family* and several other reality dating television programmes with a similar premise exist in contemporary society and on television, to assist in these attempts.

The subject of romantic love in Africa is becoming one of great scholarly interest. Cole and Thomas (2009: 1 – 2) note "the absence of representations of love in writing about Africa for Western and global audiences", saying that "historians and anthropologists have largely ignored love in Africa." The lack of scholarly attention to the subject has led to a common misconception that love is of little significance in Africa (Tocco, 2010). This is not the case, as ideas of romantic love in Africa are found in art, music, literature and other such documentations that have been ignored or that have not been brought to Western attention. Furthermore, the West could not fathom Africans as capable of experiencing what they deemed such a complex emotion or emotional experience. Cole and Thomas also note existing intergenerational tensions about passionate attraction and attachment in several parts of Africa, and that such tensions were distorted by European colonial rule, giving them new political and cultural meanings – "certain intimate and emotional relations were depicted as 'civilised,' 'modern' and 'Western' and contrasted with others deemed 'primitive,' 'traditional' and 'African'" (Cole and Thomas, 2009: 16). Furthermore, "Anthropology's failure to engage with love is in part a product of the West's history with Africa, since Europeans justified their slave- and colonial-era domination in part by depicting Africans as hyper-sexual and without the emotional or intellectual depth required for nobler sentiments like love" (Tocco, 2010: 977). Thus, it becomes important to cite the ways in which romantic love is perceived currently in the context of Africa.

Date My Family is an important study of how young, black South Africans negotiate contemporary sensibilities and social processes concerning the idea or ideal of romantic love. Tocco (2010: 977) writes that "contemporary Africans are concerned about finding, losing and keeping love". The bachelor or bachelorette and potential partners, at particular moments in *Date My Family*, express the characteristics of who and what they consider an ideal romantic partner as well as other relationship preferences that are of significance to them in their quest of first finding and then possibly keeping romantic love. These expressions can be further connected to social, cultural and historical influences and experiences – one's family life and

upbringing; one's social positioning outside of their most immediate grouping; in their community and in society at large, different forms of media representations and imaginings of romantic love; and traditional and historical conceptions of romantic love and how it is experienced or practiced – with both local and global considerations.

Cole and Thomas list three themes on the subject of romantic love in their book, *Love In Africa,* namely love as an important expression through which people in Africa have argued generational and cultural distinctions and have made political demands for inclusion, often by engaging new forms of media (Cole and Thomas, 2009: 13); love as the connection between "emotions and materiality" (Cole and Thomas, 2009: 24) – that emotional attachment and the provision of material goods as an expression of this type of attachment are mutually constitutive; and what the acceptance of love has meant for gender relations in Africa, especially for women. This acceptance of romantic love (based on African men's and women's perspectives of intimacy) follows the idea that traditional marital relationships in several parts of Africa were not based on the emphasis of love – "Marital relationships premised on modern love are embraced by women both because they are believed to entail greater autonomy from the husband's extended family and because they offer hope of more equitable and intimate relationships with husbands" (Tocco, 2010: 979). These themes are helpful in understanding some notions of love that are alluded to in *Date My Family*.

This section draws significantly from the final scenes of each episode of *Date My Family,* although my analysis is not limited to these. In these moments, the bachelor or bachelorette selects his or her potential partner and goes out on a date with them. These are the moments in which the parties finally interact with each other – sharing their thoughts about each other, commenting on the potential partner's family, and addressing meaningful romantic relationship topics. Many of these conversations can be connected to conceptions of love that are historically embedded in and influenced by cultural practices, and material circumstances that enable the formation of particular relationships. It is important to note that love and practices of it do not overtly manifest in the programme – it is not an emotion we see clearly or that is explicitly shown but there is great emphasis on it as an emotional aspiration. The idea of finding romantic love is at the centre of the programme. Love becomes an invisible commodity that the participants attempt to attain as a symbol of personal success. This is connected to conceptions of emotions and materiality when considering current imaginings of love in Africa – that money or material goods are emphasised as a display of romantic interest and the extent

of one's feelings of love towards another – more specifically among young, black South Africans.

The title sequence of *Date My Family* displays what the programme is about as well as what it intends to do. The heart symbol – a Western icon – is commonly used as a representation of love. A pale pink heart symbol is displayed in the middle of the programme title's bold, white font. The audience only sees this heart towards the end of the title sequence, perhaps symbolic of both the ending of this sequence as well as the intended outcome of the programme. This image of the family, beneath the programme's name in bold white font and with the heart at its centre, is also the image the audience has come to associate with *Date My Family* – how we think of it. We see the heart envelop the family, indicating that the son or daughter from the families featured finds love with the bachelor or bachelorette.

In Episode 5, the bachelor, Lakhanya, selects his potential partner for their first date because he says he had a better connection with her family and because of how well she was spoken of. For Lakhanya, Andzisani – the woman he selected – reflected qualities that were more aligned with his interests and requirements in his search for love. These qualities include an intelligent woman who enjoys reading, is open to adventurous activities, is caring and compassionate, and is driven and focused. Andzisani's family seemed to have held similar thoughts because they are all greatly excited and approving when they find that Lakhanya has selected their daughter for a final date. Upon meeting him, and Andzisani seeing him in person for the first time, they all seemed impressed by him, with Andzisani commenting, "He looks decent" and her sister Andzani commenting, "I like him, wow. He's great! Perfect match!" Her friends Owen and Aubrey, who were present at the dinner, also commented, "When Andzisani described the type of guy she wants, Lakhanya is a perfect match." Romantic love can be regarded as both an experience and an ideal across cultures – it is comprised of romantic ideologies and several practices of giving and receiving it. Thus there are "perfect" perceptions of it; idealistic ideas and practices to which people subscribe and even measure their own romantic experiences against. Andzisani's family's continuous use of the word "perfect" indicates a preoccupation with ideas of ideal romantic partnerships and ideal romantic love.

At the moment when Andzisani's family comment on how great a match her and Lakhanya are, we come to realise from the overall interaction that Lakhanya and Andzisani appear to have some aspects of their lives in common – the beginning of experiences that seem to connect their lives. They both studied at and graduated from institutions in or around Cape Town. It is

this piece of information that initially leads the family to think that, and to imply the ways in which, they are an ideal match. Throughout the dinner, Andzisani's family continues to say that they are suited for each other based on what Lakhanya reveals about himself and his experiences and how they know Andzisani to be and what they know her to do. Andzisani's previous relationship becomes a topic of discussion, more specifically the way in which it ended and why. Lakhanya comments on the faults she presents and suggests ways in which they both could possibly make a better effort. Andzisani explains that the relationship eventually came to an end primarily because it was long distance, with very little effort on her partner's end to see her or to spend time with her. She also cites a lack of communication as one of their greatest setbacks and mentions that, on an intellectual level, they failed to connect. These faults connect to the way in which romantic love is also perceived as an experience, and in this instance how the different experiences in terms of location, communication and intellect, among others, impacted their romantic connection or the potential for one. This example can be thought of in relation to ideas of what can and cannot contribute to a successful achievement of love. Here, the programme comments on what might be happening in contemporary life – that these are possible and notable hindrances in the attainment or experience of romantic love among young black South Africans.

Smelser and Erikson (1980: 120-121) also define love as a learning experience: "In loving and being loved, people give themselves over, at least for brief periods, to intensely moving experiences through which they achieve new awareness of self and others." Watching from a separate room, Andzisani comments that her family seems to be enjoying Lakhanya's company – they are constantly laughing and the conversation flows effortlessly. Andzisani's sister later comments "They have the same character" in her thoughts about Lakhanya. When relating this to considerations of romantic love, it seems that a significant degree of similarity between two individuals needs to exist; it is preferred that they have some, if not most, experiences, characteristics and personality traits in common in order for a successful connection to occur. Andzisani's family frequently emphasises that her and Lakhanya are similar or perfect throughout their interaction, also suggesting concerns related to the importance of compatibility or mutual feelings. Of all the families Lakhanya has visited, Andzisani's family seems to be the one where he finds more comfort, freedom and hope for deeper romantic connection. The programme helps us understand modern love as far from being unbiased and unconditional. Lakhanya speaks to the camera and reflects on his meeting with Andzisani's family. He comments that he had a better connection with the family – he was more

comfortable around them than he was with the other families, especially in the sense that he could laugh with them, "be a bit more of myself" and engage in effortless conversation. For Lakhanya, love has the capacity to make him "more of himself" – to be more authentic – and this desire can be considered socially. Erikson (1995: 131) explains, "Connecting one's sense of authenticity to self-value is critical for understanding not only how emotions are integral to feeling authentic but also how such feelings help to form and motivate behaviour at the same time that they are able to be influenced by the surrounding social and interactional contexts."

In the selection process, all families stand outside of their homes awaiting the outcome: either the bachelor or bachelorette, or a bottle of wine arriving in a car. When Lakhanya arrives at Andzisani's home, the family members scream and jump in joy, excited and happy that Lakhanya has selected their sister. In her commentary about her impression of Lakhanya on their first date, Andzisani says that he appears different from the man who entered her home – he is a better version of that man, offering much more of himself than he did with her family. That he is better and offering more allows one to consider how love can be perceived as that which improves us. There seems to be an ease about him away from the familial space and the resulting pressures, comments and thoughts, an observation that can be connected to a larger comment on the socio-cultural expectations of romance since "our culture's images of love provide a background, a language and a set of symbols within which people enact their own lives" (Smelser and Erikson, 1980: 120). At first, it seems that Lakhanya feels the need to portray a particular image of himself to the family (a respected socio-cultural unit) – to conform to an expected and acceptable idea of a well-mannered, guarded, mindful, charming and presentable individual, especially in first encounters. This first impression is typically what determines if and how future interactions will occur; it sets the tone for how an individual will then be welcomed or accepted into that same interaction. As their date progresses, it seems that Lakhanya is more at ease around Andzisani outside of the added pressures of family.

On their date, they ask each other more about each other – what the other prefers in a romantic relationship and how they tend to behave in one – as they seem to navigate and further the romantic connection they both seek. Andzisani expresses that she has a very strong personality and at times will need someone to "tame" her – "not a softie," she says, to which Lakhanya defensively replies, "I'm not a softie." Here, we see social constructs, particularly gender roles, come into play, and how Lakhanya and Andzisani have positioned themselves in response to them. Andzisani is looking for a man who displays some typical masculine traits of strength

and invulnerability. Common constructs of men, as already mentioned, perceive or expect them to be violent and aggressive, stoic (display emotional restraint), courageous, tough, risk-takers, adventurous and thrill-seekers, competitive, and successful (Donaldson, 1993: 643). Lakhanya's response comes immediately after her comment as he quickly wants to let her know that he fulfils this criteria. This moment also reflects the impact of social constructs in romantic ideals – how a man should behave in love and what a woman is to expect from him in love.

There seems to be a requirement for women that their romantic partners be stronger than them emotionally. For them, this evokes feelings of security, dependency and comfort. In the above example, the man fulfils his role as the protector and the woman takes the vulnerable role. Also implied is that Lakhanya sees himself playing this particular role or filling this position in Andzisani's life – he mentions her in scenarios that extend beyond their first date, and looks to establish a further connection with her. He then asks her what her thoughts are about the date and if she would like to go out on a second date and possibly more dates with him. Andzisani replies, "Well, from what I learned about you today… you're a pretty cool person. We can try and have another date… there's no reason why not." Andzisani's tone is quite casual when she says this. Saying, "there's no reason why not," is in opposition to ideas about the way romantic love is valued. Common features of romantic love include: "idealisation of the romantic partner, suddenness of onset, physiological arousal, and commitment to the well-being of the loved person" (Dion and Dion, 1996: 7). Romantic love is valued as an idealised preoccupation with one's romantic partner, as an experience that has a special quality of physical and passionate attraction. Andzisani goes on to express that she *feels* a connection and Lakhanya eagerly agrees.

In Episode 6, the bachelor Tshepang selects Boitumelo for the final date. Boitumelo and her family are seen waiting outside of their home and when the car arrives with Tshepang inside, she is visibly shocked that he has selected her. When asked why she is in shock, she comments that because her family had been asking him questions he seemed uneasy about, his perception of her would be negatively affected. In the previous section, I noted that these questions raised concerns about his role as a man, his financial status and the seriousness of his romantic commitment – all as components of the idealisation of romantic partnering and now, in the maintenance of ideal, romantic love. While there is the conception that romantic love is typically viewed in large part as an idealisation of romance and such practices, nuances across different socio-cultural groups are valuable. For Karandashev (2015: 11), "Culture may have a

powerful influence on how people link passionate love and sexual desire… many men, for example, are taught to separate sex and love, while women are taught to connect the two." According to Hatfield and Rapson (2005), the various meanings attributed to romantic love cause lovers a great deal of stress. The singleton or potential partner all want to know about the faults made in previous relationships. They seek to establish in what ways they might have held differing notions of romantic love in terms of the practices, expressions and performance of it. This observation raises some thoughts on the conceptualisation of romantic love across cultures, as the bachelor and bachelorette and the potential partners usually come from different cultures. These thoughts include how romantic love is defined, what romantic partners anticipate it will or should entail, and how it is performed. There is great variety in conceptualisations of love offered by social scientists because the nature of this subject allows it multiple interpretations and performances – for Fehr (1986: 6), we see "love defined as an emotion, as behaviour, an attitude, a response, a constructed experience, as physical passion, and so on." It is important to note what love means for different groups of people – "to identify important dimensions of cultural variation that are of relevance across diverse societies" (Dion and Dion, 1996: 8). In asking about these previous relationships, participants in the programme look to uncover the ways in which love was unsuccessful – the behaviours, attitudes, and responses that did not correspond with the ideals of those involved. Among these young black South Africans it seems that there is some active effort to identify hindrances and avoid similar actions in their experience of love, showing their eagerness towards the emotion and experience.

Upon being asked about her previous relationship, Boitumelo does not answer the question directly but instead responds by asking Tshepang, "How do you feel about commitment?" Tshepang responds, "It's one thing I would consider if I see potential in that relationship." Here, they begin to exchange ideas about their perceptions of relationships – commitment as a form of romantic love. Boitumelo admits that she is afraid of commitment and this is possibly the reason her previous relationship ended as her then-partner did not explicitly state the reason. In the opening chapters of this thesis, I noted that the idea of love in Africa is not new. There is, however, a shift in the way that it is perceived especially among young contemporary Africans – Cole and Thomas (2009: 11) write that studies have suggested that "many urban Africans felt both eagerness and uncertainty with regards to love – implying that it was a new emotion". Furthermore, young Africans claim that intimate passion (love) differentiates them from their elders (Tocco, 2010). Boitumelo's comment corresponds with the uncertainty and

fear about committing to a romantic relationship among younger African generations, whose fears stem from a failure to achieve the ideal of romantic partnering that will result in ideal romantic love. The difference in intimate passion between the younger and older generations that Cole and Thomas (2009) note as one of the ways in which practices and conceptions of romantic love have changed over time, can also be problematic as it makes it difficult for the former to communicate their thoughts and concerns on the subject of love to the latter. There may be social, cultural and economic experiences that have influenced Boitumelo's positioning – her family's focus on Tshepang's independence and financial status perhaps indicates their desire for comfortable living circumstances for her should the relationship continue. As Boitumelo continues, she is visibly hesitant about the subject of commitment. In this conversation, there is a mutual need to understand and negotiate past actions and behaviour so that they may experience romantic connections and eventually romantic love differently, as they also go on to talk about Tshepang's previous relationship.

Boitumelo acknowledges that there exist several barriers to relationships (disapproval from close socio-cultural groups such as family and friends, finances, upbringing, emotional baggage, etc.) which are in large part due to social, cultural, political and economic circumstances, especially for intimate development and connection. She comments on Tshepang still living with his family, asking if they will be able to "make things work." Both Boitumelo and her family are seemingly more concerned with the monetisation of love – love as material provision and resource exchange. On their date, Boitumelo frequently asks about the specifics of his business – whether it profits enough to sustain him and "them" financially. Here, we begin to think of the ways in which young black men are expected to *provide* love in twentieth century South Africa. Tocco (2010: 978) writes, "Heightened gender inequalities in post-apartheid society have increased women's dependence on men, even as high unemployment among men makes male provision in the form of marriage progressively less common." Love as a commodity in romantic partnership and as a social condition is becoming more frequent. Tocco (2010: 978) continues that a majority of African scholars have argued that "increased consumerism and socio-economic inequalities in many African societies have meant the increasing monetisation of love – even as (primarily Western) discourses of true love untainted by material exchange have gained greater salience." The expression of and degree to which one claims they love someone romantically is measured against what that person can afford to buy. Boitumelo raises concerns about privacy, referring to possible instances where Tshepang's family might interfere with or disrupt their intimate moments together if he does

not intend on purchasing his own apartment. Not only does such a comment pressurise him, it indicates the way in which he would need to make a financial sacrifice or transaction to demonstrate his seriousness about their commitment and, eventually, his love for her. Despite the tense nature of the conversation, at the end of this date, Boitumelo says that she would go on another date with him and Tshepang holds a similar opinion commenting, "I'm happy with the decision I made" and "She's what I expected."

In Episode 8, the bachelorette Vanessa selects Sphiwe from the first family she shares lunch with. When she arrives to pick him up for their date and exits the car to greet him, his friends who are standing outside with him comment, "You better open that door for her!" to which he replies, "I'm a gentleman, I got to!" Here, these men make reference to courteous behaviour often considered as an act of romance. This also refers to more traditional and old-fashioned ideas about love – a man who opens a door for a woman or who lets a woman walk ahead of him is considered a gentleman and of good intention. This sees the gentleman as a more socially accepted romantic partner capable of fulfilling romantic ideals. Sphiwe feels obligated to define himself as a gentleman and, through this gentlemanly act, to align himself with existing ideas of what both men and women consider romantic love. There is emphasis on love as being obtained only if either partner performs a particular role. As with many other bachelors, bachelorettes and potential partners in the programme, Sphiwe shows a keen interest in the partner he later find himself with. This indicates a genuine interest in the people the participants meet on the programme – that they are eager to explore the possibility of a romantic connection outside of *Date My Family*. This further indicates some seriousness among this younger generation and a willingness to pursue and explore that which has been described by Cole and Thomas (2009) as a "new" emotional experience for them. The idea of newness here refers to current perceptions of romantic love and practices that differ from traditional conceptions in the context of young Africans.

Throughout this final date – as is the case with all final dates in the programme – there are one-on-one sessions in which either Vanessa or Sphiwe engage with the camera and the audience, and reflect on their date. In her description of an ideal romantic love, Vanessa introduces the idea of a "ride or die." She again mentions this in her interaction with Sphiwe's family and this is something he remembers to bring up on their date, asking her to clarify what she means by the phrase. The term is derived from Hip Hop culture and refers to "the girl willing to do whatever she can for her man" (Pough, 2007: 92). Moreover, it references black women who

participate in illegal activity with or for their criminal partners as a display of both loyalty and love. Vanessa customises this concept of "ride or die" to describe a man or partner "who's going to be there for me, a person I can be there for… talk to, be my friend – be my best friend… be someone who I can be comfortable around". She provides this description in a tone of certainty – she is sure of the type of romantic partner she seeks and seems uncompromising. She draws from African American popular culture to describe a romantic situation that involves extreme and sometimes tragic displays of love that are often glamorised and romanticised in music videos and through song lyrics. Its traditional conception makes reference to women in particular but the phrase has since been used to describe both partners in a relationship. The notion that a woman should be prepared to suffer (even fatally) for her partner feeds into predominant stereotypes about the strength and endurance of black women, and romantic notions of what they are expected to sacrifice. West (1995: 459) writes, "Through[out] history, culture and media, black women have most often been portrayed in some combination of three images: as highly maternal, family oriented and self-sacrificing; as threatening and argumentative; and as seductive, sexually irresponsible and promiscuous." The first image reflects the idea of self-sacrifice – that black women are expected to be self-sacrificing particularly in their romantic relationships and in their families. This example also demonstrates how narratives of romantic love permeate our lives especially through media and popular culture; how these narratives have been produced and reproduced across cultures in various societies, so that Vanessa is able to aspire towards a romantic ideal derived from America.

Another possible relationship barrier is introduced, this time when Vanessa asks Sphiwe what his thoughts are on pursuing a romantic relationship with a woman who has a child from a previous relationship – she has a one year old toddler. He replies, "It's not a train smash… kids are a blessing. So you must never look at it as if the person is not with you… I just don't want baby daddy drama." "Baby mama/daddy drama" is a popular term in the black community in the US and South Africa. Singer *et al.* (2006: 2015) note,

> The often-used phrase 'baby mama/daddy drama' suggests the intrusive nature and kind of influence that baby mamas/daddies can have on subsequent serious relationships to the point that how many baby mamas/daddies a person has becomes a factor in deliberations about whether to become involved in a relationship with them.

Sphiwe wants further information on the subject asking, “The baby daddy, what’s happening? You don’t mention him much.” While Sphiwe mentions that he does not mind that Vanessa has a child, he insists on this information about her child’s father because of his concerns that her relationship with him and his with their child may negatively impact his relationship with Vanessa. He has his own romantic relationship ideals that he may not want to compromise on. There is also the possibility of encountering the father of Vanessa’s child which would then include him, even if not physically, in their relationship. This too distorts the romantic ideal of just two partners who are preoccupied with each other. Vanessa explains that she fell pregnant at an early stage in what was described by both her and close family and friends as a “toxic” relationship. There is no communication between her and the father of her child and she concludes, “I prefer to keep it that way.” They agree to move on from the subject and into a discussion about a possible second date as Sphiwe comments, “Your happiness comes first.” In this example, it appears that there is an ordered process in the attainment of ideal love. Conceptualisations of love often emphasise emotional attachment between two parties. The idea of having children too early in a relationship, and children from previous relationships, are perceived as hindrances and a cause of potential “drama” (difficulties and misunderstandings) between romantic partners. This describes a common ideal of love in which a romantic couple is often imagined first without any ties – family and children. Here, the idea of who gets to experience and to fall in love is quite selective – it decides who can and cannot fall in love and on what terms.

In Episode 9, Kholiwe, the bachelorette, selects Zuko for her final date. On their date, one of the first questions he asks is, “Why are you here?” Zuko is the first person in the episodes to explicitly inquire about the intentions of a potential partner. Kholiwe seems taken aback by his question at first but recovers to respond, “Why am I here? Why do people come on dates though?” Zuko is interested in the true reasons Kholiwe finds herself on a reality dating television programme as well as having selected him for the final date. He does not hesitate in his above question and seems to have come to the date with either a clear intention or preconception of the type of romantic connection he wishes to establish with Kholiwe. She does not add to her answer, also seeming unsure of how to proceed in it. They move on from this moment where the date officially begins and they exchange a variety of questions such as: “What is it that you want?”, “How many kids do you want?”, “What personality traits are important to you?” and “What do you find attractive or sexy in a woman?” These questions are obvious attempts to further develop a possible emotional connection, and gain some insight

into the experiences of the other's life – their personality, behaviours, traits and views. This is also to see if either person fits into the ideal romantic experience of the other. This section conceptualises romantic love as the "idealisation of the romantic partner, suddenness of onset, physiological arousal, and commitment to the well-being of the loved person" (Dion and Dion, 1996: 7). There is an emphasis on idealisation by the bachelor or bachelorette and potential partners throughout this section, showing how romantic love is typically perceived: "perfect" qualities, behaviours and characteristics in a romantic partner and "perfect" conduct and experiences express a romantic love. Essentially, the romantic ideal in this regard is "a set of beliefs about the power of love and the perfection of romance… it is a set of expectations for how a model relationship should form, develop, function and be maintained" (Hefner and Wilson, 2013: 3).

Zuko identifies possible barriers for their date, commenting, "I know everyone has got their own rules about first dates – the dos and don'ts. What can I do? What can't I do? What should I do?" He adds, "What are the don'ts for you?" These are often important and defining factors at the start of a possible romantic relationship and later, romantic love. The couple is likely to decide from this initial interaction whether or not to proceed to another date, further establishing a connection. Such rules and normalcies are typically taken from displays in romantic films and novels that repeatedly list or portray behaviours and experiences that are perceived as the standard against which romantic relationships and love should be measured (Shumway, 2003). Kholiwe, however, responds, "I can't come to a date with my set of rules – I don't know whether I'm going to like the person I'm seeing at the date." Here, Kholiwe goes against these "rules", expressing that her experiences are based on what both the person and the moment present. These rules have a powerful and restrictive influence on how individuals come to form their ideas, especially about romantic love. As a social construct romantic love seeks to preserve predominant ideas in society that deem it acceptable – how men and women in love should behave; the perpetuation of these ideas especially in media. Kholiwe does not subscribe to these constructs – she allows the process of romantic partnering and, later, love to proceed on her own terms.

Zuko also introduces the topic of gender roles to the conversation, referring to what are considered typical masculine and feminine acts – how men and women *should* behave and respond in establishing an emotional attachment and later, its manifestation – romantic love. Following Kholiwe's answer, he comments, "So there's no standard features? No, 'he needs to

pick me up on the first date?'" He adds, "But you picked me up. That's very emasculating by the way." With this statement, Zuko suggests that Kholiwe has deprived him of his male role and identity. In this instance, he is unable to fulfil his role as a male romantic partner. He believes he should have been the one to have picked Kholiwe up for their date despite the fact that this is how the programme is set to run – all potential partners are picked up by the programme's car. These "standard features" he mentions refer once again to the socially constructed roles of men and women, particularly those in an ideal romantic relationship, that determine what attitudes or behaviours are regarded as displays or provisions of love. Kholiwe does not seem to find fault in her not adhering to these standards and they both laugh as she concludes, "That's how I roll!" This statement indicates how Kholiwe has chosen to position herself – she does not conform to these standard features or rules about how to go about in romantic partnering or a romantic relationship.

Episode 11 introduces the first singleton of the episodes who grows dissatisfied and uncertain of her choice despite her initial confidence. Nomathamsanqa selects Thapelo for the date. She begins by commenting, "Out of the three choices, yes I am impressed by my choice." As the date progresses, she begins to notice that Thapelo is not as conversational as she is – "He's quiet here and there." During her interaction with Thapelo's family, Nomathamsanqa learns that he is the son of a pastor. She includes this information in the conversation during their date commenting, "Because you're a pastor's son, what was his reaction to you doing this?" By "this," she refers to him being on a reality dating television programme and to him dating overall. She clearly seems to have her perceptions about the church and romantic partnering and romantic love – she believes that the church is very strict in this regard, that it has a particular conception of romantic love and how it should be practiced. She also expresses continued interest in religious stances on romantic relationships, asking Thapelo to comment on how the church tends to preach on the subject: "When you want a relationship, God will lead you to your partner… You didn't take that route… God must have led you to *Date My Family*."

The above last comment can be connected to notions of cultural (religious) impact on the perception of ideal love. Wong (2009: 2) explains the impact of Christianity on ideas of love – "the doctrine of Christianity mentions more about love and romantic relationship. 'God is Love' is the fundamental belief in Christianity. The value of love and romantic relationship among Christians are influenced by what the Bible teaches and the commandments of God."

Thus, religion, particularly Christianity (Thapelo's faith) can affect components of love such as decision or commitment, and passion. It emphasises love as a decision rather than a feeling – "people should deeply consider the relationship before making the decision to love or being loved" (Wong, 2009: 10) – and sexual immorality and premarital sex as unacceptable. Although Thapelo and Nomathamsanqa laugh at her comment above, Nomathamsanqa appears genuinely interested in understanding Thapelo's religious upbringing and how that may possibly affect the outcome of their relationship. Thapelo is not concerned by this, commenting that his father did not mind him being on the programme though he is not a man to meet in person because of his strictness. Nomathamsanqa is visibly confused by this contradictory statement but Thapelo does not comment any further on it. This intersection of love and religion leads to the belief that romantic love has to exist in a particular way in order for it to be considered acceptable and appropriate in the church. Thapelo's contradictory statement also points to how he attempts to navigate this – he says that having a pastor for a father, and a religious upbringing, has not affected his romantic relationships and how he perceives romantic love. He is able to feel and act (emotionally) in ways that do not necessarily reflect church values – some of which I have mentioned above – but he is hesitant and uncertain when he says that Nomathamsanqa would not want to meet his father because of his strictness.

Thapelo and Nomathamsanqa hold different views of each other regarding the progress and success of the date. Thapelo comments, "The fact that she has got a great (strong) personality does not worry me. If there is love, there will be a way." He introduces the idea of romantic love overcoming all obstacles; that despite their obvious differences in character and behaviour, and any further problems that might develop between them, love will enable them to continue with their relationship. In this romantic ideal, identity is shown through autonomy – choosing someone to love and remaining steadfast in that decision despite opposition. Such thought looks to defy convention, family or class barriers. Thapelo has a "strict" and religious father but his response reflects a willingness to overcome these possible barriers. Nomathamsanqa however is left uncertain about their date: "I can't determine anything right now." She elaborates that she may need someone who can handle her strong personality and will not be visibly overwhelmed by it, as was Thapelo. For Nomathamsanqua, it is important that she meets someone who fits into her ideal, someone who is best for her. There is a repeated idea that the women with strong personalities and behaviours in these episodes, seek a man who they state, needs to be able to "handle" them. This statement can be considered in relation to socio-cultural ideas of romantic love that perpetuate stereotypes and constructs of how men

and women are to behave in love, and more specifically, women's positioning in society. The woman is seen and considers herself as someone who needs to be domesticated; that romantic love involves the "taming" of an unruly women. Kinsel (2013: 18) writes on the discourse of being tamed, noting that the idea of taming includes how and where one should be, constraining individuals seen as transgressing their boundaries or societally-expected role. In this context, the women in the episode who suggest or imply being tamed take on social constructs that portray women as less threatening than and to men, timid and obedient. Nomathamsanqa does not find this calming and controlled quality in Thapelo. At the end of their interaction, there is a difference in opinion when both comment on the possibility of a second date – Thapelo stating, "Yes, of course!" and Nomathamsanqa, "I really don't know right now."

The above analysis has identified different components that typically make up perceptions of romantic love and how these are represented in *Date My Family* and among the participants it features. There are notable preoccupations with typically Western idealisations of romantic love and the need for financial stability – the participants are concerned with the ways in which they can establish and sustain the romantic connections they make. There are social, cultural and economic factors that are prevalent throughout the episodes that drive the views of many of these participants. We see the repercussions of these factors, namely family, gender constructs, class, and religion in the comments they make about their ideal expectations of both a romantic partner and love. The young black South Africans reflect an eagerness to explore romantic love, and modern ideas of love are presented as both intentional and conditional.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

This study undertook a textual analysis of *Date My Family* for a critical examination of the black South African family structure and the dynamics therein. Three themes were identified for analysis, namely family, partnering and romantic love. The family is an important unit in society, from which social, cultural and political values are cultivated and communicated. Romantic partnering and romantic love are social practices that are strongly affected by, and which can occur within and outside of, this unit. The three themes are interrelated components of society upon which some social and cultural systems rely. I further examined the ways in which family, romantic partnering and romantic love can be considered in relation to some Western and African values and practices.

Date My Family presents the black family form in its most traditional African conception – the extended family. The panels that appear on the programme are comprised of family members who are both biological and non-biological, suggesting that the idea of the family unit can be complex. The families reflect female-headed households with few or no sightings of prominent male figures such as the grandfather or father. This observation indicates a disempowerment of men as patriarchs, reveals women as capable of taking full responsibility for their families, and reflects the repercussions of the country's oppressive history that are prevalent in contemporary society – such as migrant labour as one of the key reasons for this family form.

Black South Africans seem to draw from some Western values and practices of romantic partnering, particularly in terms of what they deem to be their ideal romantic partner. *Date My Family* begins by framing the idea of romantic partnering in an unusual way where the bachelor or bachelorette meets the family of their potential partner first, which challenges traditional conceptions of how this process is typically ordered. The participants emphasise physical attraction and well-presented partners. These ideals also perpetuate gender constructs and roles in society that perceive women to be dependent on men for financial security and emotional stability. Among the women, there is a preoccupation with their partner being employed or financially stable – one of the requirements they list in romantic partnering. The men in *Date My Family* are pressured to fulfil their prescribed roles as protector and provider. The African notion that emphasises a large weight given to the parental role in the romantic partnering of the child generation is challenged as the men and women who appear on the programme display

a greater independence in the process of romantic partner selection, as well as an eagerness to explore the possibilities of romantic partnering.

Where love in Africa is concerned, *Date My Family* presents participants who again seem to imagine romantic love in line with Western ideas. This is not to say that they solely rely on the West for the ways in which they perceive of and practice it; it also suggests that these ideas co-exist with some of their own conceptions formed within their respective socio-cultural environments, in the context of South Africa. While romantic love does not visibly manifest in the programme, the participants display a clear inclination towards its attainment. Again, finances factor into the perception of romantic love where financial provision and the means to do so are used as an indicator of one's love. This further speaks to the commodification of love in contemporary society and among these black men and women.

This study outlines the ways in which *Date My Family* is a comment on some contemporary renegotiations of the family and its structure, practices of romantic partnering and romantic love. It presents current imaginings of these and introduces crucial considerations of black identity and the implications of this socio-cultural positioning on contemporary functionings. The programme presents ways in which black South Africans are able to identify themselves in relation to the locally-specific and culturally relevant content it provides.

List of Episodes:

Episode 5 – aired on 9th April, 2017.

Episode 6 – aired on 16th April, 2017.

Episode 7 – aired on 23rd April, 2017.

Episode 8 – aired on 30th April, 2017.

Episode 9 – aired on 7th May, 2017.

Episode 10 – aired on 14th May, 2017.

Episode 11 – aired on 21st May, 2017.

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