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Consumption, Femininity and the City in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*: A Content Analysis of a Franchise

by

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Department of Media Studies

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Declaration

I, **Tessa Hayley Hellberg** (Student number: 1201796) am a student registered for **MA Media Studies by Dissertation** in the year **2021**. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above course 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.

Signature: **T. Hellberg** Date: **31 March 2021**

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And finally, to the *Real Housewives*, of Johannesburg and beyond: thank you for the endless hours of entertainment and for giving the world a peek into your lives. To quote a wall text spotted at the BravoCon 2019 *Real Housewives* museum, "A Housewife's life is a work of art. They not only make us laugh but also make us gasp, cry, think, feel and balance pinot on our heads. They just never fail to give us something to talk about!"

As someone who has just submitted a Masters Dissertation on the matter, I couldn't agree more.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Since its inception in 2006, the *Real Housewives* franchise has grown from a docusoap showcasing the lives of women in one community in the US, to a global franchise. Today, the *Real Housewives* has a presence across continents, with the recent inclusion of a version set in Johannesburg, South Africa. However, while there is ample research concerning global versions of the *Real Housewives* franchise, the same cannot be said of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. Indeed, at the time of writing, little (if any) research has been published on the premiere African rendition. Is this because location has little bearing on the content of the franchise overall? There are multiple similarities across the franchise, regardless of setting, which may support this theory. However, as will be discussed in this research, the city could also be viewed as a key differentiator between versions of the *Real Housewives* franchise.

Through a content analysis of the first two seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, this research aims to provide a better understanding of the complexities of this local version of a global franchise. Do the performances of femininity in Johannesburg differ from those in Dallas? Does being a woman in Salt Lake City hold different significance to being a woman in Sydney? How do the shopping sprees of the Johannesburg cast compare with those of their Beverly Hills counterparts? Using the theoretical framework of glocalization, I will ascertain the significance of the local elements in the Johannesburg version. Regarding performances of femininity, the other theoretical framework to be used in my research is the advisory nature of postfeminist media. The intention here is to garner an understanding of whether the advice given to women in Johannesburg regarding femininity is locally specific, or informed by a greater expectation of how women should behave, irrespective of location.

To ascertain the frequency of references to how women should behave in Johannesburg, and indeed how Johannesburg is represented in the series, this research makes use of a quantitative content analysis. However, given that quantitative methods do not allow for particularly in-depth analysis, this was combined with a qualitative, textual approach that considered both discursive and visual elements of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. In examining these components of

the text, this research concludes that much of the expectation of how femininity is performed in relation to the city is informed by notions of respectability and the politics of belonging in a Johannesburg context.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Real Housewives: An Overview

The Real Housewives franchise is a reality television show that centres the experiences of groups of women as they navigate life in their home cities (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015). Since its inception in 2006 (in Orange County, California), *The Real Housewives* has expanded significantly. While the first show was intended to showcase the lives of a group of women in a gated community in the US (Cox and Proffitt, 2012; Reality TV World Staff, 2006), today's franchise spans continents. It now affords viewers a look into the lives of wealthy women in cities across North America, Europe, the Middle East, Oceania and most recently, Africa. In 2016, NBCUniversal announced an Asian version of the show would be produced in Thailand, however at the time of writing there had been no release date (Priyah, 2016).

The popularity of the *Real Housewives* franchise is well-documented (Cox and Proffitt, 2012; Cox, 2012; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013; Psarras, 2015; and Grindstaff and Murray, 2015). Both scholarly texts and news articles (Cox and Proffitt, 2012; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013; Ragusa, 2018) evidence that *The Real Housewives* franchise consistently brings in high ratings–particularly from a female audience–and the viewership is affluent, engaged and highly educated (Bravo, 2020). Indeed, even the platform on which American versions of *The Real Housewives* are shown, Bravo, "a programme service of NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment" (Bravo, 2020) is "consistently the fastest growing ad-supported cable entertainment network" in the US (Bravo, 2020). Notably, in addition to public viewership, *The Real Housewives* also receives praise from public figures like Rihanna and Lady Gaga, and even former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama (Gavilanes, 2019). Simply put, the show is a cultural phenomenon, evidenced through its popular endorsement, exceptional ratings and impressive longevity. As Ramona Singer declared of the *Real Housewives of New York*, "we are pop icon. This show is pop icon" (E! Red Carpet and Award Shows, 2018). It should come as no surprise, then, that over the period 2010 – 2012, it was reported that advertising revenue for the franchise amounted to between $35.6 and $162 million

(THR Staff, 2012). These numbers increase every year (Bravo, 2020), cementing the financial success of the franchise.

In 2018, Johannesburg became the setting for the first South African (and indeed African) version of *The Real Housewives* franchise (NBCUniversal International Formats, 2018). While international variations of the franchise are not screened or produced by Bravo, they are nonetheless licensed by the same parent company (NBCUniversal) and share the same format and subject matter. In light of this, as with US-based iterations of the series, the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* was issued a mandate to showcase the activities of six wealthy women as they navigate life in their home city (NBCUniversal International Formats, 2018). The first season's cast included Evodia 'Madame' Mogase, Mercy Mogase, Brinnette Seopela, Naledi Willers, Lendy Ter Mors and Christall Kay (TV With Thinus, 2018). In 2019, the show returned for a second season, again starring Brinnette and Christall, but this time with the addition of four new women: Lebo Gunguluza, Lethabo Lejoy Mathatho, Nompumelelo 'Mpumi' Mophatlane (also known as 'Mrs Mops'), Tarina Patel and Mpho Merriweather (Citizen Reporter, 2019).

As has been noted, at the time of writing, little if any literature considers *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. This is unfortunate, as being the first African rendition of the franchise certainly makes it worthy of study – especially with regards to its "peculiar local circumstances" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018: 338).

A Global Text with Universal Motifs

It is common to see repetitions of format, content and themes in global media texts. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2010: 119) refer to this as "generic homogeneity", explaining that global media franchise texts share "fundamentally" similar elements which, while tweaked slightly to local contexts, exist throughout**.** These overt similarities are an attempt by brands seeking to become globally recognised (Machin and Thornborrow, 2003). Popular examples of homogenous global media brands include magazines like *Cosmopolitan* (Machin and Thornborrow, 2003; Kam, 2018) and *Glamour* (Gill, 2009).

As with other global media texts, Grindstaff and Murray (2015) argue that much of *The Real Housewives'* international popularity comes from repetitive themes seen across the franchise. These similarities make localised versions easily relatable to an international audience. Prominent themes in *The Real Housewives* include consumption and wealth (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015) and, as postulated by a host of scholars, including Cox and Proffitt (2012) and Lee and Moscowitz (2013), how the "excess wealth" (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015: 118) acquired by the housewives is often spent on appearance enhancements. This repeated motif is in no way concealed from the viewer. On the contrary, in every version of the franchise, the housewives are shown making seemingly outrageous purchases in the name of beauty. As one example, Lee and Moscowitz (2013) reference *Real Housewives of New York* star, Ramona Singer's penchant for plastic surgery as a bonding experience. Similarly, the advertising campaign for the first season of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* featured a clip of Mercy Mogase declaring, "pampering is like eating" (*The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, 2018). Ramona and Mercy may live in entirely different hemispheres, but their shared love of "pampering" (*The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, 2018) knows no borders.

Another prominent theme across the franchise is the display of extreme emotion (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015). Dominguez (2015: 156) argues that the outward display of emotion is "characteristic of the genre" of docusoaps; and indeed what draws viewers in. It is notable that this performance of emotion, as well as the emotions portrayed themselves ("jealousy and unwarranted pride"), are coded as inherently feminine (Dominguez, 2015: 156). However, Lee and Moscowitz (2013: 67) suggest the way characters on the show behave actually presents a "violation" of "gender norms". The conduct exhibited by the *Real Housewives* is seen as abnormal for women, thus Lee and Moscowitz (2013) argue that these overt expressions of emotion present a postfeminist challenge to traditionally accepted 'feminine' behaviour.

A further similarity across the franchise is the repeated cast. Grindstaff and Murray (2015: 118) note an undeniable "replication of character types" in every version of the franchise, and suggest this adds to the franchise's popularity. This is because viewers can easily identify with the

characters they've come to know in other versions (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015). This is true with regard to repeated character types, like regularly appearing "heavy-drinking...overly confrontational" characters (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015: 119) exemplified by Brandi Glanville in the *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, Jen Shah on the *Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* and Dorinda Medley in the *Real Housewives of New York*. However, it can also be seen through the careers of cast members.

In each iteration of the franchise there is at least one character involved in the entertainment industry. In *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, these are Erika Jayne, a singer who, at the commencement of this research, and just prior to the COVID-19 lockdown in New York City (Vena, 2020) was performing the role of Roxie Hart in *Chicago* on Broadway; Lisa Rina, a *Days of Our Lives* alum who also played Roxie Hart on Broadway in 2007 (Rosenfeld, 2016); and 1999 'Bond Girl' Denise Richards (Bravo, 2020). Season 10 of the series also saw the addition of Garcelle Beauvais – another actress, whose filmography includes *Coming to America* (1988) and *Wild Wild West* (1999), among others (Bravo, 2021). In *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* (2019), Christall Kay is an aspiring singer, Lethabo Mathatho is a radio personality who has starred in South African soap opera *Skeem Saam*; and Tarina Patel is a model and actress who has had roles both in South African television and Bollywood films. Likewise, in the *Real Housewives of Potomac*, Candiace Dillard has held roles in films including *The Christmas Lottery* (2020) and *Water in a Broken Glass* (2018), while in *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, Kenya Moore, Cynthia Bailey and Nene Leakes are actresses and Kim Zolciak-Biermann and Kandi Burress are singers. Further exemplifying this repetition, in *The Real Housewives of Sydney* (2017), Melissa Tkautz is an actress and singer.

Each version of the series also features a 'housewife' with a career in fashion: in *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, Dorit Kemsley is a swimwear designer and the founder of Beverly Beach (Bravo, 2020). Notably, at the time of writing, she had just unveiled a collaboration with luxury fashion brand Nektaria, and used Instagram as a way to advertise that she would be wearing exclusively Dorit & Nektaria for her title sequence 'looks'. Likewise, *The Real Housewives of New York* features Dorinda Medley and Ramona Singer, who founded DCL Cashmere and RMS

Fashions, respectively (Bravo, 2020). In the series' 12th season, Married to the Mob streetwear brand founder, Leah McSweeney also joined the cast (Bravo, 2020). Similarly, in *The Real Housewives of Dallas* (2018), Brandi Redmond owns Brandi Land clothing and Leeanne Locken is the founder of L'Infinity; and in the first season of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* (2018), Naledi Willers and her friend Lerika Kleinhans collaborate on a fashion line, Denim X.

Returning to the earlier assertion that the franchise embraces aesthetic enhancements, it is unsurprising that in most versions of the franchise, there is also at least one character involved in the beauty industry. In season 3 of *The Real Housewives of Dallas* (2018), Cary Deuber and her husband operate a plastic surgery practice; in the *Real Housewives of Sydney* (2017), Matty Samaei owns an injectable practice, 'The Medispa by Matty'; and in the *Real Housewives of Salt Lake City*, Heather Gay owns a Med-Spa by the name of Beauty Lab and Laser (Bravo, 2021). Similarly, on the New York cast, Ramona Singer owns two skincare lines (Pasarow, 2019). Likewise, in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* (2018; 2019), both Brinnette Seopela and Christall Kay own beauty salons, and while she doesn't elaborate on her exact line of work within the beauty industry, Mercy also shares having business interests in the space (*The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, 2018).

Repetitions like these, which feature across the franchise, allow viewers to see how similar women navigate their lives in different cities. In a sense, it makes no difference where the women are based – they live lives easily comparable to other women in the franchise, even though they may be physically located on the other side of the world. One is tempted to recall a line from Grindstaff and Murray's (2015: 119) definition of the franchise: "*The Real Housewives of* _____ (fill in the city)..."; the similar theorization of the franchise by Johnson and Trelease (2018: 328), as "*The Real Housewives of*…Format", and even the news article "Real Housewives of Anywhere" (2018) by Elle Hunt.

That said, the easy applicability of *The Real Housewives* to a multitude of locations is not a novel concept. On the contrary, in reality television (and, as mentioned earlier, in global media texts in general), universality is essentially a prerequisite. Cox (2012: 29) posits, "reality TV is an

international product designed to be easily translated from one culture to another". This is a sentiment echoed by Johnson and Trelease (2018: 327) who argue that the genre is ideally suited for "glocal adaptation". In the *Real Housewives* franchise, the easy applicability is played out through the elimination of differences between casts, as well as the presence of common themes that help audiences identify the franchise as a single unit, regardless of geography. This is in line with other global media texts, like the earlier mentioned *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

It is worth noting that in the case of the *Real Housewives* franchise, the lack of difference between casts is shown largely through behaviours and careers typically ascribed to women. For this reason, the next section considers how postfeminist media culture allows the franchise to exist in a number of different contexts, without the need to change its core subject matter.

Postfeminist Media Culture

The Endless Quest for Beauty

Gill (2007) notes that in postfeminist media culture, women are encouraged to enhance their beauty (through consumerist practises, naturally) to boost their confidence, and thus their power. Gill (2008) also argues that the 21st century woman's worth is inherently tied to her physical appearance and attractiveness to heterosexual males. While postfeminist ideas of beauty suggest that women should take pride in their appearance for their own self-worth, it would be remiss to suggest that the terms in which beauty is defined have been prescribed by women themselves (Gill, 2007). Rather, Gill (2007: 90) highlights that the "self-policing" women enact on their bodies is an internalization of the "male gaze".

The Real Housewives franchise offers countless examples of women electing to take extreme measures to enhance their appearances. According to postfeminist media discourse, the task of improving oneself is never complete (Gill, 2007), and the cast members on *The Real Housewives* show an acute awareness of this. In season 9 of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* (2019), Erika Girardi refers to herself as "an art project" which she will continue to tweak as she sees fit.

Similarly, in *The Real Housewives of Sydney* (2017), Matty Samaei's opening sequence 'tagline' alludes to her surgically-enhanced pout: "My lips may be fake, but they always speak the truth" (*The Real Housewives of Sydney*, 2017). However, perhaps the most overt allusion to the franchise's overall emphasis on self-improvement through beauty is the 2019 advertisement for Fiber One, a company offering low-calorie snacks. As part of Fiber One's rebranding, their advertising campaign included a music video featuring *Real Housewives* from the casts of New Jersey, New York and Atlanta, respectively (Vulpo, 2019). The music video shows Melissa Gorga, Sonja Morgan and Porsha William perform the song 'Work Done' – singing lyrics like "always getting work done, tweak it to perfection" and "I be like, 'new nose, who dis?'" (Daw, et al, 2019).

While the Fiber One advertisement is clearly satirical and overtly camp, its relevance to the greater perpetuation of the "self-policing narcissistic gaze" (Gill, 2008: 90) should not be discounted. In *The Real Housewives* franchise, it is routinely suggested that women actively choose to have 'work done' of their own accord. Moreover, it is implied that they choose to undergo extreme procedures despite protests from society. One example is a Season 13 episode of *The Real Housewives of Orange County* (2018), in which cast member Vicki Gunvalson's son expresses his frustration at her undergoing a facelift. Post-procedure, Gunvalson announced in an interview that, at the behest of her boyfriend, she was "done" with plastic surgery (Sander, 2019). The references made to the men in Vicki's life protesting her choice to undergo surgery are telling of the assumption that narcissism and vanity are inherently 'female' traits, which seek to baffle exasperated men. This speaks to Lee and Moscowitz's (2013: 65) description of the 'rich bitch', who aims to fulfil her "selfish material gains" at the expense of her relationships. Given that it is her right to enhance her image (Lazar, 2009), the 'rich bitch' wields a power over men: she is the one who will choose if she complies with their requests.

Lazar (2006) argues that this portrayal of gender relations is dangerous, as it not only implies a gender equality that does not exist in reality, but also suggests that in the postfeminist era, women have become the dominant sex. This power shift simply doesn't exist in the real world (Lazar, 2006). Yet across the franchise, successful women are shown taking extreme measures to maintain and increase their power through their physical appearances (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013). By

presenting powerful women around the world as willing participants in the quest for beauty (Gill, 2007; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013; Lazar, 2006), attractiveness and success are depicted as synonymous. It doesn't matter where a successful woman lives: if she is empowered, she must be beautiful, too.

Hypersexuality as a Prerequisite for Success

Another common theme in postfeminist media is the emphasis placed on hypersexuality (Gill, 2007). The postfeminist icon is a woman who is aware of the cultural capital her sexuality holds, and willingly exploits that power (Lazar, 2006; Gill, 2007; Gill 2008). As Gill (2008) notes, the empowered postfeminist is a woman who no longer considers herself objectified: instead, she is a willing agent in sexual situations.

While numerous scholars have spoken about the sexualization of female bodies in a postfeminist society (Gill, 2007; Gill, 2008; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013) in *The Real Housewives* franchise, I would argue that viewers are shown a continuation of hypersexuality that extends beyond the bodies of the female cast. Indeed, through *The Real Housewives*, the audience is shown how wealthy women objectify younger men.

In Season 3 of *The Real Housewives of Dallas* (2018), cast member Stephanie Hollman organises a spa day at her home, complete with shirtless male models whose task is to make her guests "feel like queens". During the planning process, Hollman and cast mate Brandi Redmond audition models together, giggling as the men do push-ups and carry them around Hollman's newly renovated mansion (*Real Housewives of Dallas*, 2018). Similarly, in an episode of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale), Christall hires a bodyguard to accompany her to Brinnette's wedding, and has him carry her around the party while she shares how glad she is to have escaped her "boring husband" (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale). Likewise, throughout Season One of *The Real Housewives of Sydney* (2017), there are constant allusions to housewife Krissy Marsh's overt flirtations with younger men working at the events she attends.

Like the earlier mentioned example of women's decisions to undergo invasive procedures against the wishes of the men in their lives, the objectification of young male bodies suggests a complete reversal of power relations (Lazar, 2006). The audience is shown a world in which women have become the sexual aggressors, and young men the passive objects (Lazar, 2006). As noted earlier, Lazar (2006) problematizes this, as it buys into anti-feminist accusations that female empowerment is synonymous with male subjugation. It also negates the reality that outside postfeminist texts like *The Real Housewives*, the lived experience of many women is not one in which they are sexual aggressors. In the immediate post #MeToo era, to suggest this would be misleading.

Camping it up with the Housewives

That said, the suggestion of reversed power relations doesn't necessitate that the production teams behind the *Real Housewives* franchise are genuinely unaware of the ironies between the lived experiences of women and their portrayal on the programme. Quite the opposite, one might argue that this is a demonstration of 'camp' at its finest.

In his fascinating consideration of *Desperate Housewives* – positioned by Pier Dominguez (2015) as the inspiration and counterpart to the *Real Housewives* franchise – as a camp text, Niall Richardson (2006: 159) defines camp as "an ironic performance of gender". Using the aptly named *Desperate Housewives* character, Bree Van de Kamp as a subject of study, Richardson (2006: 159) expands on the character's performance of traditional femininity and hyperdomesticity, and elaborates that camp is typically a means to perform gender "through hyperbole, exaggeration, parody or irony". 'Perform' is the key word here, as Richardson (2006) notes that this ironic portrayal is just that: a *portrayal*. Thanks to its ironic framing, this portrayal is made abundantly clear to the audience, and it is evident that the character, too, is well aware of their performance.

This knowingness, regularly referred to as a "wink" (Richardson, 2006; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013; Psarras, 2020a, 2020b) has a direct link to postfeminist sensibility. Indeed, Rosalind Gill (2007:

159) dedicated a section of *Postfeminist Media Culture* to the "irony and knowingness" characteristic of texts which seek to have it "both ways" through the simultaneous dissemination of and distancing from sexist ideologies. This is an idea echoed by Lisa Hill (2010: 166) who notes that, particularly in the case of *Desperate Housewives*, the text "embodies postfeminism in its knowing, yet self-reflexive examination of women in contemporary society".

Much has been written about the campiness of the *Real Housewives* franchise (Dominguez, 2015; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013; Psarras, 2020a, 2020b). Like its scripted forerunner, the *Real Housewives* franchise provides a platform to a postfeminist icon, whose quest for beauty is eternal and whose hypersexuality is undeniable. It also makes use of irony to poke fun at both of these elements of a postfeminist sensibility, through a process dubbed the 'Bravo Wink' (Psarras 2020a, 2020b, Lee and Moscowitz, 2013). This refers to the express use of juxtaposition to highlight contradictions in a cast member's commentary or behaviour (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013).

However, perhaps the feature which hints at irony most is the series' title itself. Despite the programme being named the ***'Real** Housewives'*, the majority of the cast are anything but. As noted earlier in terms of the repeated cast, many of the women featured are successful businesswomen, or hold careers in a range of industries. In a sense, this speaks to a "postfeminist girl power discourse" (Bae, 2011: 38), which places value on "educational and economic success". However, as is to be expected given the overall campness of the franchise, the women's work is treated with a sense of irony and knowingness. Lee and Moscowitz (2013: 70) argue that the cast's careers are deemed "immaterial and frivolous", and many times, disregarded outright during the editing process. Instead of an empowering message, viewers are met with footage which seeks to undermine the women's abilities. This was addressed by Christall in the Season One reunion of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, when she complained that her music career was depicted as a farce when in reality, she had won awards abroad (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2). With that said, while much of this positioning stems from the 'Bravo wink' and editing, much also comes from the cast members themselves. Indeed, Lee and Moscowitz (2013: 73) note that in *The Real Housewives of New York,* "each housewife claims to work hard but also denies that the other housewives do as well". This is reminiscent of Negra's (2009: 86) observations that

postfeminist media habitually works to "trivialize the female income earner or to de-emphasize her earning status". While Negra's (2009) observations spoke primarily to the 'problem' of working women who out-earned their male partners, the same holds true in regard to the *Real Housewives*, and informs the reading of the franchise, at large, as a "postfeminist cautionary tale" decoratively wrapped in "the language of women's empowerment" (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013: 72).

However, even if one is to understand the *Real Housewives* franchise in terms of its campness, the fact remains that, ironically or not, the *Real Housewives,* irrespective of where they reside, perform a very specific femininity: one which plays into postfeminist understandings of empowerment.

Given what has been said about repeated characters and content on the *Real Housewive*s, it could be said that the franchise operates by offering viewers a distinct 'sameness' (Grindstaff and Murray, 2015), akin to the "observable similarities" (Machin and Thornborrow, 2003: 454) seen in global postfeminist media like *Cosmopolitan* magazine. This is a sentiment echoed by Johnson and Trelease (2018: 338) whose exploration of *The Real Housewives* as a 'glocal' text concluded that the franchise sought to demonstrate repeated values "no matter what the peculiar local circumstances may be". By this standard, is it fair to assume that the city is dispensable? Cast members and Bravo executives don't think so.

The city as a mark of difference

In an interview concerning Israeli version of the franchise, *Me'usharot,* Bravo executive Andy Cohen stated, "...so much of the popularity of [*The Real Housewives*] is about capturing the spirit of the city or the country in which they take place" (Caspi, 2013). This is a sentiment echoed by *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* cast member, Kyle Richards, who has remarked that "every city has its own flavour" (@BravoTV, 2019). To be sure, most versions of the show make reference to the setting in some way. For example, in an episode of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,* actress Denise Richards remarks that the high price she's spent on a purchase is really "not bad" considering the cost of living in Beverly Hills (*The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,* 2019). Likewise, in *The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City,* Heather Gay attributes much of her business's

success to the strong Mormon influence on the city and its resulting pursuit of perfection, noting that thanks to facials and fillers, "perfection is attainable" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to Salt Lake City!) Comments like these cause one to beg the question: is the city primarily mentioned in relation to consumption – and more specifically, the *nonchalant* consumption (Johnson and Trelease, 2018) of luxury goods?

The mention of the city during moments when characters are spending money (and, to quote Cox and Proffitt (2012: 295), "lots of it") suggests that their experience of the city is one of unbridled luxury. The idea that the cast members on *The Real Housewives* are in constant pursuit of more can be likened to Socrates' concept of the 'fevered city.' Armitage and Roberts (2016) believe that in fevered cities, residents are acutely aware that there is always an opportunity to acquire something bigger, better and more sublime. Indeed, they note that "...while the individual may tire of foie gras, the building blocks of the fevered city continue to rise upwards in ever greater quantities and become part of the future of ever newer luxuries" (Armitage and Roberts, 2016).

The *Real Housewives* franchise clearly demonstrates a performance of the fevered city. It might even be said that the city itself is a character on each show in the franchise, constantly in conversation with the characters, telling them where they can go to acquire bigger, better and more luxurious objects and experiences. Johnson and Trelease (2018) postulate that for most residents of the cities in which *Real Housewives* has a presence, such a pursuit of luxury is unfeasible. Can the same be said of a Johannesburg setting? To answer this, one must first have an understanding of Johannesburg, and how it has been theorised. Indeed, if we are to understand how, as Cohen suggests, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* encapsulates "the spirit of the city" (Caspi, 2013), we must first define what the spirit of Johannesburg is.

The Spirit of a City

Johannesburg is the capital city of Gauteng province, South Africa. It first came into being after gold was discovered in the region in 1886 by European prospectors, earning it the nickname, 'the city of gold.' Because of its ties to the precious mineral, the city has long been considered a place

of wealth on the African continent, and today, Johannesburg is the largest contributor to South Africa's economy (Statistics South Africa, 2018; Karuaihe, 2013).

The fact that the city was established by European prospectors should not be dismissed, as this has had a lasting impact on Johannesburg's features. Mbembe (2008) notes that despite its physical location on the African continent, upon its establishment Johannesburg took on a decidedly European character (Mbembe, 2008). This was not unusual for a colonial prospecting town. Mbembe (2008) argues that mimicry of European cities was extremely common at the time, as European settlers sought to recreate the forms seen in their home countries. It is this distinct 'Europeanness' which causes Mbembe (2008: 39) to term Johannesburg "a European city in a European country in Africa."

Joburg or Faux-burg?

As with any city, the history of Johannesburg has a direct influence on its current existence (Mbembe, 2008). The former prospecting town has grown into a "mimetic" (Mbembe, 2008: 39) city, characterised by continued mimicry. This has often led to Johannesburg being seen as somehow 'different' to the rest of Africa. This is exemplified by the city's former marketing slogan, hailing Johannesburg 'A World-Class African City' (Sihlongonyane, 2016), which implies that it is not 'normal' for an African city to be world-class, but Johannesburg has made the cut.

Mbembe (2008: 38) notes that Johannesburg offers "an original form...of a performance of worldliness". This might be seen as a direct result of the incorporation of decidedly local features seen throughout the city, alongside the pseudo-European background. While Johannesburg is "as far as one can get from the popular image of the African village" (Simone, 2004: 407), it is also a metropolis where "formal and informal...become entangled" (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2007: 282). There is thus an unlikely blend of rural and urban elements within the space (Mbembe, 2008). The contradictions of the city make Johannesburg's 'spirit' difficult to define, especially those not accustomed to the city's workings.

In *Aesthetics of Superfluity*, Mbembe (2008) mentions that many scholars have theorised Johannesburg as inauthentic. Much of this inauthenticity comes from an attempt by property developers to mimic architecture seen in other parts of the world (Mbembe, 2008). Upon looking through literature on Johannesburg, inauthenticity (or foreignness) is a strong theme. In their essay on gated communities in Johannesburg, Jürgens and Gnad (2001) mention the popularity of 'themed' housing estates, where residents are promised an opportunity to live life like someone might in the Mediterranean, Sicily or elsewhere.

It would be remiss not to mention that inequality has played a major role in the city's current eclectic state. Years of spatial discrimination under colonialism and then apartheid have left the city in a state where extreme poverty and extreme affluence live side-by-side with no buffer zone (Pomerantz, 2019). The private cities-within-cities mentioned above, then, can be seen as an attempt by the wealthy to retreat to a Mediterranean or Sicilian village, all without needing to leave greater Johannesburg. The city offers hideaways and a sense of 'mythicism' – but only to those who can afford it (Vale and Murray, 2017).

The Spatially Dispersed City

Interestingly, in spite of what has been noted above about the lack of buffer zone between some of South Africa's most elite and most destitute spaces, Johannesburg is also often spoken about in terms of its peculiarly spread-out nature (Davies, 1981; Makan, 2015; Fenton, et al, 2019; Herbert and Murray, 2015; Lacqui, 2009). As has been established, this comes as a direct result of the spatial discrimination of the apartheid regime, which saw settlements across the city racially divided under the Group Areas Act. As a direct result of the enforced divisions, even in the post-apartheid era, Johannesburg has taken on a decidedly sprawled character - " vast, distended megalopolis without obvious or fixed boundaries" (Herbert and Murray, 2015: 471).This sense of sprawl is most obviously felt through the city's two hubs, in the form of the original Johannesburg Central Business District and what Beavon (2000) refers to as "the new 'Johannesburg-in-the-north'". That is, Sandton.

The northern section of the city has historically been held as the mainstay of Johannesburg's elites, thanks predominantly to the settlement of the Randlords on the North-facing Witwatersrand Ridge in the 1880s (Beavon, 2000). As Beavon (2000) notes, the exclusivity of the space was cemented by the inability of the city's existing public transport to reach these areas, therefore requiring residents of the northern suburbs to have access to private transport. However, over time, the northern territories of Johannesburg have only spread further afield and become more important to the city as a whole. Initially established by the state in 1969 (Larsen, 2006: 34) the northern suburbs node of Sandton has become "effectively the new CBD" (Beavon and Larsen, 2014: 370) of Greater Johannesburg. Interestingly, even as the business hub has become a place of work to a large portion of the city's workforce, Sandton and its surrounds have maintained their illustrious reputation as the home to the wealthy, with Sandton itself commonly referred to as 'The Richest Square Mile in Africa' (Beavon and Larsen, 2014; Kelleher, 2018; Henama and Sifolo, 2017). This is in stark contrast to the original Johannesburg CBD, which has experienced a decline since the 1990s (Beavon, 2000). This decline has been closely linked to the northward migration of retail and businesses, but was effectively consolidated when the Johannesburg Stock Exchange relocated from the CBD to Sandton in 1998 (Beavon, 2000).

The movement of elites from declining urban areas is not unique to Johannesburg or South Africa more generally. However, as should be expected in a South African context, wealthy Johannesburg's movement northward is also inextricably linked to 'white flight', from the original city's centre in the wake of the end of apartheid (Beavon, 2000). While Beavon (2000) notes that even though there are wealthy Black residents in the northern suburbs (and, certainly, 21 years on, the number from Beavon's earlier consideration has undoubtedly increased), the space nonetheless continues to be shaped by its foundations as a previously 'whites-only' enclave. Moreover, despite Sandton becoming the "new CBD" (Beavon and Larsen, 2014: 370), many of the city's Black residents, even those who work in Sandton, continue to live "on the margins", (Beavon, 2000) a considerable distance from the city's business hub. This is evidenced by the number of people moving from townships to places including Sandton, Midrand and Centurion on a daily basis – with Sandton's daytime population experiencing a 49% increase, while Diepsloot, Tembisa and Soweto lose more than 20% of their populations during the day (Staff Writer, 2019).

Movement in a divided space

For obvious reasons, this sprawling nature of Johannesburg has had a major impact on the ways in which residents navigate the city. Per Lacqui's (2009) assertions, in a city as stretched out as Johannesburg, essential services (and, as evidenced above, workplaces) are often far-flung, with the only means of accessing them a road or highway – and thus, a vehicle.

The presence of automobility in Johannesburg is what Nuttall and Mbembe (2007: 281) deem "ubiquitous". And yet, not everyone who sees the city "through the enclosure of a car window, in private cars, busses and minibus taxis" (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2007: 281) is able to navigate the city in the same way. Quite the contrary, the ways in which people navigate the city of gold is wholly dependent on the *type* of transport to which they have access. Darshika Makan (2015) postulates that Johannesburg has been designed with private car owners in mind, essentially meaning that while pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users '*can'* make use of the city's roads, they cannot lay claim to the same sense of belonging to the space as their private motorist peers. As Putter (2012: 68) puts forth, "traveling by automobiles ultimately enhances one's access to, and agency in, the city".

With that said, access to a private vehicle presupposes the consumption of one, and historically, Black South Africans have been barred from this (Putter, 2012; Morgan, 2020). In response to this barrier, imposed first by colonialism, then apartheid, and subsequently economic oppression, car ownership has become all the more attractive in a post-apartheid context, not only in terms of being able to traverse the city's terrains, but also as a means of social mobility (Putter, 2012). The acquisition of a car, in a Johannesburg context, is synonymous with the acquisition of respect after decades of oppression (Morgan, 2020). However, the new ‘allowance’ of Black car ownership (both luxury and otherwise) by no means suggests that there are not still barriers that remain. In addition to the aforementioned economic hurdles, luxury car ownership among South Africa’s Black population continues to be met with outrage: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela’s framing by the media in the wake of her purchasing a Mercedes-Benz (Iqani, 2015) being but one example of this. The issue is thus no longer about whether or not Black South Africans are legally permitted to buy

luxury items (both cars and otherwise), but how they will be contextualized in Johannesburg society if they do.

The racialization of consumption in Johannesburg

The impact of race on consumptive practises in Johannesburg goes beyond car ownership, and encompasses other purchases, as well. Investment in any luxury goods is a highly contentious activity when the customer in question is a person of colour. This is documented by Alweendo and Dosekun (2019) in their exploration of the *Moralization of Black Women's Luxury Consumption*. In their analysis of the high-end Luminance shop in the exclusive Hyde Park Corner shopping centre, Alweendo and Dosekun (2019: 135) highlight the very act of Black consumption as an activity "fraught and highly politicized...in post-apartheid South Africa". This is because, as with Black car ownership throughout South Africa's long-standing tradition of racial subjugation, the consumption of luxury clothing (and indeed 'normal' non-luxury clothing sold in historically 'white' spaces) has been replete with barriers to entry for Black South Africans. As a result, the subsequent 'allowance' of Black consumers in the luxury space serves as more than a mere shopping spree: it impacts the ways in which Black South Africans *experience* Johannesburg. Akin to what has been noted regarding car ownership in the city, Dosekun and Alweendo (2019) also note how the ability to shop in such an exclusive space contributes to a sense of *belonging*.

However, given the intricacies of race in Johannesburg, it should come as no surprise that even for the Black women who are able to spend their money in an establishment like Luminance, there are nonetheless remaining barriers to entry. Dosekun and Alweendo (2015) speak to the 'morality' aspect of Black female luxury shoppers, noting how a previously oppressed group being able to 'buy their way' into previously white spaces was treated with scorn by local media when businesswoman Khanyi Dhlomo opened Luminance with the express intention of serving the elite Black consumer. This was eerily reminiscent of the aforementioned disparaging framing of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's consumption of luxury goods, which, among others, included a Mercedes-Benz (Iqani, 2015). Here, the struggle icon was lambasted for supposedly turning her back on the most vulnerable members of society by way of her expenditure (Iqani, 2015). Crosswaite (2014: 189) expands on this kind of moral panic surrounding Black consumptive practises in the country,

mentioning that the social context of previous oppression and subsequent "arrival" (Dosekun and Alweendo, 2015: 131) of Black elites is typically overlooked, with many favouring instead the theorization of the group's conspicuous consumption as "distasteful, if not immoral and distorted". This is a statement echoed by Iqani (2017: 116), who notes that "the new Black middle class is thus framed as suffering from a moral hollowness: They are materialistic, selfish, greedy, have betrayed the struggle and cannot be trusted with a social democracy. They are consumers, not citizens."

While Johannesburg, and indeed South Africa more broadly, is far from the only place which sees the ridicule of Black elite consumers, it would be neglectful to say this isn't a defining characteristic to the city of gold, where the liberation from a white minority regime is still so fresh. For this reason, the research to follow will ascertain whether this receives any acknowledgment on *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg.* Are there any overt references to this "peculiarly local circumstance" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018: 338) of the city? Drawing back on what has been said of the inauthentic intricacies of the city, does *that* warrant any commentary on the programme? These questions tie in with my interests concerning how the cast of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* navigate their city in terms of femininity and consumption.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Glocalization

To reiterate the aims of this research, this undertaking will ascertain how narratives of femininity and consumption are employed in relation to the city in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. Given what has been said above about the nature of Johannesburg itself, in terms of its unique beginnings as "a European city, in a European country in Africa" (Mbembe, 2008: 39) which continues to be marred by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, my theoretical framework begins with a consideration of glocalization.

Glocalization refers to the hybridization that occurs when global texts are adapted to local needs (Wang, 1997; Johnson and Trelease, 2018; Robertson, 1995). Often, when international texts (like, in this instance, *The Real Housewives* franchise) become glocalized, they take on certain local 'peculiarities' (Johnson and Trelease, 2018). As such, the text may be instantly recognizable by viewers of other shows in the franchise, while continuing to offer locally specific content.

What is the motivation for hybridization? In short, "diversity sells" (Robertson, 1995: 29). As noted by Robertson (1995: 28), who brought attention to the term in the 1990s, glocalization is akin to "micromarketing". This refers to "the tailoring of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets" (Robertson, 1995: 28). The use of glocalization techniques by global media to gain higher profits is well documented (see Fung and Lee, 2009; Matusitz, 2010; Matusitz and Palermo, 2014); and *The Real Housewives* franchise provides a stellar example. From a repeated format to a similar cast, *The Real Housewives* is a text easily identified in a number of contexts. However, as postulated by Johnson and Trelease (2018) the city offers the key distinction from other versions in the franchise. The city is the "selling point" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018) for each programme.

Given the links between glocalization and capitalist gains, I will use this framework to gain a greater understanding of how localised elements of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* are used to promote or acknowledge consumption in the city. As noted in the literature review, across the franchise, a large number of references to the location are related to consumption and expenditure. Using glocalization as a guideline, I will determine whether the same holds true in the Johannesburg iteration of the *Real Housewives* franchise.

Postfeminism

The second theoretical framework guiding my research is postfeminism. Angela McRobbie (2004) describes this as the peculiar, simultaneous celebration and rejection of feminist ideas. This description is echoed by Simidele Dosekun (2015), who defines postfeminism as the belief that feminist demands have been realised, hence there is no longer a need for them to exist. Thus, in the postfeminist era, women are encouraged to take advantage of their freedom by embracing patriarchal standards of beauty and behaviour, because after all, these are no longer *imposed* (Gill, 2007). The postfeminist woman, then, actively chooses to embrace patriarchal norms (Gill, 2007).

Postfeminist ideas are taught to women through global media. This is done through the giving of 'advice' on topics ranging from appearance, to behaviour, to health (Winch, 2013). Notably, this advice, while often benefitting patriarchal ideas of how women 'should' look and behave, is not given by traditional patriarchal figures. Rather, it is frequently given to women by other *women* (Gill, 2007). Moreover, these advice-givers regularly approach their subject from the position of a friend; indeed, a "girlfriend" (Winch, 2013: 360). These "girlfriends" offer advice in magazines, online articles, and even self-help books (Winch, 2013: 360), and in order to qualify as a "girlfriend" (Winch, 2013: 362), one must be equally committed to constant self-improvement. In this way, 'girlfriends' exist together in a "feminine community of pain" (Dosekun, 2017: 4), which normalises regular beauty procedures – but only when actively chosen by women themselves. This 'choice' is certainly debatable: in fact, Dosekun (2017: 3) argues that the language surrounding the normalisation of intensive beauty procedures can be likened to "a governmental rationality of

power". Women may be able to choose to *not* undergo intense procedures, but to do so would certainly be ill-advised by the 'girlfriend' community.

If *The Real Housewives* is to be understood as a postfeminist media text, I'm interested to see whether it demonstrates an instance of the "sanctified female friendship", which promotes advice-giving (Winch, 2013: 360), not only in terms of the aforementioned un-ending quest for beauty, but in all facets of life. After all, Gill (2007: 155) notes that the postfeminist conceptualization of femininity as "contingent – requiring constant anxious attention, work and vigilance, from touching up your make-up to packing the perfect capsule wardrobe, from hiding 'unsightly' pimples, wrinkles and age spots or stains to hosting a successful dinner party". Certainly, the franchise is replete with advisory comments concerning both appearance and behaviour, and in particular behaviour in relation to other women. For example, in one episode of *The Real Housewives of New York*, Bethenny Frankel criticises her cast mate Tinsley Mortimer for failing to provide "an example of women's empowerment" (Season 11, Episode 19: Reunion Part 2) when she chooses to stay in what appears to be a tumultuous, transactional relationship. Similarly, in *The Real Housewives of Sydney* (2017), Krissy Marsh lambastes AthenaX Levendi for "tearing other women down". Notably, this advice comes from within the friendship group in both examples. Does this same rationing of behaviour exist in the Johannesburg version?

Postfeminism in a Glocal Text

The Real Housewives is a global text, and as such, can be related to other global postfeminist media, like *Cosmopolitan* magazine and *Glamour* magazine. As noted above, magazines are a key platform used to communicate postfeminist ideology – especially pertaining to appearance and behaviour – and *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* are no exception to this. As with other global media, these magazines contain "observable similarities" (Machin and Thornborrow, 2003: 454) which contribute to an overall "generic homogeneity" (Machin and Van Leeuwen, 2010: 119) that allows the text to be easily identified across the world. However, one should not presume that each text is an exact replica of an original Western text.

Dosekun (2015) refutes this way of thinking. Responding to the positioning of postfeminism as uniquely Western, Dosekun (2015) argues that it is actually 'transnational', with various interpretations of embraced femininity influencing each other across borders. This speaks to Machin and Thornborrow's (2003: 454) "observable differences" in global media texts. As noted in the section on glocalization, there are certain 'hybrid' elements in each international version of postfeminist global media texts, which allow for 'local peculiarities' (Johnson and Trelease, 2018). For example, Kam (2018) notes that in the Hong Kong-based *CosmoGirl*! Magazine, young female residents of the city are encouraged to be confident around heterosexual boys, while being careful not to appear 'too' flirtatious. Similarly, Dosekun (2015: 24) notes that in Lagos, despite postfeminism calling for women to be more sexually 'free', "sexual respectability" is highly valued by women. Postfeminism is thus adapted to local climates. With that said, it should be noted that even in 'Western' postfeminism, concepts discouraging women from being 'too' flirtatious, or 'too' sexual exist. This untidy overlap is what inspires me to consider how local elements are shown in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. Are cast members mirroring a Western primary text with minor changes, or are those changes irrelevant in relation to the city, indeed indicative of Johnson and Trelease's (2018: 338) postulation that the franchise works to demonstrate how the same "traditional, conservative values and roles" can be applied in a multitude of contexts? My research aims to answer this.

Chapter Four: Methodology

In order to answer the question of how narratives of femininity and consumption are employed in relation to the city in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, this research took a two-tiered approach. First, a quantitative content analysis was undertaken to ascertain scientifically reliable results (Macnamara, 2005; Deacon et al, 2007; Janowitz, 1968; Neuendorf, 2010). Second, once the content analysis was complete, the results were further explored through a qualitative, textual analysis. The reasoning behind this approach lay in the latter's ability to provide a more in-depth (Macnamara, 2005) view of the frequencies observed. This will be outlined below in greater detail.

Rationale for Quantitative Content Analysis

As noted in the literature review of this proposal, upon watching *The Real Housewives* franchise, several repetitions, both in terms of cast members and subject matter, come to the fore. These similarities across the franchise typically relate to how the characters perform their femininities in their particular locales. For this reason, I was interested in quantifying the number of times femininity, consumption and the city are referred to in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*.

Quantitative content analysis is often celebrated for its ability to make general observations about a wide span of texts and the societies in which they operate (Deacon et al, 2007; Macnamara, 2005). Thanks to the methodology's focus on counting the number of times themes, words and other features are present in a text (Macnamara, 2005), it is also often thought of as a relatively unbiased approach to research (Deacon et al, 2007; Macnamara, 2005). A researcher making use of quantitative content analysis can be understood as merely tallying the frequency of occurrences – or, as the title of Deacon et al's (2007) consideration of the method suggests, 'counting contents'. Strengthening this claim to objectivity is the fact that the occurrences to be tallied are outlined prior to any research taking place (Janowitz, 1968), thereby preventing the researcher from adjusting questions during the data collection process. As noted by Deacon et al (2007: 119), quantitative content analysis is "a directive method".

Content analysis is also often seen as a reliable method thanks to its "systematic study of texts and other cultural products or non-living data forms" which allows the data considered to "exist independently of the research process" (Leavy, 2007: 225). In other words, the content collected through analysis is not reliant on the researcher, thus adding a layer of "authenticity" (Leavy, 2007:225). Leavy (2007) postulates that authenticity is of great importance to feminist scholars in particular, as their claims to reliability and validity are routinely questioned by the scientific community at large. A methodology centred on scientific processes (Janowitz, 1968) is thus a step to overcoming being questioned.

Given the postfeminist framework chosen to guide this research, content analysis (and, more specifically, quantitative content analysis) was helpful considering the ways cast members of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* perform their femininities in relation to the city. Expanding on what has been said of validity above, it must be said that reality television, too, is often questioned in terms of its validity. Thus, having a scientific, quantifying approach not only assisted from a postfeminist perspective, but also in terms of the textual format to be considered.

Objectivity further informed the choice in methodology because I am a regular viewer of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, and the franchise in general. By using a relatively objective method (Macnamara, 2005; Deacon et al, 2007; Janowitz, 1968), I was able to distance myself from the content somewhat. However, it should be noted that being a habitual viewer of the text does not need to complicate the integrity of the research. On the contrary, Neuendorf (2011: 280) advocates that researchers *should* have an awareness of general themes contained in a text, in a process she calls "immersion in the message pool".

Problematizing quantitative content analysis

While quantitative content analysis may be heralded for its claims to objectivity by some, the methodology is not without its detractors. In fact, one of the key criticisms raised against quantitative content analysis is grounded in these assertions of impartiality. Claims to objectivity

in any approach are often considered problematic, for the simple reason that all analysts are influenced by their personal positions (Macnamara, 2005; Deacon et al, 2005). Indeed, even in a quantitative approach, where questions are formulated prior to research (Janowitz, 1968), the questions asked by the researcher will be based on their existing beliefs and understandings of a text. That said, it should be noted that quantitative content analysis actively works to be as objective as possible (Macnamara, 2005).

Another frequent objection to quantitative content analysis is that the approach does not do enough to unearth the *meanings* of the frequency of occurrences (Macnamara, 2005). Macnamara (2005) notes that advocates for more qualitative approaches believe repetition does not necessitate meaning. The argument, here, is that counting the number of times something is present does not do enough to provide a deeper understanding of the text. It is for this reason that many scholars suggest a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thus, in order to combat this particular objection, this research used quantitative analysis as a starting point, before a textual analysis was undertaken.

How this research was conducted

The content analysis component of this research considered a sample of every episode of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg,* to date. At the time of writing, there were two seasons of the series, each containing 14 episodes. In both seasons, such is the norm for the franchise in general, the final few episodes were not full-length episodes, but 'reunion specials', which offer the cast a platform to discuss aspects of the season past. These were included in the sample.

The reason for this particular sample is twofold: the first relating to a more representative sample. Because little to no literature on *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* exists at present, it was important to consider as wide a sample as possible – and given census sampling is considered the means to ascertaining the "greatest possible representation" (Macnamara, 2007: 13), this was arguably the most appropriate route. Second, Macnamara (2005: 13) notes that while the best method of sampling is through a census: a "selection of all units in the sampling frame", it is often

avoided because of its time-consuming nature. However, in the case of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, which had two seasons at the commencement of research, the sample is somewhat more manageable.

Per the suggestions by Deacon et al (2007), once the sample was collected and decided upon, it was time to decide what should be quantified – a decision that needed to be based on the research objectives in question. Identifying what needed to be counted was an important decision, because, as Deacon et al (2007) note, unlike with other, more exploratory methods, quantitative content analysis does not allow researchers to ascertain meaning from anything outside of the pre-decided questions. For this reason, my original questions, pertaining to how narratives of femininity and consumption are related to the city in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, were refined after a brief pilot study was undertaken. The final set of questions will be outlined later in this section.

Intercoder Reliability

As has been established, content analysis offers a scientific approach to the analysis of texts. However, it has also been noted that nothing can be thought of as entirely objective, as a researcher will always be influenced by their existing ideas and beliefs (Macnamara, 2005; Deacon et al, 2007). For this reason, intercoder reliability is thought to assist in keeping the research as valid as possible.

Briefly, intercoder reliability refers to the process in which two or more coders examine a sample of data, and the results of their coding are used to determine whether a coding framework is viable or not (Macnamara, 2005). This is done to ensure "maximum reliability" (Macnamara, 2005: 10). In order to undertake this research, I requested the assistance of a secondary coder to assist in this process. This coder received a coding sheet (structured like a questionnaire) and a coding manual, which elaborated on the questions asked on the coding sheet in order to address any confusion (Deacon, et al, 2007). The accompanying coding manual is vital for content analysis, as when a second coder assists with the research, it is imperative that they have an understanding of the process. This is outlined in Appendix One.

Intercoder reliability in qualitative analysis

As with quantitative content analysis, the qualitative aspect of this research (for example, the questions asking the coder to identify 'positive', 'negative' and 'neutral or unclear' references) also required some kind of intercoder reliability. However, Macnamara (2005) notes Mayring's assertion that in the qualitative tradition, the means of attaining reliability are somewhat more relaxed. According to qualitative reasoning, reliability can be "maximized" by undertaking the coding process alongside a "trained" coder (Macnamara, 2005: 17). While the provided coding manual provides this training, the attempt at achieving reliability was taken a step further by approaching a fellow postgraduate Media Studies student to assist as the second coder for this research project.

Notes on the coding process

As demonstrated above, the scope of the coding process for this research was expansive, especially given the large sample of text to be considered. For this reason, the secondary coder was not required to watch every episode in the sample. Instead, we tested for reliability using a "systematic random" sampling method (Macnamara, 2005:13). This called for the second coder to look into "every n^{th} unit from the total population" (Macnamara, 2005: 13). In the case of this research, the 'n^{th}' units were taken to be episodes 7 and 11 from each season. The reasoning behind the 7th episode is because it marked the halfway point of each season, and the 11th episode was the final full-length episode in both (as episode 12 of season two ends halfway and flows directly into the part one of the reunion special).

Initially, the second coder and I agreed to view the sample together. However, in response to the COVID-19 lockdowns which took place shortly after our first viewing, this plan had to be adapted. Both the second coder and I watched *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* separately on Showmax, and recorded our responses in individual Google Sheets documents. Once the results were in, the research was collated in order to ascertain any disparities. While this collation

demonstrated similar findings across all 4 of the episodes, minor discrepancies were addressed through WhatsApp messages, and ultimately, the findings were unanimous.

Textual analysis

As noted above, once the results of the quantitative content analysis were recorded, a qualitative, textual analysis was undertaken. This was done to get a better understanding of the *meanings* behind the quantitative findings. Provision for this qualitative section was made in some categories of the coding sheet, such as those asking the respondent to note positive, negative and unclear or neutral references to the variables in question (Macnamara, 2005: 14). In the first category, that of 'advice-giving', the coders were also asked to note when cast members are told they 'should' or 'should not' behave in certain ways. Like the positive, negative and neutral classifications, this also offers an opportunity for deeper analysis (Macnamara, 2005).

In order to ascertain a closer understanding of the meanings of the results of the quantitative analysis, discursive and visual elements of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* were considered. From the start of the research process, it was decided that the particular scenes to be closely analysed would be chosen based on the quantitative data. However, there were some areas of interest in the interim. These considered verbal iterations of what it meant to perform femininity in the way one 'should' or 'should not' in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. I was particularly interested in discovering what the conversations surrounding this aspect tell the viewer about being a '*Real Housewife*' in a uniquely South African context. Equally interesting was ascertaining whether there was any differentiator from the rest of the franchise – indeed, a "peculiar local [circumstance]" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018: 338).

Also included in the interim points of interest were the depictions (both verbal and visual) of the city. When consumption took place, were cast members overtly placed in Johannesburg, or could they be in any city, anywhere in the world? When issues of safety arose in conversation, were viewers alerted to this being an issue unique to Johannesburg? Essentially, the visual and textual analytic component of this research paid close attention to how issues raised in *The Real*

Housewives of Johannesburg speak to the locally-specific elements of the text and how they compared with the broader discussions about the global franchise, postfeminism and glocalization.

Chapter Five: Exploring How the City is Represented in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

Considering *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is aimed at putting a spotlight on the ways in which elite residents navigate the city of gold, the number of verbal references made to the city in the programme is surprisingly low. In a sample of 14 episodes from Season One of the series, the city was referred to by name a total of three times. Of those mentions, one had a positive connotation, the second neutral, and the third negative. Thus, even when Johannesburg *was* spoken about in season one, there was no clear commentary on the city itself, nor was there much said about what it meant to be a resident, let alone a wealthy one. Season Two saw a significant increase in mentions from its forerunner, with a total of nine references across 14 episodes. Of these, four were neutral, and the remainder negative, and predominantly related to safety concerns in certain parts of the city. The concern over safety is an important one given the cast's navigation of the space, and will be explored more in-depth later in this chapter. For now, however, the chapter will begin with a consideration of how viewers are reminded of the show's setting when verbal references alone make up such a small fraction of the programming.

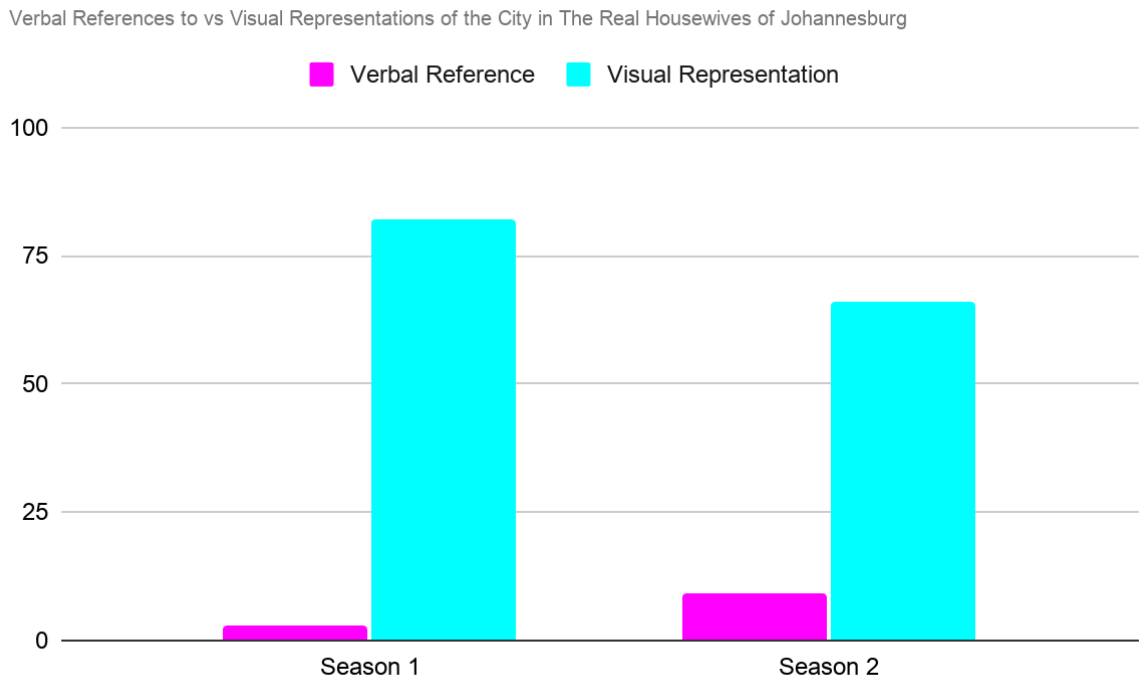


Figure 1: Visual vs Verbal References to the city in The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

Establishing the City in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

While the cast of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* may not make frequent mention of the city, that by no means makes the setting ambiguous to viewers. Naturally, the name of the series is one of the more obvious reminders of a Johannesburg-based text. However, the audience is most effectively and routinely reminded of where the series takes place through the use of visual elements.

Each episode of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* begins with one of the most recognizable components of the franchise: the title sequence. In these, each housewife shares her official 'tagline' for the season, alongside in-studio poses, as her name flashes across the screen. While this is primarily a way for the audience to acquaint themselves with the cast, it also serves as a way to introduce viewers to the city in which the show is set. In some versions of the franchise, housewives make mention of the hallmarks of their hometown (Kyle Richards of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* is a pertinent example). However, with the exception of Mpho Merriweather (who joined the cast halfway through season two and shares "you say Johannesburg, I say the world" [Season Two: Title Sequence] in her tagline) like the aforementioned lack of verbal references throughout the episodes themselves, in the two seasons released to date, none of the other *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* reference the city in theirs. Instead, the title sequence reminds viewers of the setting through a number of visual cues.

In the programme's title sequence, viewers are made aware of the location through three elements: footage of local landmarks, the background of each housewife's studio footage, and the title card at the end of the sequence, which includes a visual of the full cast and the name of the series. In both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the title sequence opens with an establishing shot of a part of the city (in season one, this is a visual of the CBD itself, while season two has footage of Sandton). Soon after, the audience is confronted with the studio footage, the background of which features an animated, gold Johannesburg city skyline, indicative of the city's roots as a gold prospecting town, as well as a golden lioness. The inclusion of the feline also issues

a subtle nod to the region's affiliation to the animal, as the Gauteng coat of arms features two lions. Lions are also relevant to the city and the region through the naming of two major sports teams – The Imperial Lions cricket team, and The Lions rugby team.

After each housewife has been introduced, the sequence closes with a title card which again features the animated skyline, but now with the addition of a golden crown, also in the shape of the Johannesburg skyline. The cast appear together in a group shot, smiling at the camera, and each holding a golden nugget, once again symbolic of the city's history as the former most important gold producer in the world (GCRO, 2021).



Figure 2: The Real Housewives of Johannesburg Season One Title Card



Figure 3: The Real Housewives of Johannesburg Season Two Title Card

The title sequence alone is thus replete with symbolic references to the programme's setting, and immediately situates the viewers in Johannesburg by providing them with a condensed idea of what the city is known for. However, this sequence is only the beginning of the visual reminders of the setting.

Across both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, several scenes are punctuated with establishing shots of the city. Some of these are used to show viewers where a cast member is spending her time, or to give a general idea of where in the city a housewife lives. However, many times, these shots have nothing to do with the context of the storyline. Rather, they are merely used to call attention back to what sets this version of the *Real Housewives* apart from every other rendition of the franchise: the titular city.



Figure 4: (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong): Image of the Sandton CBD, as part of a montage between scenes in Kyalami and Rosebank.



Figure 5: Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette) Image of Hyde Park, as part of a montage before the episode opens with a scene at Brinnette's mother's Diepkloof home.

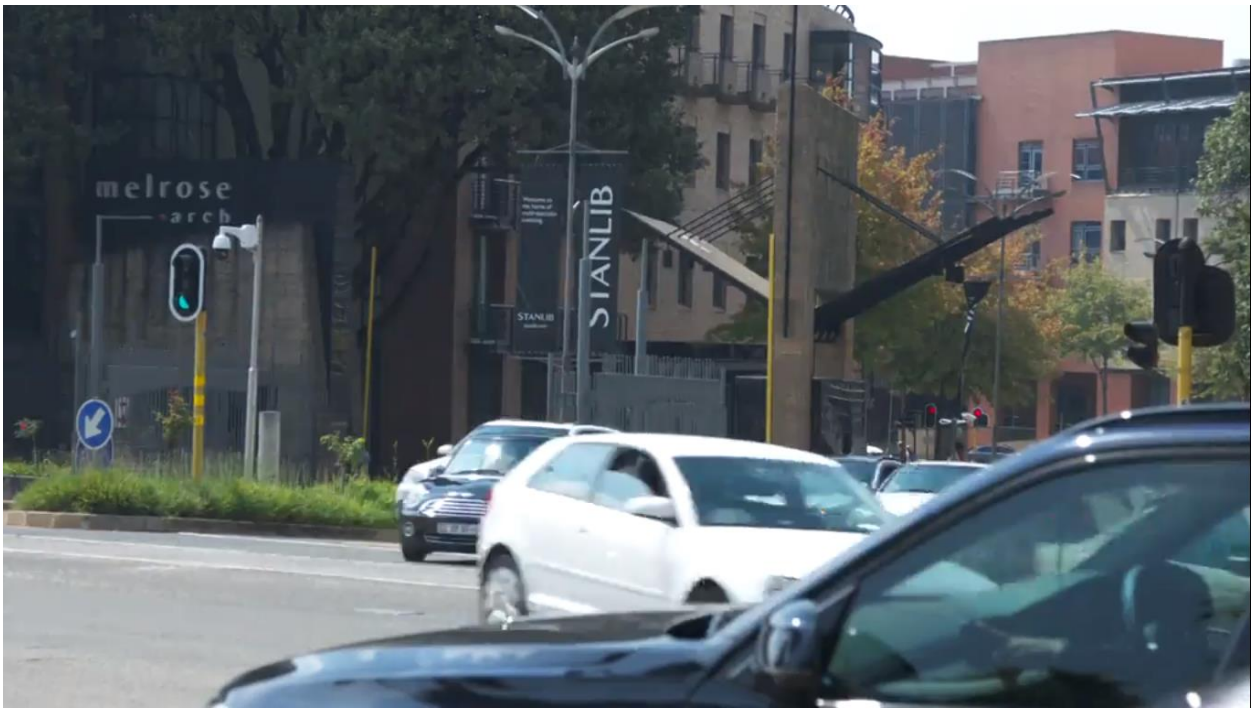


Figure 6: Season Two, Episode Eight) Image of Melrose Arch, as part of montage before a scene which shows Brinnette and Mpho having lunch in Sandton.



Figure 7: Footage of Sandton, in montage ahead of a girl's lunch in Hyde Park

The regular use of establishing shots in between scenes is a commonly used device across each rendition of the *Real Housewives* franchise. Just as viewers of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* will be shown montages of the Sandton skyline or a section of Jan Smuts Avenue outside Hyde Park Corner in between jovial home visits, gossip-fuelled coffee dates and terse dinner parties, so are *Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* audience members given glimpses of snowy mountains and Temple Square amidst reconciliatory spa days and confrontational luncheons. Likewise, *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* fans are routinely reminded of the show's setting through video footage of Rodeo Drive and the Beverly Hills sign on Santa Monica Boulevard amid scenes of girl's lunches and charity events.

However, while these scenes of the city certainly help to call attention to the show's setting, one could argue that they go beyond situating the audience. Indeed, it is through these representations that we are able to deduce and understand what it means to be a member of Johannesburg's elite.

In the premiere season of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the number of these establishing shots came to a total of 82 across 14 episodes. These shots portrayed a predominantly northern suburb-centric view of the city. As noted above, the establishing shots we see are of the Sandton CBD, the Melrose Arch precinct, and a section of William Nicol Drive that connects Hyde Park with Sandton. The choice of location for these shots is hardly surprising, given what has been noted of the region in the literature review. Johannesburg's northern suburbs have long been associated with high-value real estate, exclusive private schools and entertainment centres (Seltzer and Heller, 2010: 172). It is also home to a number of high-end shopping centres, including among others Hyde Park Corner and Sandton City's 'Diamond Walk', where shoppers are offered access to an array of international luxury brands including Burberry, Bvlgari, Cartier and Louis Vuitton, among countless others (Sandton City, 2021). As has also been established in the literature review, Sandton, in particular, is regularly referred to and commonly understood as 'The Richest Square Mile in Africa', and houses the country's stock exchange (Beavon, 2000; Beavon and Larsen, 2014; Kelleher, 2018; Henama and Sifolo, 2017). While some prior knowledge on the part of the viewer is required in order to understand that these scenes chiefly depict one section of the city, one thing is abundantly clear: the audience is shown some of the most illustrious parts of the city, and that is the natural domain of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg.*

By contrast, Season Two featured imagery of a much wider cross-section of the city. Despite the number of establishing shots tallying at a much lower 66 out of 14 episodes (predominantly attributable to the second season featuring three full-cast trips outside of Johannesburg to Cape Town, Durban and Polokwane, respectively, compared to the first season's single full-cast trip to Botswana), viewers are given a much broader view of the housewives' setting. While viewers are once again afforded footage of Sandton and Hyde Park, in this season, those images are featured alongside video of Nelson Mandela Bridge in the Johannesburg CBD – and Johannesburg's neighbouring city, Pretoria.

Although some of the Pretoria-shot footage features distinct landmarks (and commentary from the housewives, such as Mpumi's description of, "a beautiful sunny day in the capital" [Season Two, Episode Two] in a scene showing her and her friend Sam doing yoga at her home, Mpho's

articulation of Mpumi's "beautiful" [Season Two, Episode Two] home "over the boerewors curtain" [Season Two, Episode 10] and Tarina's narration of the "lovely view of Pretoria" [Season Two, Episode Six] from Lebo's home), some is more ambiguous, and without prior knowledge of that city, might easily be mistaken as part of Johannesburg. However, one could argue that this, in itself, reveals something of the latter's character. That is, Johannesburg is not as rigidly defined as one might think.

Considering the Megalopolis in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

As noted above, Season Two features regular imagery of South Africa's Executive Capital, juxtaposed with footage of Johannesburg. However, the inclusion of another city in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* does not stop there, nor is it something 'hidden' from the audience. Rather, viewers are made acutely aware that while each of the ladies featured on the show spends a large amount of time in the City of Gold, not all of them reside there. In Season Two, Mpumi Mophatlane and Lebo Gunguluza make mention of the fact that they live in Pretoria. Likewise, in Season One, the audience is informed that Evodia and Mercy Mogase live in the North West province, in the holiday town of Hartbeespoort.

One might argue that this is indicative of Johannesburg's status as a melting pot. Certainly, as the oft-referred to economic powerhouse of the country, the city welcomes commuters from all over the region, and even South Africa, more broadly, because it is at the centre of the country's "economic heartland" – The Gauteng City-Region (GCRO, 2021). Often understood as a megalopolis, Johannesburg is not limited to any official demarcations because it makes up the most vital part of "the sprawling city of Gauteng" (Geyer et al., 2015:19) that includes a number of smaller neighbouring cities.

However, while Johannesburg may have a close connection to cities like Pretoria/Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Alberton and Benoni, among others (GCRO, 2021), there can be no denying that the capital of Gauteng is the region's seat of luxury and high-end commerce and entertainment. As such, it only makes sense that the elites from surrounding locales would flock to it. In this way,

Johannesburg is more than a physical location: it is a hub of high-end economic activity, and a playground for South Africa's rich and fabulous. It is for this reason that viewers aren't sold the idea of *'The Real Housewives of the City-Region'* or '*Ladies of the Megalopolis*'. The cast, wherever they officially reside, are *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* because they embody the lifestyles necessary to take advantage of all the city has to offer.

Based on the above observations, it might be said that the city in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, while titular, is something of a silent character in the show. The viewer need not be explicitly informed of Johannesburg having more to offer in terms of luxury shopping, it is simply deduced by the fact that the housewives elect to spend their time (and, more importantly, their money) in The City of Gold.

That said, seeing the city as a 'silent' character in no way suggests its irrelevance in the broader understanding of the global text. On the contrary, this just means viewers need to *see* what it means to be a member of the Johannesburg elite, rather than hear explicit statements about it. With that in mind, I will now take a deeper look into what, exactly, the visual elements mentioned above can tell us about the city of Johannesburg.

Automobility: The Spirit of Johannesburg

In light of what has been said about the borderless nature of Johannesburg, and indeed what was noted in the literature review regarding the city's 'sprawling' character, it should come as no surprise that one of the most pertinent elements depicted in the visual references to the city is the presence of automobility. Across Seasons One and Two of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the number of times vehicles are shown amounts to 182 out of a cumulative 28 episodes.

In both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, most establishing shots of the city feature at least one automobile, but many include even more than that. In addition to the footage of housewives arriving at events in their private vehicles, these cars are also seen parked outside of venues, as well as featured in sped up scenes of (predominantly northern suburb) traffic. Given

the high number of cars on Gauteng's roads (in September 2020, the exact amount was recorded at 3 111 364 [eNatis, 2020]), this seems somewhat par for the course in the city.

While one may be tempted to argue that seeing cars in built up, urban spaces is by no means unusual, given the earlier note that these scenes are used to remind the viewer that they are watching a Johannesburg-based text, it goes without saying that the heavy presence of automobiles is intended to show something about the spirit of *this* city. In this way, the scenes themselves are reminiscent of Nuttall and Mbembe's (2007: 281) assertion that "driving is ubiquitous in Johannesburg".

As it pertains to a luxury lifestyle, one might also be tempted to use the argument that the very act of owning a vehicle in Johannesburg is a sign of privilege (Graham, 2007). However, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is a globally understood text, with a mandate to show how the elites navigate the city. It does not deal with 'relative' privilege, nor does it profess to depict the 'everywoman'. As such, it should come as no surprise that the vast majority of cars shown in the series (both in establishing shots and in other scenes) are luxury models.

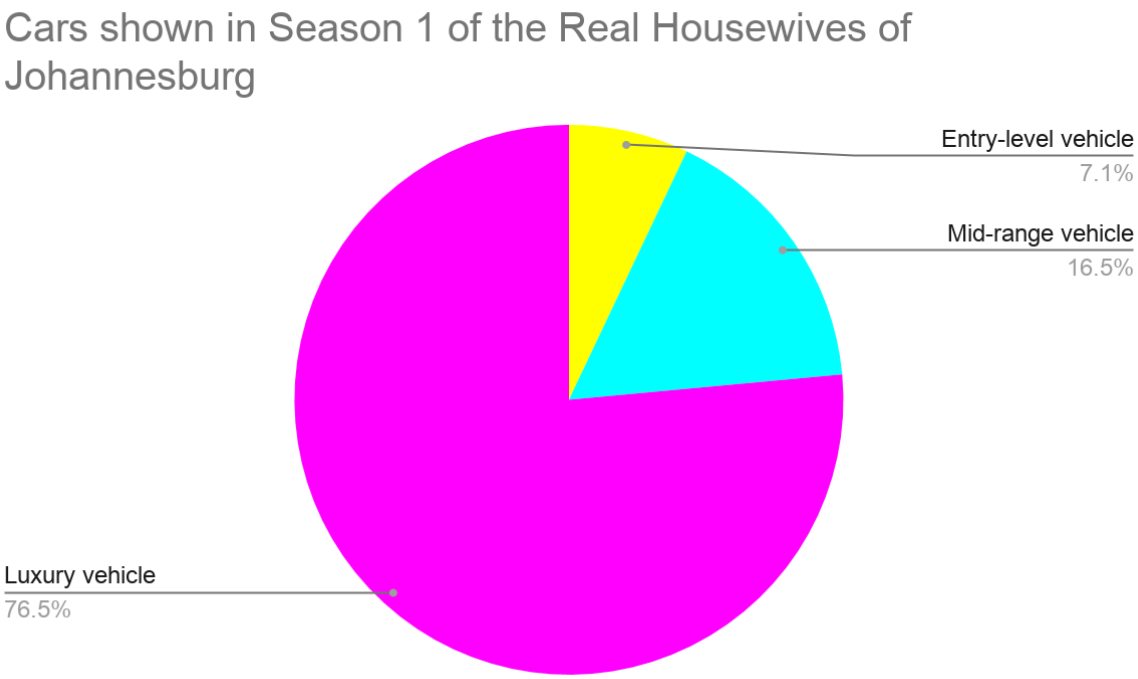


Figure 8: Types of Cars Shown in Season One of The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

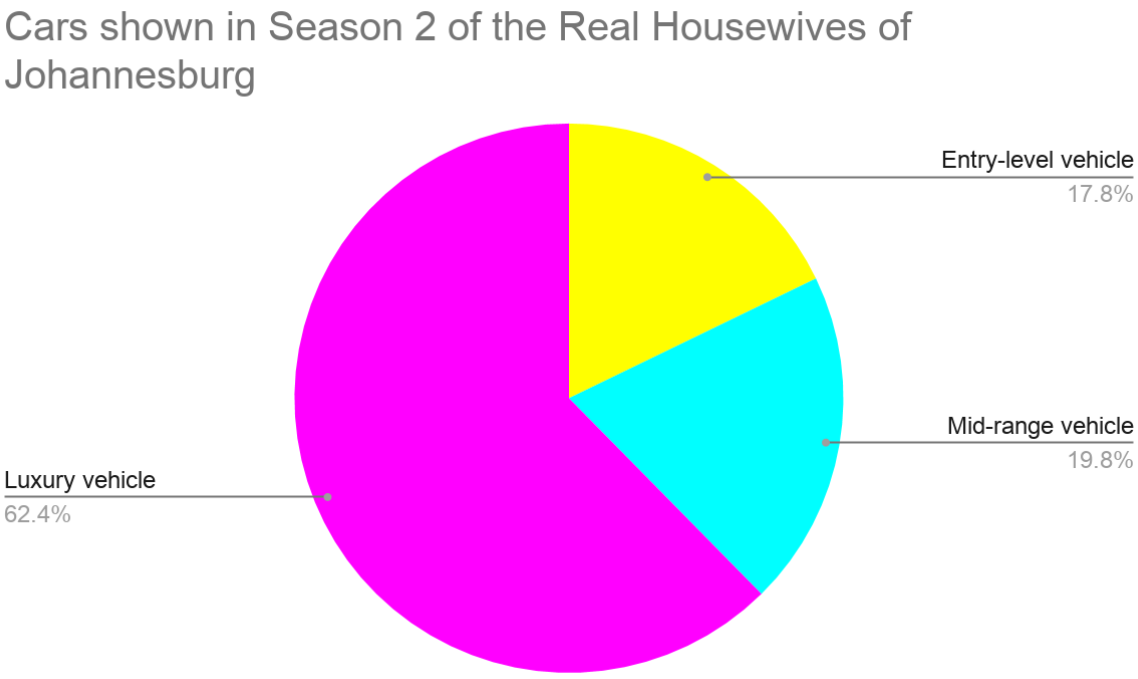


Figure 9: Types of Cars Shown in Season Two of The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

Of the automobiles depicted in both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, more than 60% would be classed under the luxury category. Indeed, in almost any given episode, viewers can expect to see at least one G-Class Mercedes-Benz traverse the city, or a Porsche Panamera pulling into a pristine driveway. Seeing these types of vehicles in Johannesburg is certainly not uncommon, nor is it merely something contrived for viewers of *The Real Housewives* franchise. Indeed, as Morgan (2020) notes, in 2005 it was reported that more new BMWs were sold on South African soil than in any other country, with the exception of Germany. Additionally, Crosswaite (2014: 198) notes that, in light of the South African luxury consumer's penchant for high-end vehicles, "it is no coincidence that the largest Porsche Centre in the world is located in Johannesburg[1]". However, with that said, these images have been carefully selected by the editing team of the series, with the express intention of showing not only the spirit of Johannesburg, but the spirit of *wealthy* Johannesburg.

The prevalence of luxury cars in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is by no means limited to establishing shots, and while they may make up a part of the city's 'silent' character, nor are they something that goes unremarked upon by the cast. Quite the contrary, cars are a regular topic of discussion in the programme, and were even a source of drama across both seasons. In fact, one of the first fights of Season One revolved around a cast member supplying a vehicle deemed unacceptable by her peers.

"My darling, you are such a liar": Viano-gate and the perils of using a peer's Porsche

In the premiere episode of the first season of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, Christall Kay made a fatal error: joking about a Lear jet. While discussing how she planned on getting to Naledi's mother's birthday party in rural Botswana, in response to the jokes by the other women about "driving, for 7, 8 hours...through the potholes…" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life), Christall laughed "no, no, no, no, I don't do that, okay? Just understand, sorry guys" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). Christall declared that she would be taking a "Lear jet" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) instead. This ultimately led

[1] Located in Paulshof, Porsche Centre Johannesburg spans over 25 000 m^2 (Vanderwerp, 2017).

to the other ladies thinking they would be invited along, but when it transpired that Christall did not, in fact, have access to a private plane, she pulled strings to supply the next best option: a party bus. Once that plan fell through as well, Christall finally settled on the "more classy" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet) option: a Mercedes-Benz Viano. However, this was not just *any* Viano. Despite Christall declaring it to be "the most incredible, luxury vehicle that you can actually take" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet), in the eyes of Evodia, it was "the oldest Viano [she had] ever seen" – so old, in fact, that it couldn't even boast a sunroof. Mercedes-Benz branding aside, Christall's selection of a car represented a drop in the "standards" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet) to which Evodia held high society Johannesburg women, and led to Madame labelling her "a joke" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet) for even suggesting the vehicle would make the cut. Evodia was even more frustrated by the ordeal because she could have avoided it altogether by taking one of the cars from her personal garage of luxury vehicles instead. Notably, this scene was the site of one of the 3 mentions of the city of the season, as in response, Christall shouted to Evodia, "take your little setup and head right back to Johannesburg" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet).

However, while Christall's gaffe was soon forgiven by Evodia (especially once Madame had an opportunity to enjoy the vehicle's air conditioning [Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet]) by far the biggest storyline surrounding automobility in Season One of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* was the allegation by Evodia and Mercy that Brinnette was using other people's cars to arrive at events.

This drama was first addressed during a scene showing Mercy and her friend Barileng at the Jackson's Real Food Market in Bryanston, debriefing after a recent yoga session with the group. While explaining that there was something about the group that left her feeling "not convinced" (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever) about the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* (with the notable exception of Christall, who "is convincing" [Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever]), Barileng commented that the number of cars outside a group yoga session "did not add up, they did not fit the number of people inside" (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever). In response to Mercy's suggestion that someone may have travelled to the yoga studio with a friend, Barileng

was unrelenting, questioning “so then why do you not leave in the same car?” (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever). This storyline carried over to the subsequent episode, which saw Mercy discuss with another friend, Pinky, the possibility that Brinnette arrived at her one-year vegan party in Athania’s–Evodia’s friend–Porsche Cayenne, narrating, "when she got there, she came in nicely with her own car, drove in, parked, walked inside and greeted. Then she went to Athania...and then, there she was...apparently it's Brinnette walking out fetching Athania's car. She then drove around...she drove in twice" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). The ladies’ confusion led to a confrontation with Athania later in the episode, in an attempt to get to the bottom of the matter, where both Mercy and Evodia chastised the use of others’ property. While Athania confirmed that Brinnette had used her car to "look like other people and arrive in a Porsche" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster), she attempted to reason with the Mogases by noting that, if one of them owned a Ferrari, she would want to be seen in it, too. However, Mercy was uncompromising, echoing Barileng’s sentiments from the previous episode with her argument: "but we would have left your house in one car and arrived together. I wouldn't arrive at a party and drive in and be seen in my car to only go back outside and drive in again" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). Moreover, Evodia asserted that she would never let her own friends use her car, because "my car is my personal property that I worked hard for" (Season One, Episode Six : Fashion Show Disaster). This was a sentiment seemingly echoed by Athania herself, as even though she did not think Brinnette using her car was a “big deal” (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster), she took on a more serious tone when confirming that she would never pretend to own something that wasn’t hers. The tension from the situation ultimately culminated in a verbal altercation between the mother-daughter duo and Brinnette in the season’s reunion episode, and was a major contributing factor in the Mogases storming off the set and refusing to return.

To the casual observer, the Mogases’ frustration with Brinnette seems little more than a squabble between friends who have fallen out. However, when one takes into account what car ownership (and in particular, luxury car ownership) means in a Johannesburg context, the reality of the argument speaks to something far deeper.

The Politics of Car Ownership in a Post-Apartheid Johannesburg

In his writing on *Driving, Cycling and Identity in Johannesburg*, Njogu Morgan (2020) notes how Black South Africans have historically faced barriers to car ownership (Morgan, 2020). While professional driving was deemed acceptable for Black people by the white minority regime, owning a vehicle for personal use was relatively rare – especially when the car in question was a luxury model. Indeed, even when owning such a vehicle was 'allowed', the economic inequality brought on by the system made affording an already high-cost vehicle near-impossible. As a result, more often than not, Black residents were relegated to pedestrianism or bicycle ownership (Morgan, 2020).

Morgan (2020) notes that it is a direct result of this historical denial which has made luxury car ownership all the more attractive to previously subjugated peoples. Given the luxury car's ability to mark a distinction between those with the means and everyone else (Livermon in Putter, 2012), luxury car ownership is a commonly held status symbol across the world. However, in South Africa, it's something *more* than that. Owning a high-end vehicle is a way of regaining dignity and taking up space in an historically segregated city in response to the repression which continues to shape the space today (Morgan, 2020). This very much fits in with the wider theorizing of the rising Black middle class in the city, for whom cultivating a 'Bling Lifestyle' is a means to "demonstrate freedom from oppression" from the previous order (Crosswaite, 2014: 190).

Morgan's note on "previously denied respectability" (2020: 75) is interesting when explored in relation to Evodia's aforementioned frustrations with her cast mates' attitudes to cars, but also with regard to the discussions she has about cars in general. In an early episode of season one, she recounts how important it was for Mercy to buy her own first car, "a [Fiat] Palio" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life), even if it meant not having the luxury of air conditioning (in a confessional, Evodia recalls telling Mercy "open your windows" if heat became an issue [Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life]). The matriarch's reasoning behind this was teaching Mercy the value of purchasing one's own luxury vehicle, through hard work and determination and the feeling of accomplishment that comes with making such a big purchase.

Indeed, Evodia explains "I groomed my daughter very, very well. She was independent at a very early age" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). Later in the season, viewers are given some more insight to this decision, as during the slumber party she hosts as part of her Fairlawns girls weekend festivities, Evodia shared that after divorcing her first husband, she was forced to flee the marital home without any of her belongings. Included in this was "all my cars. I had plus, minus, 17 cars I had to leave behind and start all over again" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep). Through Evodia, viewers are shown that car ownership in Johannesburg is a sign of empowerment, but we are also shown that achieving that comes with its fair share of hardship, thereby making their acquisition a marker of deep respect. It is also reminiscent of the earlier noted commentary that she would never let a friend drive her cars because their acquisition is something she "worked hard for" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). Through the commentary Evodia makes on cars, viewers of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* are made acutely aware of the harsh reality of the fragility of the reclamation of dignity.

It would be expedient to note that this fragility is also threatened by the racialized nature of automobile consumption in a Johannesburg (and South African) context. As was noted in the literature review, even though the purchasing and ownership of luxury vehicles by Black South Africans is no longer sanctioned by the state, there continue to be challenges to Black luxury car ownership in the city. Evidenced by the media's opposition to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's ownership of a Mercedes-Benz (Iqani, 2015), Black elites run the risk of having their morals called into question for making expensive purchases while so many others still live in poverty. The implication here is that it is their responsibility to uplift all Black South Africans before enjoying the fruits of their labour (Morwe, 2014; Iqani, 2015, 2017; Alweendo and Dosekun, 2017). One is thus expected to tread carefully when reclaiming dignity through material means if they are to maintain a sense of 'respectability'. This is eerily similar to Lee and Moscowitz's (2013: 65) description of the 'rich bitch' in postfeminist media texts, who aims to fulfil her "selfish material gains" at the expense of others. The only difference here is that the 'rich bitch' in question not only sacrifices her relationships in her quest for material success (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013), but supposedly contributes to the struggle of the already oppressed.

Theorizing the car in Season Two of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

While there are fewer arguments concerning automobility and the politics of car ownership in Season Two of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg,* they are not entirely absent, and viewers are again reminded of the cultural value automobility holds. Early on in Season Two, a reference is made to Viano-gate when Lebo supplies a Quantum minibus to ferry the women from the Cape Town International airport to their girls' trip accommodation at the Colosseum Hotel. However, this time the issue does not escalate into a screaming match. In fact, despite Brinnette laughing in a confessional, asking "we're catching taxis now?" (Season Two, Episode Three) and Mpumi and Lethabo jokingly walking past the Quantum, then standing adjacent to it, pretending to wait for the 'real' transport arrangements to materialize, the atmosphere at Cape Town International Airport is far more jovial than it was at Sir Seretse Khama International Airport in Season One. Moreover, after the cast finally board the "Pretoria ghetto ride" (Season Two, Episode Three) Mpumi notes, "funny enough, we're...complaining about the taxis – I was raised, actually, by the taxi industry. My dad was a taxi boss" (Season Two, Episode Three).

With that said, later on in the season, the audience is again reminded of the cultural capital luxury car ownership holds in an episode featuring Lebo's Lux Empire event, held at the Da Vinci hotel in Sandton. As part of the festivities, a luxury vehicle was up for grabs, and Tarina became the owner of a brand-new car. However, in a confessional Lebo shares being taken aback by Tarina's apparent lack of gratitude, mentioning that in place of giving thanks, Tarina complained of having a number of cars already. One Twitter user, @Ctembele (2020), remarked on this, noting that Tarina "acts like she has won a packet of chips" upon hearing the news. Lebo countered her cast mate's seemingly blasé reaction in a confessional by commenting that she only ever saw Tarina arrive at events using Uber. This is taken a step further when Lebo quips "X, Nogal!" (Season Two, Episode Five) in reference to Tarina's choice to select the lower-cost option available on the e-hailing platform. This one comment, even as an aside, speaks volumes of the expectations of Johannesburg's elite: the choice to arrive in anything other than a luxury vehicle when one has the choice to do otherwise is, as Evodia would say, not up to "standards" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet). Moreover, given the value of owning such a car in Johannesburg, even when one has the means to attain several, one should never lose sight of how lucky they are.

The Politics of Belonging in Johannesburg

While luxury vehicles may be par for the course for the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, that does not make the cast immune to one of the unfortunate realities of the city. That is, the prevalence of violent crime and vehicle theft, brought about by the enormous inequalities between the 'haves' and 'have nots' of the city. With this in mind, this chapter will now move into its second section, concerning the verbal iterations of safety concerns and belonging in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*.

As mentioned in the introduction, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg's* sophomore season featured more commentary than its predecessor concerning what it meant to inhabit the city of gold, with many references aimed at safety in certain parts of the city. This commentary begins in episode one, when Brinnette invites the ladies to the first in a series of her monthly birthday parties. Brinnette's pre-40th "Bye to Be"-themed party (Season One, Episode One) is held in the Maboneng precinct of the Johannesburg CBD, a "privately developed urban neighbourhood" aimed at enticing more people into the city centre (Maboneng, 2021). This event documents some of the ladies' first meetings, and as part of these, a discussion of their journey to the venue ensues. As each housewife arrives, viewers are offered various iterations of the area's safety (or lack thereof), with Lebo sharing through a confessional that the event marked her first experience in Maboneng, describing the space as "dodge" (Season Two, Episode One). Shortly thereafter, Tarina echoes this thought in her own confessional, noting "I must say, it is a rather dodgy part of town" (Season Two, Episode One), before Christall asserts, "I never go to the CBD, it's a very dangerous place. Anyone will tell you that. Why on earth do you have a party there? Why?" (Season Two, Episode One).

Upon their entering the venue itself, The Living Room rooftop bar, Christall, Mpumi and her friend Sam discuss their anxieties at driving into the city. In this conversation, Mpumi reiterates Lebo's and Tarina's concerns at being in such a "dodgy side of town" (Season Two, Episode One). In addition, the ladies make specific mention of their fears at entering the CBD in their own vehicles.

Indeed, one of the first questions Christall asks her new cast mates is "how did you guys get here?" (Season Two, Episode One). Shaking her head at the situation, Mpumi responds that she and Sam ordered an Uber to avoid "driving my fancy car" (later confirmed as a Mercedes-Benz G-Class) “in here" (Season Two, Episode One).

Conversations like these are important because they show the viewer the politics of belonging in Johannesburg. While the housewives may be able to physically get to and experience the city centre thanks to their access to automobility, they are also acutely aware of the fact that the very wealth which affords them that ability to easily access the space (Putter, 2012) could very well turn them into, as Mpumi describes "a target" (Season Two, Episode One). For all that Lethabo mentions that being "the real thing" (Season Two, Episode Three) in upper class Johannesburg, requires one to "have a name and a surname" (Season Two, Episode Three) that people recognize, discussions like the one noted above serve to remind viewers that being ‘too’ overt in displaying one’s level of material achievement could put them at risk. The viewer is shown, through these conversations, that in Johannesburg, the elite are required to perform something of a balancing act: too little could lead to a snub, a slight or a snide remark by way of confessional, but too much could have life-threatening consequences. This is summed up in one of Christall’s confessionals, where she explains having “risked my life” (Season Two, Episode One) to attend Brinnette’s party. However, given that in the same confession, Christall lauded herself for making an effort to attend Brinnette’s party despite getting divorced the next day, it’s uncertain if she truly felt she was in danger, or if she wanted to give herself a pat on the back for being a gracious guest.

While Season Two’s first foray into the politics of belonging takes on a decidedly serious note, it should also be noted that the ‘risk’, in this sense, goes beyond safety concerns. Later on in Season Two, two of the ladies return to the CBD (this time just Lethabo and Mpumi) with the intention of buying authentic decor and dress for the former’s upcoming African-themed dinner. As viewers see footage of the ladies parking outside the entrance of the Kwa Mai Mai traditional market (the oldest in the city, Pilane (2016) notes), four city blocks to the east of the Maboneng precinct, Mpumi questions, through her confessional, "honey, ladies of this calibre…what are we doing in downtown Jozi, baby?" (Season Two, Episode 11). After greeting each other in the parking lot, Lethabo quizzes Mpumi on her choice of outfit, jokingly asking why she would wear a leopard-

print tailored suit and designer shoes to Kwa Mai Mai. Before Mpumi has the opportunity to respond, Lethabo suggests that by sticking out, the shopkeepers in the market would likely adjust their prices to "flippin' sell these things to us at R100 000" (Season Two, Episode 11). Mpumi responds that, at least as it pertained to the suit, she thought it might help her blend in because "you know, Zulus and leopard print" (Season Two, Episode 11). As for the shoes, Mpumi demonstrates how they, too, could help her blend in, by breaking into a spontaneous Indlamu dance in the parking lot.

The Kwa Mai Mai scene lets the viewer know that in Johannesburg, appearing 'too' affluent might lead to one being overcharged by shopkeepers in the informal sector. This is a colloquially understood phenomenon in the city, and it's not unusual to hear (predominantly Black) women complain of needing to 'dress down' to avoid being swindled in beauty salons and shops in the informal sector, where prices are not always pre-set by service providers. Given the fact that Johannesburg is characterized by its combination of formal and informal elements (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2007; Mbembe, 2008), this kind of interaction is a reality of the city, making it unsurprising that Lethabo would question her companion's shopping 'game plan'.

While certainly not as fraught with commentary as the Maboneng scene, the Kwa Mai Mai trip alludes once again to the precariousness of belonging in Johannesburg as a wealthy member of the elite. Neither Mpumi, nor Lethabo face physical barriers to entry in the city, as they are able to drive in using their private cars (although notably, while Lethabo arrives in her Range Rover, Mpumi opts to drive in with an Audi SUV – perhaps as a result of her previous fears at driving into the CBD in her "G-Wagon" and becoming a "target" [Season Two, Episode One]). Per Putter's (2012) reasoning, the women's cars afford them agency in the space and provide them with a sense of belonging (albeit one which may cause some anxieties venturing into it). Additionally, there are no obstacles preventing them from making use of informal service providers at the market, as they have the financial means to make purchases in the space. However, it is precisely this ability which turns them into a "target" (Season Two, Episode One) of another sort. This is because, by appearing overtly affluent, they open themselves up to being charged

higher than necessary prices. Lethabo and Mpumi may be able to make use of the market, but they may end up doing so at the risk of being significantly overcharged.

Playful perceptions of a city

As evidenced through the Kwa Mai Mai scene (which hints at an inconvenience, more than anything else – surely, even as Lethabo criticizes Mpumi's outfit, she herself emerges from a red Range Rover, wearing a trench coat, Burberry wellingtons, a platinum blonde wig and oversized sunglasses [Season Two, Episode 11]) many of the housewives' references to the city and its less illustrious areas are more playful than an indication of genuine concern. Similar to Tarina's observation that Maboneng was a "dodgy" (Season Two, Episode One) choice of venue, in the episode documenting Brinnette's 40th birthday party (this time in Melville, just north of the city), Mpho giggles about the area's reputation for being "crusty [and] dusty" (Season Two, Episode 11). This time, the other ladies don't speak to the safety aspect of the area, nor of the cultural intricacies of the space, but Lebo and Christall share their frustration at visiting such an 'out of the way' location – with the former noting that the venue was "far out" (Season Two, Episode 11), using dramatic hand gestures in her confessional to emphasize her annoyance. Christall's vexation, meanwhile, is mildly amusing for viewers with a good understanding of the city. This is because, despite her complaint that "this party is really out of the way, again. Like her last party was" (Season Two, Episode 11), Melville is actually closer to her Kyalami home than the Kream Brooklyn restaurant, where Mpumi hosted her "chocolate, cheese and wine" (Season Two, Episode Four) evening a few episodes prior. Notably, Christall had no issue commuting to the high-priced, haute cuisine restaurant in Pretoria – a fact which makes it abundantly clear that in elite Johannesburg circles, it is not the distance that truly matters, but the destination on the other side.

The type of commentary noted above speaks to the suggestion that for the upper-class members of Johannesburg society, some parts of the city just do not live up to the required "standards" (Season One, Episode Two), and as such, should be avoided altogether. As a result, the locations are something to be chuckled at, as the housewives know that even when they are 'there', these less-than-chic locations are not 'theirs' to inhabit. For ladies of their "calibre" (Season Two, Episode

11) the less glamorous parts of the city are nothing more than a daytrip, from which they can return home to their elite enclaves at any time, aided by their access to automobility.

Ironic retellings of the city in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

It would be remiss to assume comments like Mpumi's "ladies of our calibre" (Season Two, Episode 11) and the general irritation at being invited to events close to the city's CBD reflect a genuine out-of-touchness with the majority of the city's residents. Quite the contrary, one might argue that this is reminiscent of the 'Bravo wink' – a device employed by the production team of the *Real Housewives* franchise as a whole to highlight ironies (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013) as they play out on the series. Certainly, Mpumi's assertions that ladies of hers and Lethabo's "calibre" do not belong in "Downtown Jozi", coupled with her earlier confessional, in which she contorts her face in mock distaste while exclaiming, "Downtown Jozi, baba! Yeyi, yeyi, yeyi, yeyi" (Season Two, Episode 11) are clearly framed as a playfulness. Through her disparaging commentary of the city, Mpumi plays into the *campy* idea of a privileged, rich woman who has little business venturing into the wild world of the CBD. However, while she and the other housewives certainly complain about venturing outside of the city's more elite enclaves, there are also times when that venturing is a choice. One example of this can be seen in Episode Five, as Mpumi herself invites viewers along to her parents' home in Tsakane, a township in Ekurhuleni. Here, no disparaging facial expressions are made because it is where Mpumi grew up. In fact, Mpumi mentions in a confessional, "I love to go home, so if I could go home every weekend, I would" (Season Two, Episode Five). Additionally, in light of her note that she grew up in the taxi industry (Season Two, Episode Three), the audience is well aware that the housewife has an understanding and experience of life outside of the bubble.

Similarly, while Lethabo declares that having a well-known "name and surname" (Season Two, Episode Three) in order to hold any validity in Johannesburg high society, she also shares more than one story about her humble beginnings in Seshego, Limpopo. In fact, in one confessional, a tearful Lethabo even shares having to ask her neighbours for tissues when she could not afford to buy her own sanitary pads – "so meaning I didn't have a tissue at home" (Season Two, Episode

Three). Lethabo's emotionally charged confessional is a stark reminder of her background prior to entering Johannesburg's elite, and serves as a reminder that while she may joke about the "fake fur" (Season Two, Episode One) adorned by the Johannesburg set, she has first-hand experience of existing outside of that society.

South Africa's first ensemble are in on the joke when they perform the role of the entitled rich woman. Although much of the series revolves around portraying a lifestyle many residents of the city could only imagine, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* demonstrates an element of social awareness that ties in with stark inequalities that are a reality for residents of the city and its surrounding areas.

The cast of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* are also shown to be incredibly charitable because of the overt inequalities that make up part of the city's spirit. Lethabo's confessional comes as viewers witness her organizing payment for a young girl unable to buy sanitary pads reaches out to her through social media, asking for assistance (Season Two, Episode Three). In this scene, she informs her manager that she intends to pay for the girl's sanitary pads each month going forward (in addition to assisting with other challenges she may be facing), and expresses her devastation at the fact that even one young girl is still facing the same experiences she once did, prior to achieving the lifestyle she now has. She also notes, "when such things happen, you're like...so many years ago and there's someone who's still going through the same thing that I went through many years ago...we have to stop this...I just don't take them very lightly" (Season Two, Episode Three).

Evodia, too, uses the *Real Housewives* platform to bring attention to hers' and Mercy's giving back to Madibane High School in Diepkloof, Soweto. In the episode showcasing their outreach to the school "not far from where [Mercy] grew up" (Season One, Episode 10: Haarties), Evodia addresses a matric class on the value of education and hard work, before the girl students are invited to try on dresses for their upcoming matric dance. In addition to a montage showing each of the girls trying on a range of glittering evening gowns, viewers are alerted to the fact that these are not just any gowns being donated – they are the high-fashion, highly priced ones worn by the

Mogases themselves. Likewise, in the season's finale, Evodia and Mercy do another clothing donation drive, this time taking along their friends Lerika, Pinky and Chandra to go to the Chief of Moletjie to make donations for girls in the community. Again, Evodia mentions that they are not taking "old" clothes, "but clothes that we don't use" (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale).

While the scenes featuring charitable outreach certainly speak to the ladies' generosity, it bears mentioning that there are times when that outreach reads as somewhat self-serving. In the case of the Mogase's donations, Evodia's assertions that they were offering not just any clothes, but beautiful, expensive and 'designer' items, coupled with her use of the phrase "something else" (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale) to describe her kindness issues a reminder to viewers that her donation exceeds expectations. While I would not go so far as saying that the Mogases have ulterior motives (surely, their genuine compassion is demonstrated across the first season, a pertinent example being Evodia's strong emotional reaction to the performance by the Mofolo Melodies acapella group in Soweto, which saw her tear up at the thought of not being able to do more to bring attention to underprivileged performers' talents [Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster]), I would argue that the way in which their evening dress outreach is performed is, to quote Richardson (2006: 158) "deliciously campy". Evodia's commentary that hers and Mercy's donations are not only "standard", but a step above the rest, speaks to a camp performance of the self-indulgent philanthropist whose motives for charity lie in narcissism. However, given that viewers are aware of the struggles she has faced in building her business back from scratch after a devastating divorce, there is a distinct 'wink' (Richardson, 2006; Psarras, 2020a; Psarras, 2020b; Lee and Moscowitz, 2013) at the audience. This 'wink' is all the more evident when one takes into account the fact that her outreach is accompanied by a speech that mentions needing to sleep in a caravan and sustain herself with peanut butter sandwiches (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day). Evodia may use her confessionals to suggest that her charitable endeavours are superior to those of her peers, but she is not unaware of the position she inhabits. Similar to Iqani's (2015: 786) comment on Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's luxury consumptive habits, that "there is no dissonance between caring for the needs of the masses and driving a Mercedes-Benz", Evodia's charitable projects–while framed in a decidedly campy manner–remain an attempt to uplift the communities she feels an attachment to, even if she expresses that attachment while wearing a Gucci tracksuit and matching hat (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster).

Luxury Consumption in the City of Gold

The Real Housewives of Johannesburg may show an understanding of the grave inequalities inherent in the city, but they are nonetheless a part of a franchise which celebrates luxury and the consumption of luxury goods. After all, the programme's description on Showmax does promise viewers a glimpse into the "glamorous" lives of Johannesburg's "richest women" (Showmax, 2021). Thus, even though Mpumi might argue that "whether it's Kwa Mai Mai or Sandton Diamond Walk, at the end of the day, it's all shopping!" (Season Two, Episode 11), the consumption most frequently alluded to is highly likely to take place in the latter.

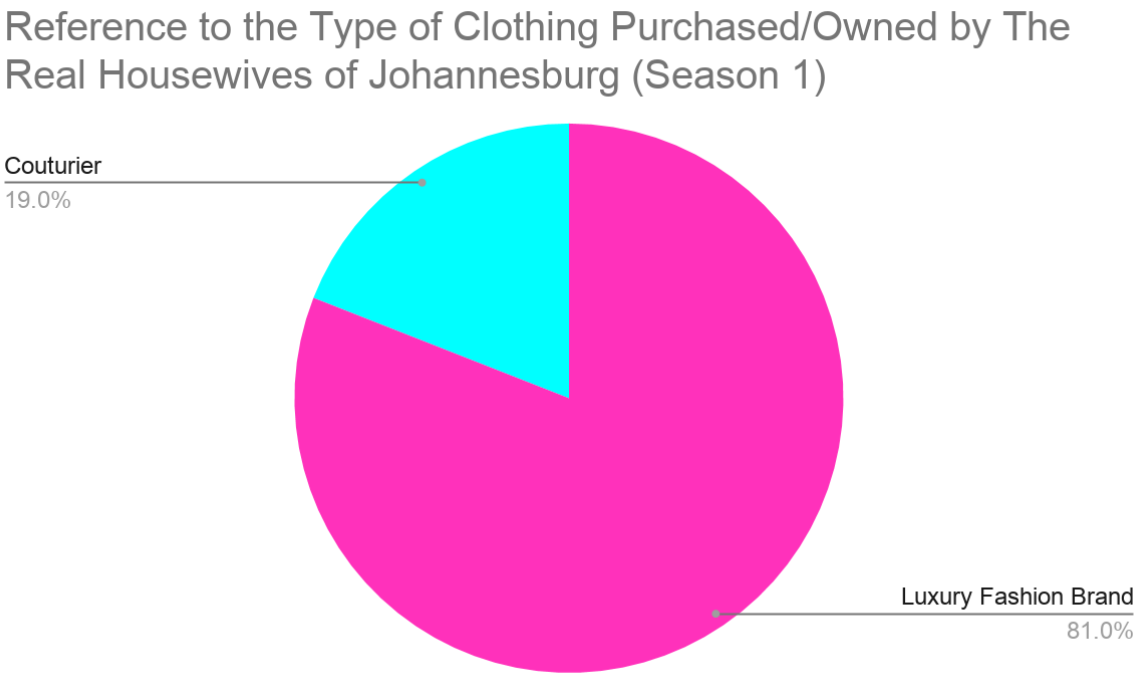


Figure 10: Type of Clothing Purchased/Owned by The Real Housewives of Johannesburg (Season One)

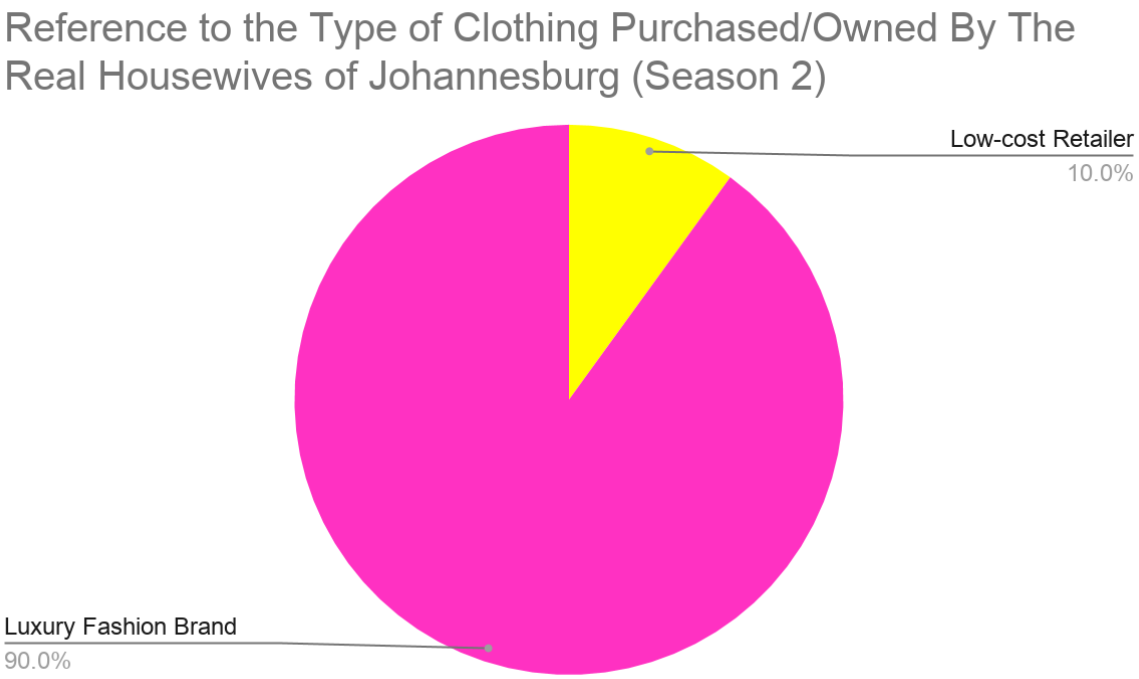


Figure 11: Type of Clothing Bought/Owned by The Real Housewives of Johannesburg (Season Two)

With the exception of Mpumi's mention of the Diamond Walk at Sandton City, the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* make very few verbal references to the act of consumption in the city. Indeed, aside from the first season's introductions to the cast, which highlight each of the original housewives' consumptive habits (Brinnette explaining that her spa business is purely a means to generate money for handbags and shoes, Christall mentioning her extensive shoe collection, Naledi postulating that she, like any woman, loves purchasing haute couture, Mercy's admission that she only shops for high-priced items, and Lendy's comment that she loves shopping [Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life]) actual conversations about shopping in the city are few and far between. However, that is not to say that the viewer is not shown the importance of *owning* high-end and luxury fashion in Johannesburg. While we may not hear the characters assert that they bought their Gucci shoes, Dior bags or entire wardrobes of Versace from a particular spot in Johannesburg, all signs nonetheless point to the City of Gold.

In the first season of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, there are 4 references made to local, high-end couturiers. Of these, two couturiers make an appearance on the show: Liz Ogumbo and Gert-Johan Coetzee. While Liz's Melrose Arch studio serves as the spot where Naledi and Mercy meet for the first time (and the brand from which both women initially intend to purchase outfits for Brinnette's traditional wedding) (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life), Gert's is the source of Brinnette's gown for her white wedding. In a confessional, Brinnette shares that the bespoke dress came to "more than 100k" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong) – a price she was happy to spend given the occasion. Indeed, in a different confessional, Brinnette declares, "I don't care how much he charges me. I'm like, Gert!" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong). Gert-Johan Coetzee is referenced once again in a later episode, which sees Brinnette attend one of his fashion shows alongside Evodia, Olwethu and Lerika (Brinnette noting that she was "personally invited by Gert" [Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette]); as is Skhalo, the brand behind her traditional wedding dress that helped her achieve "looking like Makoti" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). Through these inclusions, there is a distinct highlighting of local designers. However, it is noteworthy that for the most part, when the cast reference luxury fashion, they're generally referring to international brands. Indeed, even though Season Two featured no local couturiers, but highlighted instead the fashion available in lower-cost markets (in the form of Kwa Mai Mai [Season Two, Episode 11]), the overwhelming majority of references made to fashion brands still pointed at international ones.

The *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* features mentions of a host of internationally renowned luxury brands, including Dior (as in, Mpumi's "limited edition Dior" [Season Two, Episode Nine] handbag, damaged as a result of Christall and Bridgette's champagne-throwing fight, and Tarina's "Dior – I think it's last...two seasons' ago collection" (Season Two, Episode 11) outfit, worn to Brinnette's 40th birthday party); "Gucci and Fendi" (Season Two, Episode Three) – Lethabo and Mpumi's choice brand in sneakers for hiking in Cape Town; Prada (the brand from which Mercy buys "dresses that are 70k" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown) and Valentino (as in, the shoes which prevented Christall from crossing the lawns to the other ladies at Brinnette's wedding [Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale]). However, without a doubt, the most referenced luxury brand in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is Versace. This is largely owed to the Mogases, whose "standard" (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day) penchant for the

brand culminates in them earning the nickname “the Versaces” (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day) and "Team Versace" (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale). The mother-daughter duo’s love of the Italian label runs so deep that there are even scenes in which they adorn matching outfits – a move Evodia attributes to their desire to show that they both own the same pieces, and are not merely sharing them (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day).

While Versace is an Italian brand by heritage, in the South African context, it can easily be thought of as a Johannesburg-based label. This is because there is only one flagship store in the country, located on the Sandton City Diamond Walk. Although Versace ships to South Africa and has its own online website with South African prices today, at the time of the first season’s filming, the brand had not yet been acquired by Michael Kors (Taylor, 2018). This meant Versace enthusiasts had to visit the physical store (unless, of course, they travelled abroad to buy the pieces) to meet their desires. However, similar to what has been said of luxury car ownership in a Johannesburg context, it is not the origin of the brand that makes it locally relevant so much as the cultural capital it holds.

As noted above, Evodia shares that part of the reason she and Mercy wear matching outfits is to demonstrate that they both own the pieces on their own. Indeed, while on a girl's trip with Mercy, Lerika, Pinky and Chandra, Evodia asserts, "I wear Versace, I love it, and [so does] my little Princess...so we walked in with matching clothes to show that we don't borrow from each other. No, no, no, don't mistaken us – we buy the same clothes" (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day). Evodia's clarification that she and Mercy did not need to share one another's designer goods speaks directly to what Crosswaite (2014: 192) terms the “self made” South African luxury consumer: “status...is displayed outwardly via luxury goods and services”. While Evodia and Mercy may indeed "wear Versace" because they "love it" (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day), they are not merely wearing the brand's high-end, highly priced pieces for the sake of it: there is a deliberate intention to show that through hard work and determination, they have both “made it” (Crosswaite, 2014: 192), and are therefore using their clothing choices as a means to demonstrate that fact. This is entirely reminiscent of Alweendo and Dosekun's (2019: 131) consideration of Black shoppers at the ultra-exclusive Luminance store in Hyde Park Corner, in which they assert that luxury

consumption in the space translates into "a distinguished and desirable rank or status" for the women who make purchases there.

This, in itself, speaks to the earlier note on luxury car ownership in Johannesburg. In a city where so many people were previously denied the freedom to demonstrate their wealth, ownership of the brands inextricably tied to luxury is a means of asserting how far one has come in spite of the obstacles (Crosswaite, 2014).

Mercy and Evodia's positioning as "self made" luxury consumers is also clear when comparing their commentary on luxury purchases with that of some of the other housewives. Brinnette, for example, shares feeling confused at the sight of her cast mates wearing luxury brands at seemingly inopportune moments. One scene sees her chuckling at the fact that, in Season Two, Mpumi and Lethabo elected to wear Gucci and Fendi to hike Table Mountain. Her query, "is this a fashion show?" is curiously reminiscent of a question asked in a Season One confessional. Here, Brinnette quizzed why some of the other housewives dressed up for Evodia's pyjama party at The Fairlawns Hotel, especially when it was "just girls" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep).

Brinnette's lines of questioning speak to *her* status as a "money aristocracy" (Crosswaite, 2014: 192) South African luxury consumer. As Brinnette shares throughout both seasons, she grew up in a wealthy family, thanks to her parents' ownership of a tavern and her mother's ownership of a catering company. In fact, one of the first things viewers learn about Brinnette in the first season of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is that she has "always got anything and everything that [she] wanted" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). As such, it is unsurprising that, like the typical "money aristocracy" consumer, Brinnette is "familiar with luxury and… confident navigating it" (Crosswaite, 2014: 192). Brinnette does not feel a need to 'prove' ownership of luxury purchases because, as she reminds the cast at the Season Two reunion, she "grew up in money" – so much so that she doesn't "see [it] from here" (Season Two, Episode 12).

Christall, too, could be thought to fit in with the "money aristocracy" (Crosswaite, 2014: 192) consumer. While in Season One she shares that she first entered the luxury lifestyle through a

former romantic partner (and, unlike Brinnette, was not born into it), it is her ideology towards luxury fashion which aligns her most closely with this positioning. Indeed, although Christall boasts an extensive collection of shoes (a collection she deems "the best in Johannesburg" (Season One, Episode Three: Dinner from Hell), her attitude towards high-fashion brands is similar to Brinnette's in terms of its relatively relaxed approach. This is shown in Season Two, through her defence of wearing a scotch-print dress that Mpho's friend, Bridgette, labelled "fake Burberry" (Season Two, Episode Nine). In response, Christall quips that Bridgette (herself a self-proclaimed "self-made" businesswoman) is "shallow" if clothing "always has to have some little label on it to make you feel good" (Season Two, Episode 13). Ultimately, while Christall defends that the dress was purchased at a Sandton boutique (a fact Season Two reunion host, Phat Joe, deemed to be "all that matters" [Season Two, Episode 13), she is unphased for the most part – a fact which demonstrates that she, too, does not feel a need to 'prove' her wealth.

Further demonstrating her positioning as "money aristocracy" (Crosswaite, 2014: 192), like Brinnette, Christall also has a disparaging opinion of the other women's choice in highly exclusive brands. Despite her praise early in Season One, regarding Evodia and her friend Athania being a step above fashionistas because they are able to afford "the real thing" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster), she later passes harsh judgment on the Mogases' affinity for Versace. Here, she postulates that in place of spending their money on expensive clothing, they should be channelling their finances into real estate – especially, according to Christall, because their existing home was "not very big" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette).

Although Christall's statement on the values of investing in property could be taken at face value, as with the intricacies of luxury car ownership mentioned earlier, the reality of the matter is just not that simple. Christall's thoughts on the Mogases' expenditure may appear straightforward, but they negate to take into account one thing: her whiteness in a city whose very foundation is based upon white supremacy.

Whether or not Christall is aware of it, in suggesting that Evodia and Mercy channel their wealth towards a bigger home, she is echoing the questioning tone so often levelled at the rising Black

middle class in the city, and indeed the country. The Mogases are questioned on their priorities when making luxury purchases, in a move reminiscent of Crosswaite's (2014: 190) quote by businessman Kenny Kunene, who took exception to being ridiculed for his "bling lifestyle", noting that Black South Africans were far too often told what they could or could not do with their own money. This also speaks to the broader framing of Black South African elites as "irresponsible with money" (Iqani, 2015: 789). Given that, in South Africa and beyond, wealth has traditionally been associated with whiteness, it is perhaps unsurprising that deviation from the norm (in other words, Black wealth) is often the object of intense criticism. Interestingly, detractors of Black wealth tend to frame their criticisms within an apparent concern for 'morality' (Morwe, 2014; Iqani, 2015, 2017; Alweendo and Dosekun, 2017) as Black elite consumers are seemingly 'expected' to conduct themselves more virtuously than their white counterparts. It would appear as though, despite luxury consumption patterns being able to serve as a status symbol and a means of asserting belonging in a city with racist foundations, one should always be careful not to overstep the mark and upset existing the existing status quo entirely. This can perhaps best be summarised by a journalist quoted in Cobus van Staden's (2015) consideration of Kenny Kunene's infamous 'sushi parties' that became the symbol of politically connected elites with debauched tendencies. The quote articulated that, while black economic empowerment was certainly a worthy cause, such overt displays of wealth and lavishness were simply 'too much'. Black luxury consumption, then, is constantly under scrutiny and open to criticisms.

While Christall's suggestions that the Mogases channel their resources into a bigger home scratch the surface of the racialized nature of consumption in Johannesburg, nowhere in the series is this more evident than in the first seasons' ninth episode, titled "Shopping Spree Showdown". The site of the drama begins with Christall taking the ladies to the Bellanita Boutique in the Michelangelo Towers Mall (a subsection of Sandton City and Nelson Mandela Square), with the intention of finding dresses for Brinnette's upcoming white wedding. After Mercy mentions that she would rather look elsewhere for a dress, Olwethu narrates in a confessional that Christall walked out of the store. From there, there is a flurry of confusion as some of the drama seems to take place off-camera, with off-mic audio replaying an exchange between Mercy and the boutique's owner. Through subtitles, the audience sees the shopkeeper tell Mercy not to "underput" her business, to which Mercy responds, "don't treat me like trash, lady" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping

Spree Showdown). At this point, the cameras begin rolling once again, albeit from behind and below Mercy, suggesting that the cast are unaware that they are being filmed. Viewers see the shop assistant attempt to restrain the boutique owner, as she taunts Mercy to find a dress "under 20 grand" in the store. In response, Mercy stands up to declare that she wears "dresses that are R70k from Prada and Versace". Through a confessional, Evodia explains to the audience that the shop owner is suggesting Mercy doesn't want to shop in her store because she cannot afford to do so, before footage cuts back to her holding her handbag up, shouting "does she know how much is this?" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown).

The situation escalates when Christall returns to the shop, and after encountering the other ladies in the doorway, says "you guys are overreacting once again" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown) – a statement which leads to Evodia pulling off her coat and dropping her bag to confront her. Here, Evodia questions how they can be "overreacting when she's saying we can't afford a dress that's 20k?" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown). After Christall rolls her eyes, saying "oh, please", both Evodia and Mercy shout that they are "not beggars", and won't pretend to tolerate being spoken down to (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown).

As the scene unfolds, Lerika attempts to explain to Christall where the Mogases are coming from, again noting how the shop owner has left both Mercy and Evodia feeling "undermined" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown). Lerika, too, made reference to the women being made to feel like "beggar[s]" who "can't afford things". However, the attempt at explanation is instead met with an enraged assertion that Mercy had started it by being rude to the shopkeeper. According to Christall, this rudeness went beyond Mercy's choice not to shop at the boutique. Instead, she showed poor "behaviour" by "speaking a African language when...dealing with white people" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown).

With this one statement, viewers are made painfully aware of the system which has played its part in Mercy and Evodia needing to 'prove' their ability to afford luxury items in the first place. While Johannesburg may be a melting pot for the elites from its surroundings, it is also a space which

allows for the continued monitoring of its Black residents and their 'behaviour', whether wealthy or not. Much like Alweendo and Dosekun's (2019: 130) assertions regarding the tension faced by Black South African consumers whose acquisition of luxury goods has "been long fraught with meaning", once again, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* demonstrates a fine line between two much and too little – even for "Johannesburg's richest women".

Concluding remarks

The above chapter has shown how luxury in the City of Gold exists in a state of constant tension. Whether real danger or mere inconvenience, showing evidence of 'too much' wealth might put one in a compromising position. At the same time, not showing evidence of 'enough' wealth might lead to one being questioned by their peers, and should therefore be avoided at all costs. For the elites of the city, there are high expectations, and "standards" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet) should be maintained at all times if one is to avoid the scrutiny of high society.

However, through the cast of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, we are also shown that, as it pertains to this scrutiny, the stakes are higher for some than they are for others. For the elite residents who are comfortable in their wealth, not adhering to the strict code of standards has fewer ramifications than it does for the city's nouveau riche – particularly when the new money in question are people of colour. For the latter, there is still a need to demonstrate one's status through the ownership of luxury items, whether they be cars, clothing, or jewellery.

Like the very nature of the "fevered city" (Armitage and Roberts, 2016) itself, it appears there is no end to what should be acquired in order to truly 'belong' to the elite. In a Johannesburg context, where consumption is so linked to respectability and belonging, it might be thought that the tone in which the fevered city speaks to its residents is wholly dependent on the residents in question. For the money aristocracy, the tone implies a nonchalance, an easiness. However, for the self-made luxury consumer, and more specifically, for the self-made Black luxury consumer, there is a sense of urgency. The acquisition of luxury goods goes beyond enjoyment: it is a statement which denotes arrival and belonging in a city with a complicated past that continues to shape its present.

To conclude, this chapter has theorized Johannesburg as something of a silent character, due to the small number of verbal mentions made to the setting. However, it has also argued that the scant verbal references in no way denote an irrelevant setting. Quite the contrary, it is through the visual representations of the city – and the content of those representations – that viewers are given a sense of Johannesburg's spirit. The spirit has been defined as one which presupposes automobility, both because of the physical necessity, and also because of the cultural capital automobility holds in the post-apartheid city. The chapter has argued that while luxury cars are commonly held as status symbols across the world, in Johannesburg they are more than that. The same goes for the consumption of other luxury goods. However, the chapter also makes mention of the fact that even for those who can acquire luxury goods, there is always a chance that it is simply not enough.

Chapter Six: Performances of postfeminism in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

With 9 spa excursions across 12 episodes (excluding reunion episodes) in Season One, and 6 spa excursions across 11.5 episodes[2] (excluding reunion episodes) in Season Two, one would be forgiven for thinking that the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* were 'ladies of leisure', whose days revolved around "pampering" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). With a cumulative number of 16 positive and nine neutral references to both invasive and non-invasive beauty treatments, investing in one's appearance seems to be a full-time job in and of itself for the cast, entirely reminiscent of the earlier mentioned 'Work Done' song performed by Porsha Williams, Sonja Morgan and Melissa Gorga. Indeed, there is more than one reference made to women 'needing' to pay constant attention to and improve their appearances, Evodia explaining, "a woman needs a glow, people. You can't just sit there with your face and not go do facials and expect to have a glow. Believe me. Your face needs to be *refreshened*" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong). In line with the postfeminist notions of constant "self-surveillance, self-monitoring and self-discipline" (Gill, 2007: 155), *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* positions "getting work done" (Daw, et al, 2019) as a necessity of sorts. Indeed, after Evodia's articulation about 'needing' a fresh glow, in the same episode, while looking at pictures of Lendy in her former 'Miss Black Barbie South Africa' and 'Miss Lovely Legs' days, she marvels at the "drastical change" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong) in Lendy's appearance, concluding that "as a woman, you definitely have to take care of yourself. Girl, wake up and smell the coffee" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong).

The Johannesburg iteration of the franchise thus fits in with the broader nonchalance of regular beauty treatments, invasive and otherwise, held as a hallmark of the series. This is demonstrated through discussions about and visual representations of botox appointments (Season Two, Episode 10), boob jobs (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life; Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever; Season Two, Episode Four; Season Two, Episode 10, Season Two, Episode 12) and

[2] The finale episode of Season Two is split into two parts, the first serving as the finale episode, and the second going straight into Part One of the Season Two Reunion Episode.

microneedling (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong; Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). As it pertains to beauty interventions, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is firmly ensconced in the broader franchise.

However, much like in other versions of the *Real Housewives* franchise, "getting work done" (Daw, et al, 2019) in regard to one's appearance is but one part of what makes a woman in a postfeminist media text holistically successful. While procedures both invasive and non-invasive may be par for the course in the franchise as a whole, the "work done" in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* most often refers to the ladies' occupations.

Getting Work Done: The Real Jobs of *The Real Housewives*

For those unfamiliar with the franchise, the lack of actual 'housewives' in the *Real Housewives* franchise as a whole is often a source of confusion, and with good reason. Indeed, the women featured are often brought onto the shows *because* of their reputations as high-powered career women in their cities, many even owning their own businesses. *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is no exception to the rule, so it should come as no surprise that across both seasons to date, there is a heavy emphasis on what the elite women of the city do for a living, amounting to a cumulative total of 62 references, with 35 mentions made to work in Season One, and 27 in Season Two.

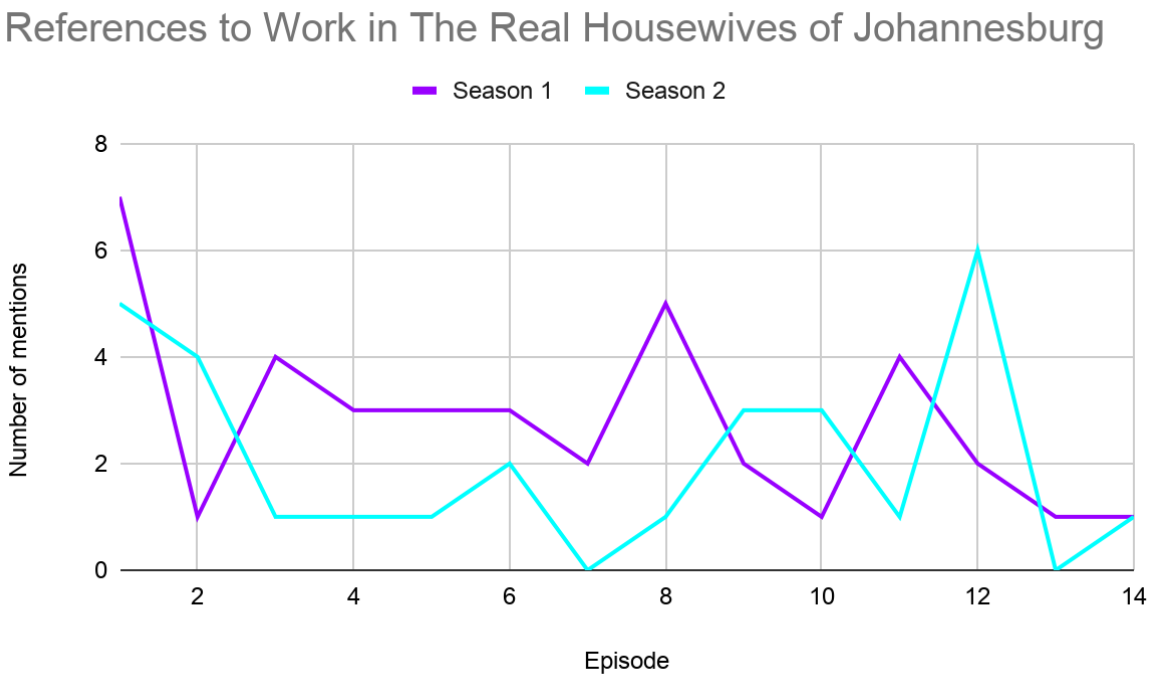


Figure 12: References to Work in The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

When Tarina is first introduced to the audience in season two, she declares, "I do NOT have a 9 to 5. I don't know what that is. I see it around me, I believe it exists. I have no personal interaction or personal experience of this nine-to-five" (Season Two, Episode One). However, despite this, there is no shortage of mentions of work itself in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. Quite the contrary, across both seasons there are a total of 62 mentions of the casts' and their featured friends' careers, businesses or work commitments. It is through these mentions that the audience learns that, in spite of her business being one of her "hobbies" which brings in "money for handbags and shoes" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life), Brinnette owns a spa. Likewise, Christall owns a nail salon (in addition to her music career and her former career as an attorney, as well as her years spent as a model), and Evodia is a former teacher, turned panel beater, turned vegetation management business owner. We also learn that, after spending time working on cruise ships when she was younger, Mercy is a Herbalife Ambassador involved in the health and beauty industry (along with having a security business), while both Lendy and Naledi are former beauty pageant finalists, with Lendy now hiring out her home for film, TV and photo shoots, and Naledi going on to pursue a law degree. Additionally, through the discussions

concerning work, viewers are informed that Lebo is a high-powered businesswoman, Lethabo a TV personality, producer and founder of a charitable foundation, and Mpho an artist. In spite of Tarina not knowing what a nine-to-five is, she does have a career as a Bollywood actress and a businesswoman, and while, at the time of filming, Mpumi was a stay-at-home mom who might be considered a housewife in the true sense of the word (referring to herself in one episode as "Mrs Mops, the homemaker"[Season Two, Episode 10]), she also mentioned having studied Drama at University, and expressed a desire to re-enter the entertainment industry after having taken time away from the business to raise her children.

The heavy emphasis placed on the occupations of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is demonstrative of the prevalence of working women in the city. Akin to *The Real Housewives of New York'*s Jill Zarin's assertions that, in that particular city, "women have to work" (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013: 71), viewers are shown that in Johannesburg, work is non-negotiable. However, based on the conversations concerning and the framing of work in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, viewers are shown the innate *value* the series ascribes to working women in the City of Gold. Through the ladies' conversations about their careers, the audience is alerted, in no uncertain terms, to the ways in which work can elevate one's standing, both financially and socially. Work is framed as the quintessential key to women's empowerment, and the vehicle one must use in order to attain their dream lifestyle. However, through these conversations, the audience is also made aware of one of the things work aids most in this particular iteration of the franchise. That is, respectability.

Throughout both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* to date, viewers are reminded of the programme's conceptualization of the respectable working woman. In Season One, Evodia, in particular, takes more than one opportunity to share how hard work and sacrifice ultimately led to her highly respected position in Johannesburg society as a successful businesswoman (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown; Season One, Episode 10: Haarties). Likewise, in Season Two, Mpho's friend Bridgette also makes mention of her respectability as a "self-made businesswoman" (Season Two, Episode Nine), sharing a list of her accolades to illustrate her point.

However, while scenes like the one depicting Evodia speak to school children regarding the importance of education and hard work (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day) show viewers evidence of what it means to be an esteemed career woman in Johannesburg, it is notable that the audience is most often reminded of the respectability aspect through its direct inverse. In other words, how entering society and attaining wealth through anything other than hard work is the epitome of dishonour.

Across both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, two women, in particular, are chastised by their peers for allegedly attaining their status in society not through work, but by way of transactional relationships: Brinnette and Christall. Despite the note above about both women owning their own businesses in the beauty industry, they are nonetheless questioned by their peers for their proximity to wealthy men, and it is repeatedly suggested that their relationships with these men are ill-intentioned.

The criticism levelled against Brinnette begins in the very first episode of season one. As Mercy and Evodia enjoy a spa day ahead of Brinnette's traditional wedding, viewers witness Mercy wonder aloud at the bride's "pattern" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) of being romantically involved with wealthy men. Mercy declares that while "one or two" wealthy prospects might be considered a fluke, anything more might "raise an eyebrow or something, you know?" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). This suspicion carries over into Season Two, when Christall tells Lethabo and Mpumi that she doesn't believe Brinnette "ever loved" (Season Two, Episode Five) her ex-husband, and that she had been "after him for the money" (Season Two, Episode Five) – then left once she realized he wasn't as wealthy as she thought. The conversation leads to Lethabo's and Mpumi's continued speculation of Brinnette's motives throughout the season, with one episode seeing Lethabo share a rumour that, at Lebo's Lux Empire event, Brinnette had chosen between two suitors based on who had more money (Season Two, Episode Six). Lethabo also shares, through a confessional, that while she has connected with each of the other housewives, she hasn't been able to "get to know what [Brinnette is] all about, except for talking about rich men" (Season Two, Episode Six).

The ladies' criticism of Brinnette was ultimately addressed in part one of the Season Two reunion episode, where the host, Phat Joe, asked Lethabo if she thought Brinnette was a "gold digger" (Season Two, Episode 12), based on her commentary throughout the season. Despite Brinnette muttering "of course she thinks I'm a gold digger" (Season Two, Episode 12), in the same reunion, the spa owner reminded her co-stars that there was no need for her to marry a wealthy man, since she had grown up wealthy herself. She also added that, if she had married for money, her husband's salary would hardly have been a shock or reason for divorce, given he was not "a tenderpreneur", but "an employee", whose payslips would have easily given away a lack of wealth (Season Two, Episode 12). Lethabo's concluding comment, that whether or not Brinnette had a "preference" for wealthy men was not something she cared about (Season Two, Episode 12)–curiously reminiscent of Christall's observation that "guys may have the riches, and girls may have the beauty, and there's nothing really wrong with that...but the crux is that there's got to be some love and attraction" (Season Two, Episode Five)–suggested a space of non-judgment. It was also a reminder of Evodia's Season One iteration that "in life, there are people who attract money" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life), and as such, having a "pattern" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) of being linked to wealthy men was mere coincidence and luck. However, given the commentary leading up to the accusations, one would be forgiven for thinking otherwise.

While Brinnette found herself in the hot seat for her alleged "preferences" (Season Two, Episode 12), by far the greatest criticism against one of the cast members for their alleged reliance on men to advance their social standing was aimed at Christall. In one of her first introductions to the audience, Christall shares having entered high society thanks to an exceedingly wealthy ex-boyfriend. This is a point she repeatedly alludes to across both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, and in addition to making comments regarding having been "engaged to the owner" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep) of The Saxon Hotel, in Season Two she shares not 'needing' to have breast augmentation surgery because, from her experience, billionaires "didn't like fake boobs" (Season Two, Episode 10). As a result of these iterations, among Christall's cast mates (and the friends of the cast featured on the show) it is understood that she amassed most of her fortune through the "love that [she] had before" (Season One, Episode One:

Welcome to the Good Life) – a fact confirmed by the former attorney. It is precisely this which her cast mates use as ammunition in arguments about personal and professional success.

In Season One of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, Evodia compares her respectability as a self-made businesswoman with that of someone who would "bitch around" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown) to acquire her dream home and lifestyle. The audience is made acutely aware of exactly who she is comparing herself with in the aftermath of the heated argument at the Bellanita Boutique: Christall. In this scene, Evodia postulates that she does not "have 100 boyfriends, I stick to one man and I'm a very respected woman...and then I've never bitched around to have big houses" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown). She further asserts:

> "this is me; this is Madame, I've worked very hard for who I am...whatever I'm wearing, I'm dressing, my house – everything, I've worked hard. I didn't bitch around in hotels, I'm not that kind of a woman, bitch...YOU are the worst bitch!" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown).

For any audience members who aren't clear on the 'bitch' in question, Olwethu's confessional serves as a clarification: "oh...that was Christall? She's the one that...*that* many men? For her...that white house? The land, guys...was bought by...? Yoh!" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown).

Similarly, in Season Two, in a heated argument which ultimately culminated in Christall and Bridgette throwing champagne in one another's faces, in response to being asked what she did for a living, Bridgette explained in a confessional that she believed the reason she was asked the question was because "she thinks that because I'm married to a white man and the white man 'saved' me...I don't have any money" (Season Two, Episode Nine). As a result of this, Bridgette asserted "well, I don't lay on my back to get a house", before elaborating that she was a "self-made businesswoman" who had "been in business since [she] was 21 years old" and therefore "didn't need to open [her] legs" to achieve the life of her dreams (Season Two, Episode Nine). Bridgette

further notes, through a confessional, that Christall was "the last person to be asking such questions, especially what word on the streets say about [her]" (Season Two, Episode Nine). When Christall confronted Bridgette over her comments in the season two reunion, Bridgette was unrelenting, responding "but I think we all know how did you get your house" (Season Two, Episode 13).

Through these conversations, viewers are made acutely aware of the ramifications of furthering one's position in society through a man, rather than through one's own efforts. What is notable is that, in spite of the other ladies' allegations, as mentioned above, Christall has an extensive CV. In addition to being a former attorney, current salon owner and aspiring singer, Christall also mentions having a career as an image consultant and, in the opening episode of Season One, shares with the audience that, like Lendy, she rents her home out as a film, TV and photoshoot location. Moreover, her Season One tagline shares that she "worked real hard and sacrificed a lot to get [her] dream home" (Season One, Title Sequence). However, regardless of her professional background, because of the allegations surrounding her entry to society, her reputation will forever be marred in the minds of the city's self-made businesswomen.

The message is thus clear: a woman's success should be entirely independent of a man's involvement if she is to be thought of as truly empowered and respected. This makes sense, given Evodia's very motivations for joining the cast revolved around the desire to show young women that hard work was the key to success and attaining an affluent lifestyle – a "backlash against 'blesser culture', if you will" (Makhoba, 2018). If a woman is to become both empowered and respectable, she should rely solely on her own wits, but perhaps with the help of some (female) friends.

The Girlfriend's Guide to Booming Business

While *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* may discourage a woman from being too reliant on a man for her advancement, the same cannot be said of one's female friends. On the contrary, being supported by a group of successful women is purported to be the key to real success.

In part one of the Season One reunion, Evodia shares that one of her highlights of being on the show was having the platform to “inspire” (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2) and support other women. This is reminiscent of the article documenting her reasons for joining the show in the first place (Makhoba, 2018). Similarly, in a Season Two scene, Brinnette shares her excitement at her and her friend Faith's support of one another's businesses (Season Two, Episode Six).

The idea of women assisting one another in their pursuit of success is also shown in a Season Two scene that documents Mpumi and Lethabo meeting for facials at Camelot Spa in Melrose Arch. Taking on a rather critical stance, in this scene the women take aim once more at Brinnette’s alleged use of men for transactional relationships. Lethabo expresses her frustration at Brinnette and Tarina's friendship, speculating that "they are together for one purpose, and that purpose is to get Brinnette a man...plain description-wise, a rich man” (Season Two, Episode Six). Lethabo then queries why, as a businesswoman, Tarina is

> "not helping Brinnette with her businesses? 'Cause if Brinnette is saying 'I need a rich man because I have financial issues', and I'm your friend and I've got businesses, I will give you, like, give you tips...not to say I'm gonna get you a rich man! A rich man to come and do what? Help you with your businesses? 'Cause that's the thing, her mission right now should be asking on how to get that spa running and making money, not to be asking for men." (Season Two, Episode Six).

Lethabo’s note here speaks to the rhetoric of ‘girl power’ which permeates through postfeminist media texts in general. In addition to the earlier notes on women needing to achieve success without the assistance of a male partner, the franchise places a lot of emphasis on the idea of ‘women supporting women’ in their endeavours. In fact, women supporting one another in their journey to success is considered a prerequisite for empowerment.

In Season One of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the audience is shown evidence of the women supporting one another's business through the attendance of work events and commitments. The first example of this can be seen in a Season One episode, when Naledi and Brinnette join their friend Chef Nti for her cookbook photoshoot, Brinnette noting, "Chef Nti and I get along so, I mean, I couldn't have said no...when somebody's doing something that important in their life and they ask you for their support, why not?" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet). Another is Naledi and her friend Lerika's fashion preview and the breakfast which followed the day after (as the original event's logistics fell through). While Christall was the only full-time housewife to attend the previous evening's festivities, Evodia and Mercy arrived at the subsequent breakfast in support of the ladies' 'Denim X' collaboration line. The fact that this was a gesture of support was summed up by Evodia when she noted that, despite not seeing anything in the collection that she would wear herself, "as a woman, I'm happy [they] can do something" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). In another episode, when shooting the music video for Christall's single 'Wish I Was Married to a Billionaire', Brinnette shares that, despite the songstress "bossing [them] around", she "want[ed] to support Christall" (Season Two, Episode Eight). Similarly, in a later episode, Mpumi shares that she, Lebo and Christall are on-set as extras to "support" (Season Two, Episode 11) Tarina as she stars in a music video for UK-based singer, Charlie Freeman. It bears mentioning that Mpumi shared needing to put her personal issues with Tarina aside in order to provide the aforementioned "support" (after not receiving an invitation to one of the latter's previous events). Additionally, even though Christall joined the group as well, she shared through a confessional that it didn't "really gel" with her, "as an artist" herself, to be featured in "someone else's music video. It's just like, nah. It's just flat" (Season Two, Episode 11). However, flat or not, Christall nonetheless showed up in support of her fellow housewife, thereby performing the role required of one empowered woman providing assistance to another.

As demonstrated above, visiting one another's work events or supporting one another's businesses is a regular occurrence across both seasons of The *Real Housewives of Johannesburg.* What stands out is that, in each of the examples mentioned above, there is an overt conditionality of the housewives' support. In fact, given that in each of the occasions mentioned above, the women hinted at a sense of frustration at having to support their peers, even when it wasn't ideal for them to do so, this is telling of the *obligation* they feel to one another. Brinnette isn't merely in

attendance at Chef Nti's photoshoot as an unconditional supporter, she's there because she "couldn't say no" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet). Likewise, Christall would prefer not to be an extra while Tarina has a starring role in a music video, but she 'has to' go along with it in order to fulfil the duty of being a supportive friend – even one who vocalizes her frustrations. By each of the cast members explaining that they are in attendance with the express intention of supporting their cast mates, rather than a genuine desire to be there, the housewives demonstrate that, as women with a platform, it is their responsibility to play a role in uplifting others, even when it feels like an inconvenience to do so. However, it is also somewhat reminiscent of Lee and Moscowitz's (2013) assertions regarding the ironic portrayal of the *Real Housewives of New York*. As with their American peers, the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* "speak a language of women's empowerment" (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013: 72), while hinting more closely at the postfeminist sensibility of individualism. The women articulate their support, but the conditionality of that support provides the sense of it being a chore of sorts.

The obligated, albeit vocally conditional supporter also hints at another hallmark of the franchise as a whole: the opinionated woman. *The Real Housewives* franchise is littered with examples of cast members sharing their opinions, solicited or otherwise, on the way in which their cast mates run their businesses. In *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, Christall's amused observations that, at Naledi and Lerika's fashion preview "there was no modelling of any kind" and further noting that "you can't have a fashion show without that, that is what makes a fashion show" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster) is just one instance of this. Another instance was Naledi's commentary of Christall's singing techniques when she accompanied her to a recording session at Goodnoize Productions Studio in Greenside. Here, Naledi attempted to advise Christall regarding her "vocal threshold" (Season One, Episode Three: Dinner from Hell), much to Christall's outrage. After all, Christall had only "invited" Naledi to learn more about the business (Season One, Episode Three: Dinner from Hell). Further demonstrating a deeply opinionated group was the confessional montage depicting the ladies' joint confusion at Lebo's Lux Empire event. Tarina, in particular, noted the unclear messaging of the event, sharing through her interview that the function was "a mix-match of some people trying to put something together. It was a good, sort of, first attempt, but didn't quite hit the nail" (Season Two, Episode Five).

These criticisms fit in with the broader 'constructive criticism' made by housewives all around the world, in multiple different franchises. In an episode of *The Real Housewives of Sydney*, businesswoman Lisa Oldfield scoffed at her cast mate, AthenaX Levendi's choice to base an event for her jewellery line on *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – noting "Holly Golightly was a prostitute", thus undermining her cast mate's attempt at creating an elegant soiree (Season One, Episode 11: Fur Wedding). Similarly, in an episode of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* that saw the cast visit *Real Housewives of New York* star, Bethenny Frankel's home in the Hamptons, Bethenny made comments regarding the "production value" (Season Six, Episode Seven: Pretty Mess) of one of Erika Jayne's music videos, during which she noted how her marketing expertise qualified her to do so. In yet another episode of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, Dorit took to a confessional to state that Kyle didn't know "what the hell" she was doing, ahead of her New York Fashion Week show (Season 10, Episode One: The Crown isn't So Heavy). Likewise, in an episode of *The Real Housewives of Dallas,* D'Andra Simmons and Kary Brittingham point out the flaws in their cast mate LeeAnne Locken's 'L'infinity' dress (Season Four, Episode 12: Babes in Thailand). Going back to what has been said of the women supporting one another out of obligation, D'Andra tells LeeAnne "I bought the dress to *support* you [but] I can't figure the dress out...wouldn't you want to know? Because if I have a call from my clients, I want you to say, 'this is a problem you have'" (Season Four, Episode 12: Babes in Thailand). It should be noted, however, that in the final example, the other housewives spoke against Kary's and D'Andra's actions, with Kameron Westcott asserting "constructive criticism is good, but it's only how many times you're going to give it" (Season Four, Episode 12: Babes in Thailand).

Through this comment, viewers of the global franchise are shown that criticism should always be given with the intention of helping one's peers 'improve' in various aspects of their lives. This is very much in line with the advisory tone of postfeminist media texts in general, spoken through the guide of a "girlfriend" (Winch, 2013). Ample criticism should be given, and should always be graciously received, but it is always intended to help the recipient better their businesses, and thus, themselves (Winch, 2013).

Given that the *Real Housewives* franchise, as a whole, is replete with criticisms (and, as noted above, criticisms of those criticisms), it should come as no surprise that, when the women elect not to support their peers at all, they are lambasted severely by their cast mates. Much in line with the earlier note that respectability is demonstrated through its inverse, it is through the admonishment of women who fail to uplift their peers that the audience is shown what female friendship 'should' look like.

This comes across in an episode of Season Two of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, in the scene that leads up to Christall and Bridgette's champagne-throwing fight. In fact, the argument begins after Christall laments that, as a woman, having friends who don't support one's success can have a devastating effect on one's emotional wellbeing. In a sense, Christall's way of sharing that she felt deserted by her friends of over 20 years hints at her thought that all successful women have had to deal with something of the like. This seems to be a sentiment many of the other women agree with, Mpumi noting that it could happen if a friend felt "jealous of your success" (Season Two, Episode Nine). However, the conversation nears its crescendo when, almost indicative of the very point she is trying to prove, Bridgette laughs at Christall for being "shallow" (Season Two, Episode Nine) when opening up about her successes. At this, Christall shouts that if anyone didn't have the same experience with girlfriends leaving a friendship out of jealousy, it meant they needed to "reach higher heights" and "develop" themselves (Season Two, Episode Nine). Thus, viewers are presented with a paradox: one should never feel deterred from their journey to success, but one should be mindful of the risks involved. Female friendship is a prerequisite for building success, but it might not always last once that success has been attained. In some ways, this is reminiscent of Lee and Moscowitz's (2013: 72) commentary regarding the dynamics shown in the franchise as a whole. Indeed, in spite of the fact that "the cast members speak a language of women's empowerment; nevertheless, in their relationships with other women...the characters become post-feminist cautionary tales rather than feminists" (Lee and Moscowitz, 2013: 72).

As has been touched on throughout this chapter so far, postfeminist ideas are something of a pertinent theme in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. This is demonstrated through the emphasis of the importance of work and the imperative of women assisting other women on their

journeys to success. It is also evident from the strong reaction to transactional relationships, which (while freely chosen) detract from true empowerment because they are reliant on a male romantic partner. Are we to believe, then, that Johannesburg's elite women perform their femininity in line with the postfeminist ideals of the global franchise? The answer might not be as clear-cut as one would think.

Complicating *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg's* Claims to Postfeminism

Despite *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* exhibiting subject matter consistent with the postfeminist themes found in the franchise more broadly, there is an overt commentary on respectability that ties well with Dosekun's (2015) observations. In her consideration of a sample of "hyperfeminine" Lagos women, Dosekun (2015: 24) put forth the idea that the women's financial independence from men was more closely aligned with "sexual respectability" than with postfeminism proper. Akin to Evodia's rationale for participating in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* as a "backlash against 'blesser culture'" (Makhoba, 2018), Dosekun shared that much of the women in her sample's reasoning behind achieving financial independence lay in the desire to prove they were not embroiled in a transactional relationship (Dosekun, 2015). Indeed, Dosekun (2015: 24) quotes one of the women in her study as saying being in a transactional relationship would be "the worst thing I could be known for".

Certainly, in terms of the criticisms levelled at Christall, the lens of sexual respectability over post-feminist ideology is extremely evident. As noted above, it doesn't seem to matter to Christall's co-stars that she has had a career as an attorney, nor that she has embarked on several business ventures. The fact that she has been transparent about receiving wealth through a former partner (and, notably, not a husband) opens her up to condemnation that far surpasses criticism of financial dependence.

Further impacting Christall's perceived lack of sexual respectability in the eyes of her co-stars is her continued fascination with the man who introduced her to high society. There are numerous instances of her cast mates criticizing the way in which she speaks about her former partner – from

Naledi, who mentions that she would not appreciate being in Christall's husband's shoes, to Mercy, who asserts, "I think it's a little bit disrespectful for you to be talking about how amazing another man is when you're married" (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever). The issue also takes on a locally specific tone when Evodia laughs at Christall's commentary about staying friends with her ex-boyfriend and her husband moving in with her, rather than the other way around. Here, Evodia postulates: "according to my culture, you can't be just talking like this and talking about men being your friends...In our [Sotho] custom, it's unacceptable. If a man marries you, you have to respect him" (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever). Christall's predicament is thus informed not only by her history in a transactional relationship, but also her lack of adherence to her co-star's cultural norms.

By contrast, the discourse surrounding Brinnette's "preferences" (Season Two, Episode 12) for wealthy men speaks directly to the postfeminist ideals of "choice, agency and empowerment" (Gill, 2008: 438). That is not to say that she is immune to commentary regarding "sexual respectability" (Dosekun, 2015: 24). To be sure, in the Season Two reunion, after Brinnette alleges that Mpumi had an affair, Mrs Mops rebuffs the suggestion, noting "honey, I am not like you. I don't run these Joburg streets like you. I have a rep, something that you do not have" (Season Two, Episode 13). However, the language used in reference to Brinnette typically revolves around an issue that could be fixed, should she stop making "the 'wrong' choices" (Gill, 2008: 446). Should Brinnette heed Mpumi's advice to "never, never show...desperation for a man, no matter how desperate you are. That's rule number one. Rule number two: do NOT ask to be hooked up by every Tom, Dick and Harry" (Season Two, Episode Six), she could easily find herself on the 'right' path. Conversely, Christall already bears her supposed scarlet letter, making her shift into respectability a much more challenging feat.

It bears mentioning that while "sexual respectability" (Dosekun, 2015: 24) is important to the cast of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, that by no means suggests that the norm of hypersexuality across postfeminist media texts is absent in the programme. In fact, like its international forerunners, the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* shines a light on the necessity for women to be "up for it" (Gill, 2007: 152) at all times. Across both seasons, there are multiple

references to the women needing to have a strong sexual identity – from Mercy sharing that women should "want your husband to come home and you're like, 'honey, I'm right here, this is dinner'" (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever), to Tarina and Christall simulating what they refer to as "the eight" (Season Two, Episode Three) sex position on Lebo's boat trip. Season One also features a scene where Mercy brings a box of handcuffs and a whip as a "very, very sexy and naughty" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong) gift, while the two discuss undergoing "vaginal rejuvenation" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong) procedures. Viewers are also invited along to witness Lerika go for an "o-shot": an injection that promises to "tighten the area" and "helps with libido" and "lubrication" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette), and accompany Mercy and Evodia as they visit the V Bar by Midori for vaginal steaming – to get "fresh for that time of the month and fresh for your partner" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). Hypersexuality is therefore far from a taboo topic in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, but exactly how that hypersexuality is employed makes all the difference in terms of how each woman will be received by her peers.

Also notable is the fact that, unlike in international versions of the franchise, The *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* makes comparatively little commentary on the sexualization of men. Although the *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, the *Real Housewives of Dallas* and the *Real Housewives of New York* all feature scenes which depict women as sexual aggressors (Lazar, 2006), in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, that is not the case. Aside from Christall's employment of a bodyguard to carry her around at Brinnette's white wedding (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale), male sexual partners are typically only referenced in terms of the importance of maintaining a healthy sex life, and thus, a relationship (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong; Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever). Much of this comes down to respectability, once again, and it should be noted that when Christall does appear 'too close for comfort' with her bodyguard, the other women move to another table as they won't tolerate it – especially since they "know that she's a married woman" (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale).

Perhaps because of the respectability aspect, there seems to be an intentional de-sexualization of men in the programme, with hypersexual aspects of the show always focusing on the women in

the series. Perhaps the most pertinent example of this can be seen in the episode depicting Christall and Brinnette's post-divorce "breakthrough" party (Season Two, Episode 10). Here, each of the women complain about the male strippers at the party, with Christall even shooing them away at one point, telling one of the men at the stripper pole to "move over, we want a lady, please" (Season Two, Episode 10).

The audience is thus shown something of an untidy overlap between the expectations of sexual respectability and postfeminist ideals in Johannesburg elite society. However, it is precisely this which speaks to Dosekun's (2015) theorization of "postfeminism as transnational culture". As noted in the literature review of this paper, postfeminism is adapted to suit local needs and climates, and as such it is unsurprising that this overlap exists in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. This in no way prevents the text from being considered a postfeminist one. Rather, it just means that the postfeminism exhibited has a locally distinct flavour, much like the *Real Housewives* franchise professes to portray across its numerous iterations. The *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* may not always provide a portrayal of postfeminism that is entirely aligned with its Western counterparts, but that doesn't make the text any less postfeminist. Rather, it demonstrates a postfeminism unique to Johannesburg.

Thus far, this chapter has sought to describe how *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* highlights the precarious way in which women navigate the City of Gold. This has been done by exploring the emphasis the series places on work, financial independence and the intricacies that go along with them. However, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* does more than highlight the working lives of the 'housewives'. While the focus on work is an important component of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, viewers of the programme are also given a glimpse into the women's navigation of the city in the social sense of the word. For this reason, the chapter will now delve into how the 'advisory nature' alluded to above translates into the monitoring (Gill, 2007) of the ladies' conduct in *social* settings.

"To Another Successful Event!": The Prevalence of Parties in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

Across both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the number of filmed events that take place tally at 30. 'Event', in this sense, spoke to functions including braais, weddings, bridal showers, work events, birthday dinners and parties – essentially, anything which might traditionally be understood as an organized group gathering. As evidenced by the number of events that took place across both seasons, it is clear that social events make up a major part of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg's* programming.

The inclusion of so many social events serves an obvious purpose in the sense that it allows viewers to see the cast altogether. From a purely logistical standpoint, the events need to take place in order for a story to unfold. This is particularly evident in Season One, which, while littered with several other events along the way, is centred on the premise that one of the housewives, Brinnette, is getting married. Indeed, the season begins with Brinnette's traditional wedding (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) and ends with her white wedding (Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale). While Season Two didn't have a single central event as its focus, that, too, saw the full cast meet one another for the first time at Brinnette's 'Bye to Be'-themed monthly birthday party (Season Two, Episode One).

However, in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, parties are more than a setting or mere backdrop. While these events provide the site of unfolding drama in terms of *where* the arguments, bonding, or even heartfelt conversations take place, they also often form the basis of many of those arguments. Indeed, many of the conversations had in the series are centred on the women's conduct, dress and etiquette at one another's events. In this way, the parties become a battle zone of sorts: nothing is off limits, everything is open to criticism, and guest and hostess alike are coached on how to do better the next time. Far from being a means to unwind, in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the art of hosting and being hosted is something of a power struggle between who has it 'right' and who is in dire need of intervention. A phenomenon one might think

of as 'party politik', which fits in with the broader postfeminist requirement for women to be able to host "a successful dinner party" (Gill, 2007: 155).

Given that events are something of a serious business in the programme, it should therefore come as no surprise that 'respect' is a commonly referenced prerequisite for all those in attendance, hostess included. Being respectful to one's hostess or guests is non-negotiable, and failure to make good on this will open one up to considerable criticism. It just so happens that one of the sincerest ways to demonstrate good conduct in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is through the making of good choices. Clothing choices, that is. In spite of the different natures of each party (surely, one's outfit for a Church wedding would be dramatically different from one's dress at a bachelorette party – and when it isn't, it will be remarked upon, such as Naledi's commentary on one of Brinnette's bridesmaids, whose dress showed what she deemed to be excessive cleavage [Season One, Episode 12: Season Finale]), one thing remains vitally important regardless of the event in question. Indeed, in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, viewers are made acutely aware that dressing to impress is not only appreciated, but *expected*. In line with Joanne Entwistle's (2015) considerations of the politics of fashion, in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, dress is far from functional: it is a means of readying the body for society, and commanding respect for the correct choice in adornments.

Dressing for success: a key component of party politik

The housewives' guide to respectful fashion 'Do's' for partygoers begins in Season One, in the aftermath of Brinnette's traditional wedding. While at Chef Nti's cookbook cover shoot, Naledi shares that she was asked by other guests if she thought her outfit–a tea-length[3], strapless, dark mint dress with a white shweshwe print–might have left Brinnette feeling upstaged. She then shared her response: "I'm like, she wouldn't have had such a fancy function if she wanted you to come in your dungarees, you know. Um, I think we respected the occasion" (Season One, Episode

[3] A length that hits between the calf and ankle. Dresses in this style typically feature fuller skirts and can be easily styled for both formal and semi-formal occasions.

Two: The Real Jet), to a resounding agreement from both Chef Nti and the bride herself. Dressing up, and dressing well, is thus a marker of not only a good guest, but a *respectful* one.

However, while Naledi's statement speaks to how one should be dressing for an event, in light of what has been said of the advice-through-inverse dynamic in relation to sexual respectability and women supporting one another, it should come as no surprise that, as it pertains to dressing for functions, *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* are advised more frequently on what *not* to wear, than on what is deemed acceptable for the setting. In fact, across Season One, there were just nine references made to what one 'should' wear to an event: less than half of the mentions of the clothing choices women 'should not' be making. The housewives may give a guide on party fashion 'Do's', but they present an encyclopaedia on the 'Don'ts'.

Arguably the most militant in terms of appropriate party dressing is the series' 'Madame', Evodia. When questioned about her stance at the season finale, she asserts "I respect people...when you invite me, I'm going to look into the invitation and I'll definitely adhere to what you say I must do" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2). Almost an embodiment of Entwistle's (2015) assertions, Evodia's position is such that dressing appropriately is a marker of good conduct. It should come as no surprise, then, that at multiple points during the season, she expresses her frustration with the others for their lack of dress code compliance.

Evodia's first criticism takes place at Lendy's braai, which saw the host invite her neighbour, Theresa. Much to Evodia and Mercy's dismay, Theresa didn't put much "effort" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong) into her appearance, instead coming with what Evodia described as "uncombed hair" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong) and a more casual outfit of a white button-down shirt and black pants. After being confronted for her assessment at the season's reunion – Lendy asserting that the Mogase matriarch had "no right" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2) to be so vocal about Theresa's appearance, especially given she was "a grandmother" (Season One, Episode 13: Part 1 of 2) – Evodia stood by her statement. Asserting that she did not care if Theresa was a grandmother or not, she declared: "if you look shabby, you are shabby, that's it!" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2).

Moreover, she emphasized the importance of making a good first impression when meeting new people, even arguing that it was the duty of the hostess to ensure everyone was appropriately attired.

Similarly, over the course of her girl's weekend at Fairlawns Boutique Hotel, Evodia deemed her guest's attire to the weekend's first event, the pyjama party, a complete and utter disappointment. More specifically, she lamented: "Their dress code, it sucks. Believe me. Others, they are wearing pyjamas that I've worn when I was in university. Those ones, I wear them when I'm depressed at home" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep). This was a bone of convention touched on once again when Evodia hosted the women for another pyjama party – this time, a themed dinner to end off a day she organized for the ladies at Hartbeespoort. After Naledi arrives to the dinner in a leopard-print onesie and Ugg-style slippers, Evodia announces in her confessional that, going forward, "I'm not going to allow any dinner or any pyjama party because I know people, they like it, but they don't honour it" (Season One, Episode 10: Haarties).

Interestingly, at both of the pyjama party events, Brinnette had a slightly different outlook to Evodia. In response to the Fairlawns fiasco, she shared feeling confused that the other women are "dressed like they're about to be on their honeymoon or something" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep), suggesting that, at least according to her, dressing to impress for a slumber party went against the typical dress code for such an event. Likewise, when Naledi arrives at Evodia's Hartbeespoort home, Brinnette chuckles that even though she can see the host, Lerika, Chandra and Mercy judging her choice to wear a onesie (compared to their silk and lace robes) she sees nothing wrong with it. In fact, akin to her outlook on Fairlawns that silky pyjamas and being "dressed up" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep) in sleepwear should be reserved for one's honeymoon, in response to Naledi's onesie, she explains that, as a married woman, her choice in pyjamas is perfectly acceptable.

Referring back to the Fairlawns dress code debacle, ahead of the penultimate event during the girl's weekend, a high tea, Evodia pleaded with her guests to respect her dress code, sharing in a confessional that, as part of her invitation, she had emphasized that dressing according to theme

was important to her (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep). While she was pleased with the ladies' compliance for that (although, notably, she and Christall staged a makeover for Lendy in preparation), she was once again disappointed at the weekend's final event, a pool party hosted in her private villa at the hotel. After the footage shows Christall arrive in a ruffled peach short-sleeved blouse, printed shorts, and ballet pumps, Brinnette in a light pink silk robe-style dress with a matching bikini underneath, and Naledi in an all-black ensemble (trench coat and boots included) Evodia shares in a confessional, "oh my goodness, another story again. Dress code. No effort. I'm tired, I'm just tired" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep). Evodia, by contrast, wore a Versace cover up to the affair, and as Mercy arrives, narrating "I arrived, in style, looking fantastic" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep), viewers see that the mother and daughter are wearing matching outfits.

Asked about her musings and expectations of her cast mates at the season's finale, Evodia was unrelenting once again, decrying the fact that such "beautiful ladies" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2) would let her down. It is thus clear that, for Evodia, a beautiful, successful woman 'should' be able to perform the role of a respectful guest. Such was the "standard" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2) for Johannesburg women, and deviation from the norm was not taken too kindly.

While Evodia is arguably the most vocal of the group in terms of party dress propriety, the other housewives share their opinions freely as well. This is evidenced by both Lerika and Olwethu's commentary regarding Christall's sheer jumpsuit, worn for the launch of her single 'Wonder' (Season One, Episode 11: The Big Day), and Christall's joke that Lerika and Naledi's sunglasses at their fashion preview are "comical" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). Each of these spoke to the women's supposed inability to dress appropriately for their own events, and hinted at the idea that they had failed the task of presenting themselves appropriately for the occasion (Entwistle, 2015). However, even though there are many other fashion faux pas referred to across the first season, with objections raised by many of the ladies, out of the 21 'What Not to Wear' references recorded, eight came from just one event. That is, Brinnette's bachelorette party, hosted by Naledi and held at the former's Spa Aesthetique premises.

"Yussus": Occasion-Appropriate Fashion in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

The commentary begins after Lerika and Christall greet at the event, and Lerika scoffs, through her confessional, that the housewife "should have left the granny dress at home, girl. Like, this is not that kind of party" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). In a similar vein, after Evodia arrives to the party in a short, tight, partially sheer dress in what Naledi refers to as "very, very flimsy material" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette), viewers are shown a confessional where Madame questions the other guests' comprehension of the dress code, noting "since they said it's a bachelorette, you need to be sexy. I really don't understand these other young girls" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). However, while Lerika and Evodia may agree on the necessity of a sexy, "flimsy" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette) outfit for the occasion, some of the other women differed in their views. While Naledi commented on the confidence required to wear "such a dress" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette) Christall and Brinnette both made more than one reference to the 'inappropriateness' of Evodia's outfit. While Christall postulated that "it's not appropriate to wear almost a see-through dress when you're over 50 to a bridal shower for a young lady that's getting married, is it? No" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). She further asserted the dress's impropriety by noting that there was no way Evodia could wear underwear under it. Brinnette, meanwhile, began her assessment of Evodia's look with "Yussus" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). The footage then switches to a confessional, in which Brinnette asks "how old is Madame, again?" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). Brinnette further narrates that "the dress is tight, it's short, it's a lace dress...I would never allow my mother to come to any event dressed like that, just saying" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette).

The bachelorette party commentary is important because it touches on two things: the necessity of sexiness as a marker of postfeminist success, and the simultaneous criticism of women deemed to have 'taken it too far'. Evodia's very decision to wear the short, white and lacy dress was grounded in the idea that bachelorette parties are intended to recognize and draw attention to women's identities as sexual beings (Montemurro, 2003). Because of this, it also speaks to the greater

theorization within postfeminist media culture which equates empowerment with sexual agency (Lazar, 2006; Gill, 2007; Gill 2008). Evodia has chosen the dress because it demonstrates her reclaimed sexual identity and her "confidence" in asserting her sexual prowess (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). Indeed, it is a marker of her empowerment. As Naledi notes, "no small woman can wear such a dress" and for that reason, Evodia's choice in outfit left her "feeling inspired" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette). Evodia's choice in dress is also a marker of her success as a 'middle-aged' woman in a postfeminist context. Despite being "over 50" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette), Evodia has maintained her ability to look 'sexy', and even manages to outdo her younger peers. In this sense, she has achieved "successful ageing" (Gibson, 2018: 482), akin to *Real Housewives of New York*, Ramona Singer's assertion that she was "proud of being sexy…at the age I am" (Season One, Episode One: Meet the Wives). From a Western postfeminist view, this is certainly an achievement: after all, Mancini (2012) argues that enjoying one's sexuality is a marker of respectability amongst women in many Western societies.

With that said, the criticism levelled at Evodia and her choice of dress by Brinnette and Christall makes it clear once again that "sexual respectability" (Dosekun, 2015: 24) in a Johannesburg context differs somewhat from the aforementioned Western societies. Through Brinnette's assertions that she would "never allow" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette) her own mother to appear in such a hypersexualized item, the audience is made aware that Johannesburg-based mothers and middle-aged women should not call too much attention to their sexuality at events, no matter how confident, successful or 'empowered' they are. Doing so would not only be distasteful, but entirely unacceptable. This is not only something that applies to a "bridal shower for a young lady" (Season One, Episode Eight: The Bachelorette), but a general 'rule' that seems to apply to all events. This is evidenced through another criticism by Brinnette in an earlier episode. While having dinner with Mercy at Kream in the Mall of Africa, Brinnette shares via confessional her beliefs that "when you go to an event together, y'all dressed like the same – y'all rock up in miniskirts, tight dresses, long weaves, long lashes…now, who's the mother, who's the daughter?" (Season One, Episode Five: Vegan Fever). Brinnette's line of thinking is thus clear: the ability to dress in a sexually provocative manner while maintaining an air of respectability is entirely contingent on one's age and position within the family.

While these arguments regarding the fine line between 'sexy enough' and 'too sexy' are delivered by women, it would be careless to ignore the similarities between the housewives' monitoring of one another's dress and traditional, patriarchal ideas. In her fascinating consideration of *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), Gerda Lerner explains how Middle Assyrian Law required women to identify their social status, closely linked to their sexual respectability, through the use of a veil. While respectable women (a category which included married women and their daughters, as well as wedded concubines) were permitted to cover themselves with a veil, 'unrespectable' women (that is, anyone outside the aforementioned category) were required to be unveiled (Lerner, 1986). Similar to this is Whisner's (1982) consideration of the ways in which patriarchal structures enforce specific 'types' of dress between cisgender men and women, as a means of distinction and domination. The monitoring of women's dress has historically been entangled in patriarchy, so it should come as no surprise that the 'too-sexy-or-not-sexy-enough' dichotomy espoused by the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* presents as patriarchal ideology, re-packaged with a postfeminist bow. Women are 'allowed' to dress in whatever way they see fit, but their freedom of choice cannot spare them the judgment of their peers, whose own views have been undeniably shaped by the patriarchal systems upon which the world continues to operate.

Exemplifying the idea of patriarchy re-packaged as postfeminism, Evodia is neither relenting in her desire to dress in a way that she chooses, nor in her criticism of the other women's choice to dress in a style different from her own. In fact, one of her final parting thoughts on the matter is addressed to Brinnette: "you're talking how sexy I am, 'how can I dress up like this' – that's how I dress! And I won't pretend to be someone else" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2). With this comment, Evodia asserts her position as an empowered postfeminist figure, whose freedom of choice to wear what she feels most comfortable in will not be undermined in the name of propriety. Ironic, given how vocal she had been regarding the other women's choice in clothing. Viewers are thus given yet another example of the precariousness of being a woman in Johannesburg in a postfeminist context: whether one decides to wear a sexually provocative dress or something more modest, there is always an opportunity for censure, for which the "girlfriends" (Winch, 2013) will gladly step in.

In Season Two of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the number of references to how one should or should not dress dwindled significantly from its predecessor. Indeed, while Season One saw 30 overall mentions in the 'what to wear/what not to wear' categories of the content analysis, Season Two had 11 mentions overall. This is largely attributable to the absence of Evodia and Mercy in the second season, and is one of the markers of what appears to be a more laidback cast overall. With that said, despite the lower total number of mentions, the ratio of 'what to wear' versus 'what not to wear' remained similar. Season One saw that 70% of the mentions referred to 'what not to wear', and likewise, in Season Two, 63% of the references spoke of the garments one should avoid for an event. Thus, even when dress code might not seem to matter as much at first glance, when it *is* discussed, it holds just as much weight.

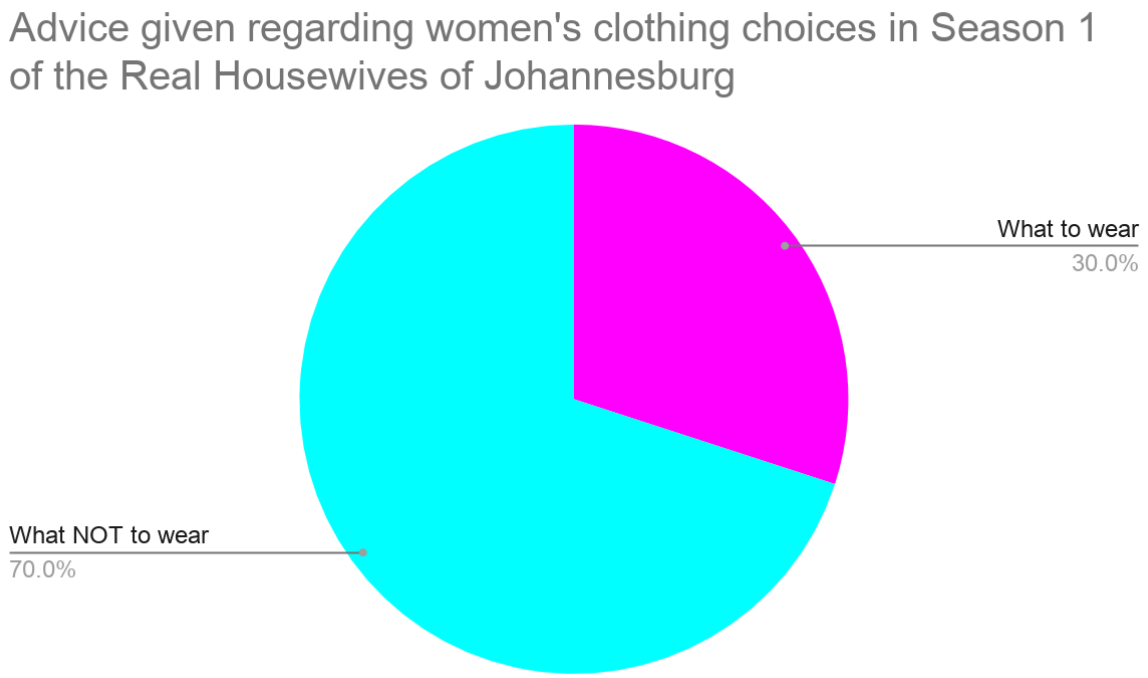


Figure 13: Advice on Women's Clothing in Season One of The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

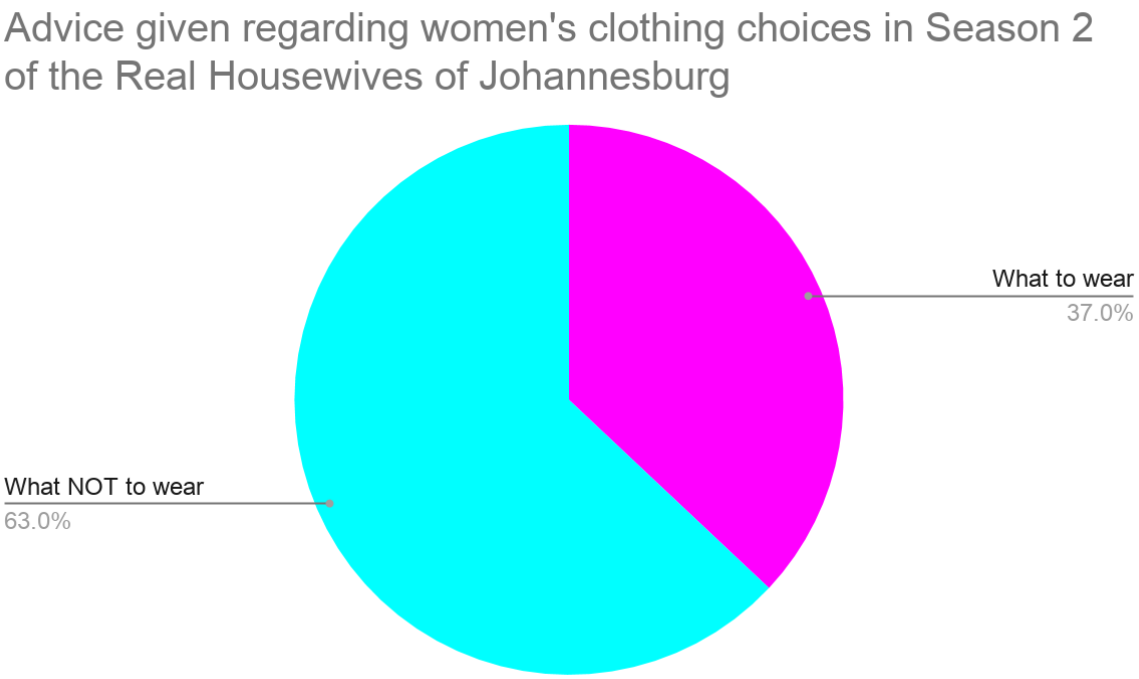


Figure 14: Advice on Women's Clothing in Season Two of The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

One of the more notable differences between Season One and Season Two in terms of its event dress codes, is the latter's propensity towards 'themed' events. In Season One, with the exception of the ill-fated pyjama parties, dress up events were few and far between – so much so that when Evodia suggested they wait to hear about the theme of Brinnette's wedding before purchasing dresses for the event, Christall scoffed "how many people have themes for weddings? How old are you, like 12-years-old?" (Season One, Episode Nine: Shopping Spree Showdown). By contrast, Season Two featured a fancy-dress party in the form of Lebo's '60s Icons' party, which required the guests to source outfits from costume shops. Additionally, while not dress up parties in the sense that they were a celebration of culture, Tarina hosted an Indian dinner party, to which most of the ladies dressed up in "honour" (Season Two, Episode Two) of the occasion, and Lethabo an "African-themed lunch" (Season Two, Episode Eleven), which also saw the women suitably attired in a variety of animal print and shweshwe fabrics.

Lethabo's African-themed affair was unique in that each guest dressed accordingly, with Mpumi and Tarina both in leopard print ensembles, Brinnette in the dress she wore ahead of her traditional

wedding in the previous season, and Lebo, Lethabo and her friend Refilwe adorned themselves in shweshwe-print outfits. However, the other two events didn't fare as well in terms of dress code.

The Indian dinner, which took place at The Royal India restaurant in Sandton, saw Tarina, Mpumi, Lebo and Lethabo wear different forms of traditional Indian dress. Notably absent from those who did "honour the theme" (Season Two, Episode Two), were "the OGs" (Season Two, Episode Two) – Brinnette and Christall. However, while Brinnette joked that she must have "missed the memo" (Season Two, Episode Two) regarding the dress code, Christall acknowledged her faux pas on arrival, sheepishly sharing through her confessional that, "I'm seeing that Tarina is actually in a very traditional dress...anyway, I'm feeling quite bad now, and I just keep quiet" (Season Two, Episode Two).

Lebo's '60s Icons' party also led to some confusion among the ladies in attendance. This time, the only guest who failed to dress according to theme was Brinnette, who first explained that she had decided to dress "as a white girl" (Season Two, Episode Two), therefore settling on Madonna, before mentioning that she also thought she could pass for "Storm from the Avengers" (Season Two, Episode Six). In a spa day subsequent to the party, Mpumi and Lethabo joke about the mishap in a debrief, with Lethabo chiming "she wore a blonde wig and thought that's a 60s icon. Imagine" (Season Two, Episode Six), and Mpumi concluding that "she just came as herself: a confused Brinnette" (Season Two, Episode Six).

Although Brinnette drew most of the ire of her cast mates at the 60s icons party, at the same event, Lebo (who dressed as Miriam Makeba) also took aim at Lethabo for donning her signature blonde wig while dressed as Cher. Postulating that she should have "committed to the theme" (Season Two, Episode Six), Lebo shared with the audience that dress-up parties call for one to "get out of your comfort zone" (Season Two, Episode Six). Christall (who arrived dressed as Marilyn Monroe), meanwhile, declared that none of the other women "took the time" (Season Two, Episode Six) to respect the theme – erroneously suggesting that Cher, Miriam Makeba, Tina Turner and Brigitte Bardot (Tarina's choice in icon) were not "from that era" (Season Two, Episode Six).

In some ways, it could be argued that the dress up parties in Season Two are a direct commentary on the previous season's seriousness about dress codes. The very fact that the women are critical of one another's fancy dress appears to satirize one of the main thrusts of what Season One aimed to say about Johannesburg: that it was a city where one had to dress to impress and uphold "standards" at all costs. Surely, in the first episode of the second season, Lethabo cackles through her confessionals at the residents' regular use of "fake fur" (Season Two, Episode One), highlighting the almost comical nature of the trend in the city.

However, even though the themed events allowed for more playful criticism between the cast of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the second season nevertheless reminded viewers of the importance of dressing well and respecting a theme in the city. Because of this, there was commentary once again on what *not* to wear if one is to be respectful of the event they find themselves at, and everyone in attendance.

At Brinnette's 40th birthday party, Tarina found herself in the hot seat for wearing something clearly deemed inappropriate by Mpumi: a light grey, tulle skirt and jersey combination. After seeing the businesswoman enter the venue, Mpumi curtly narrates, "Tarina walks in and she's wearing a jersey" (Season Two, Episode 11). After pausing for a moment, one eyebrow raised, nostrils flared and lips pursed, she reiterates: "a jersey" (Season Two, Episode 11). Despite the culprit subsequently clarifying that it was not just any jersey, but a *Dior* jersey, Mpumi remains unimpressed. Instead, with widened eyes and a scolding expression, she once again scoffs "either way, it's a jersey!" (Season Two, Episode 11). The note here is interesting, as it demonstrates that high-end or luxury fashion are no substitute for respecting a formal dress code. Being able to "look the part" (Season Two, Episode Five)–a note made by Brinnette earlier in the season, ahead of the Lux Empire event–is paramount, and no amount of branding will change a jersey into an evening gown. If one is to respect their host, their fellow guests and the event itself, this is a rule to which one must adhere.

Almost ironically, yet entirely indicative of the paradoxes that go hand-in-hand with dressing 'appropriately' in Johannesburg, despite Brinnette being the one to use the words "look the part" (Season Two, Episode Five), while hosting her 'Bye to Be' party, she herself became the target of not heeding her own advice. Despite wearing a black, off-shoulder, calf-length and fitted dress with fringe detailing and a blue belt, not everyone was impressed by their hostess's attire. Quite the contrary, Lebo took to her confessional to chuckle that the dress was a "40-year-old's outfit. It's not a 'I'm hosting, I'm the host and I have arrived...You know, when you host something you prepare for it" (Season Two, Episode One). Here, Brinnette is deemed not to have gone far enough in establishing her position as the hostess through her dress – although what would qualify as 'enough' isn't exactly clear.

It would be remiss not to point out the parallels between this and the discussions that erupted in response to Evodia's bachelorette party outfit. Where, as a guest, Evodia's hypersexual outfit was considered 'too much', Brinnette's dress was dubbed 'too little'. This reiteration of the too-sexy-or-not-sexy-enough dichotomy might raise the concern that there is no explicit 'right' way to dress for a high society Johannesburg party. However, one might also consider that an indication in and of itself: in the City of Gold, the "standards" are high, but they are undefined. As such, one is in constant danger of criticism. One's best hope is to rely on their "girlfriends" (Winch, 2013), and even then, they're still not guaranteed to be spared.

To suggest that the intensity with which the women critique one another's fashion choices is an indication of campness would not be a far-fetched idea. In fact, one could argue that the vociferousness with which the ladies echo their varied 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' of appropriate, respectable fashion choices seems at times to emphasize the notion that, under patriarchal (and, thus, postfeminist) reasoning, women simply cannot win. The idea that the expectations of women have set them up for failure is a popular idea, so much so that in 2020, Camile Rainville's poem on the subject, 'Be a Lady They Said' was recited by actress and former star of Sex and the City, Cynthia Nixon in a YouTube video for *Girls. Girls. Girls. Magazine* – a video which, at the time of writing, had more than half a million views on the original YouTube channel (*Girls. Girls. Girls. Magazine*, 2020), and more than nine million on the director's Vimeo channel (McLean, 2020).

Through the *Real Housewives*' obsessive attention to detail in matters pertaining to appropriate dress, then, it might be thought that the cast mirror these impossible expectations. However, given what has been said regarding the series' camp nature, it should go without saying that this takes on a decidedly ironic tone. Similar to Hill's (2010: 166) consideration of *Desperate Housewives* as a "knowing, yet self-reflexive examination of women in contemporary society", the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* call attention to the ridiculous 'standards' to which women in the city (and the world, as a whole) are held, through "hyperbole, exaggeration, parody or irony" (Richardson, 2006: 159). In particular, Evodia's stance on 'standards' caricatures ideas of how wealthy women are expected to conduct themselves – even though, as Lee and Moscowitz (2013: 66) put forth, the women featured in the franchise are set up to be "post-feminist failures".

"As a host", "As a guest": who will navigate the party best?

While dress is shown to be an important marker of respect to one's hostess and fellow guests, it is only one piece of the puzzle. Given what has already been said of events in the series being thought of as something of a 'party politik', the navigation of an event in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* is nothing short of an art form. As such, it should come as no surprise that how one should behave in order to be considered gracious (both as a guest and as a hostess) is a readily mentioned topic in the programme. Across both seasons, there are 129 references to how one should or should not behave at events, as a guest or hostess. Within that figure, the trend of a somewhat less critical Season Two surfaced once again, with the first season displaying 67 total mentions, and Season Two only 52. However, once again, the number of references under the 'what not to do' category far exceeded 'what to do', and this time, the second season showed a much wider disparity.

In Season One of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, 73% of all references to ideal guest and hostess behaviour spoke to how guests should *not* conduct themselves at an event. While the total number of references to guest behaviour was significantly lower in Season Two, guest conduct was once again referred to most commonly in terms of how it should not be performed, with 81% of the mentions addressing this.

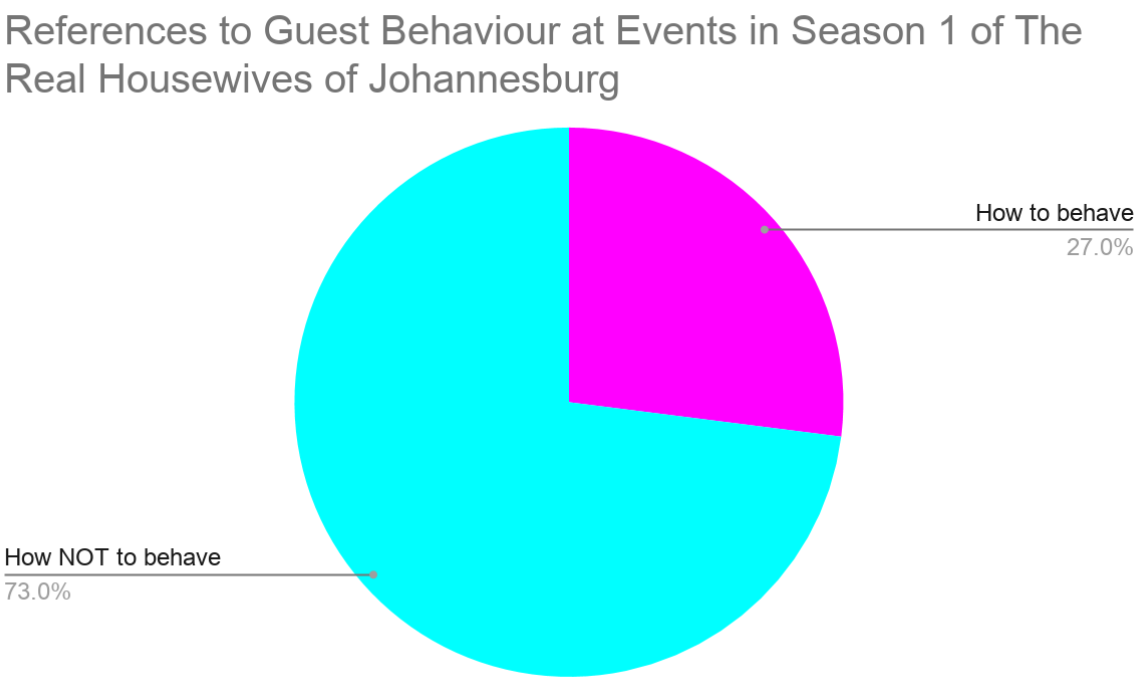


Figure 15: References to Guest Behaviour in Season One of The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

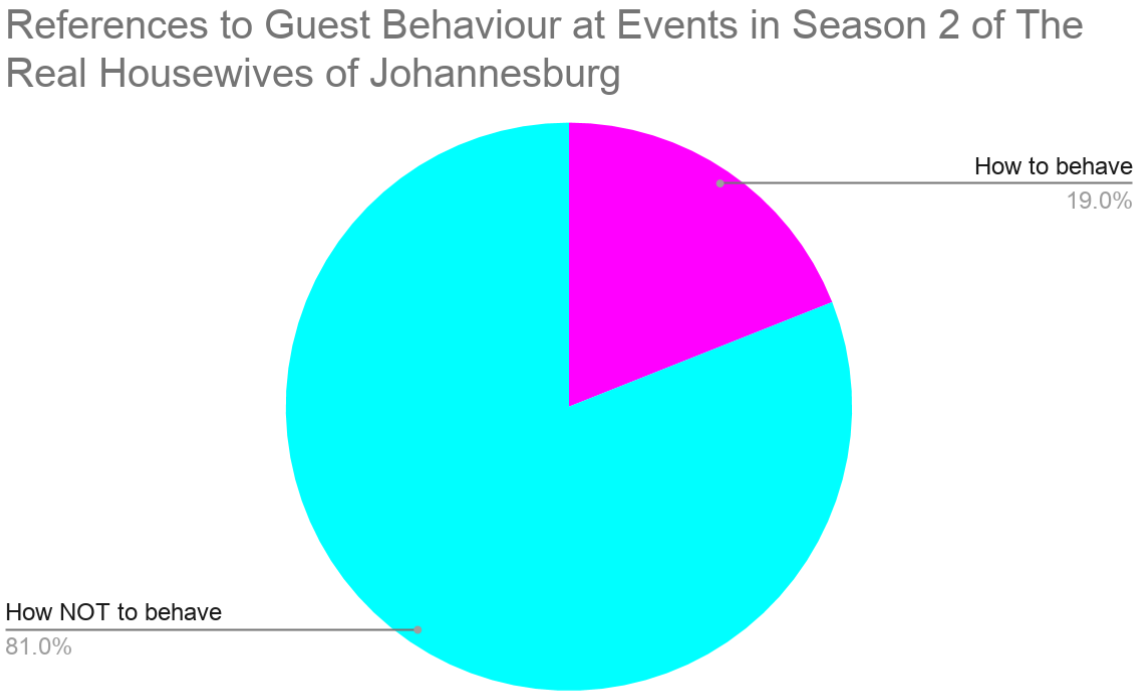


Figure 16: References to Guest Behaviour in Season Two of The Real Housewives of Johannesburg

Given what has been said regarding dressing as a sign of 'respect' to one's host, it is unsurprising that, in both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, the monitoring of the women's behaviour is typically talked about in relation to the respect paid to one's host and the other guests. Across both seasons, of the references to how guests should not behave at events, several spoke directly to the necessity for ladies to be "respectful" when visiting one another's homes. In Season One, Lendy shared feeling disappointed by Christall and Evodia getting into a verbal altercation over an argument at Christall's dinner party in the previous episode against the backdrop of her braai. Evodia concurred that the behaviour was inappropriate, noting "I didn't want to fight at Lendy's place, I need to respect these ladies' houses" (Season One, Episode Four: Apology Gone Wrong). Similarly, in Season Two, an argument breaks out between Mpumi and Brinnette when the two spar over Brinnette's sleeping arrangements in the holiday home booked by Christall ahead of the Durban July. After Mpumi suggests Brinnette sleep in "the maid's quarters" (Season Two, Episode Seven), she mentions that there are no rooms for her (while Lethabo agrees that all the hotel rooms in the city were booked) (Season Two, Episode Seven). In response, Brinnette expresses the impropriety of making decisions or raising arguments while in another person's home, noting "that time you're a guest in this house", to which Mpumi replies "so are you" (Season Two, Episode Seven), thereby articulating that Brinnette shouldn't attempt to stamp her authority either. Likewise, in the episode highlighting Lethabo's African dinner party, Mpumi jokes that, even though she knows where to find drinks for herself and the other ladies while they wait awkwardly downstairs, with no hostess in sight, "I don't want to intrude...tonight I'm here as a guest, so I must behave" (Season Two, Episode 11).

There is also an expectation on the part of the hostess to treat her guests in the appropriate manner. Just as guests are expected to be on their best behaviour in social settings (indeed, even Lebo's 'Worst Behaviour'-themed birthday trip garnered the comment, "the theme was 'Worst Behaviour', not 'Bad Behaviour'" [Season Two, Episode Three] after the boat ride descends into chaos), so are hostesses required to honour their invitees. This rationing of behaviour begins in the very first episode of Season One, when Mercy complains that Brinnette should have

accommodated her vegan diet[4] at her traditional wedding, especially since she was a guest. Likewise, once Evodia returns to Hartbeespoort after Naledi's mother's birthday party, she shares that even though Mercy could not make the trip when she fell ill unexpectedly (in the subsequent episode, it was revealed that she got sick after eating all the leftover food from her first vegan party, attended only by Christall), she would have 'expected' (Season One, Episode Three: Dinner from Hell) her daughter to be catered for. In sticking with the theme of catering, Christall's dinner party also draws the ire of a guest when Brinnette asserts that she felt disrespected by the buffet-style setup, especially since she and the other guests had been promised to see "what it means to host" (Season One, Episode Three: Dinner from Hell). Mpumi's dinner, by contrast, became the site of Brinnette's newfound respect for the host, with the latter explaining that she was seeing Mpumi in her element, as "someone else's wife" and mother (Season Two, Episode 10). However, the respect dwindled somewhat when Mpumi joked that after dessert everyone could "fuck off" (Season Two, Episode 10) – a joke not well received by Brinnette. Despite her otherwise stellar hosting skills, with just one joke, Mpumi falls short of "hosting a successful dinner party" (Gill, 2007: 155), and thus, it is once again time to call in the girlfriends.

What is interesting in each of these examples is that while the *Real Housewives'* criticisms of one another are grounded in upholding propriety in a variety of social settings, the way in which they speak to each other hints at the exact opposite. Their open hostility towards one another surely weakens their claims to notions of traditional social graces and transgresses patriarchal expectations of how women 'should' or 'should not' carry themselves. In a sense, this speaks to Lee and Moscowitz's (2013) observations that outwardly displays of emotion in the *Real Housewives* franchise as a whole serve as a subversion of patriarchal gender norms. Far from being the demure house guest traditional etiquette guidelines would hope to address, the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* monitor their peers' behaviour through decidedly ironic means. Despite their rationing of each other's behaviour serving to uphold patriarchal structures, the manner in which they do this entirely undermines the traditional expectations of 'respectable' women. The criticisms thus represent a tension between empowerment and subversion. Redolent

[4] Unfortunately for Mercy, despite her requests there were no vegan offerings at the wedding. This culminated in Mercy scoffing that she brought a lunchbox as backup, and felt no qualms about opening it at the table.

of sexist standards, yet representative of small victories, the critical tone with which the *Real Housewives* address their co-stars is postfeminism in action.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but it is worth noting that the small 'victory' of being able to criticize one's peers is not necessarily a marker of genuine liberation. Quite the contrary, as Gill (2007) postulates, postfeminism is merely an internalization of patriarchy, meaning the same microaggressions once levelled by patriarchal figures are now enacted by women against their peers. However, it does speak to the postfeminist hallmark of individualism (Gill, 2007). By airing their criticisms of one another, each of the *Housewives* is able to distance herself from the social 'wrong' committed. Their right, as individuals, to critique their peers is upheld, and ultimately, solidarity within the "sisterhood" (Season One, Episode 13: Reunion Part 1 of 2) is pushed aside.

Glocal Elements in the Events of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

While the commentary regarding events and how they 'should' be hosted and attended points to the value respectability holds in a uniquely Johannesburg context, the prevalence of events themselves is not unique to the Johannesburg-based text. Quite the contrary, the *Real Housewives* franchise as a whole is replete with parties, from Potomac to New York City. As noted at the start of this section, these events play a logistical role in that they allow the cast to be filmed together and create storylines. However, the local "flavour" promised by the series isn't only shown through what the discussions surrounding events point to (in this case, respectability). In fact, one of the key ways in which the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* sets itself apart from its international contemporaries and positions itself as a distinctively Johannesburg-based version of the franchise is through the *type* of event portrayed.

Across both seasons of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, there are a number of events held which speak directly to the "peculiar local circumstances" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018: 338) of the South African city and its residents. In fact, there are 4 events in particular which are expressly intended to shine a light on the hostess's cultural heritage. These include Brinnette's traditional

wedding and Naledi's mother's birthday party in Botswana (which, while Naledi explains isn't entirely traditional, is intended to stay "as authentic and traditional as possible" [Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life]) in Season One, and Tarina's and Lethabo's respective Indian and African dinners in Season Two. A further two, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this section, were not events in the traditional sense, but experiences nonetheless intended to highlight local cultures, and came in the form of Brinnette's organized trip to Soweto (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster), and Lethabo's home visit to Christall, which saw her bring a plate of 'Seven Colours' as a peace offering after their explosive fight in the Cape Town harbour. In each of the events mentioned, there are allusions made to the function's cultural aspect, and sometimes even discussions of what makes them unique to the Johannesburg, South African and even Southern African experience.

Ahead of Brinnette's traditional wedding in the programme's premiere episode, viewers bear witness to the bride and her close family members dancing outside her family home. The bride has on a pink, blue, white and yellow peplum dress with a matching doek, and shares in a confessional that she is "wearing Sepedi" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) in reference to the dress's inextricable link to culture. From there, she narrates the gift-giving ceremony before the wedding itself, and explains that, as the new wife, she was instructed by the elders to become the person who "brings order" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) to her new family. During montage footage of the ceremony, viewers are shown images of hers' and her husband's family members singing and presenting one another with blankets. Brinnette also shares with the audience that, while receiving advice from the elders on her new role, she had been given a new name by her in-laws – Mmabatho – suggesting that such is the custom at a traditional wedding. Prior to the main event, Brinnette also elaborates on the menu, sharing that, despite Mercy's requests to the contrary, there would be meat served, in line with the fact that this was a traditional wedding. Indeed, after being asked by Mercy to accommodate her vegan diet, Brinnette elaborates: "babe, it's a traditional wedding! In our tradition, do you know what we eat? There's meat. Black people love meat!" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life).



Figure 17: Footage from Brinnette's traditional wedding (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life).

For the programme's second cultural event, Naledi's mother's birthday, the cast is taken to rural Botswana, and after Brinnette arrives to help set up, viewers are invited into Naledi's backyard to witness the preparations. While there, there are several visual references to regionally understood practises, such as greeting the elders and shaking hands with one hand placed over the opposite forearm (see Figure 18). The audience is also shown several massive three-legged pots, the contents of which Brinnette and Naledi both attempt to stir, in order to emulate the deftness shown by Naledi's aunts. During the festivities of the event itself, Evodia marvels at the authenticity of the function, and comments on Naledi's distinct heritage, which she can deduce from "the way she speaks Setswana so fluently" (Season One, Episode Two, The Real Private Jet) in her speech.



Figure 18: Footage of Brinnette greeting the elders at Naledi's mother's home (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet).



Figure 19: Footage of the women at Lethabo's African dinner (Season Two, Episode 11)



Figure 20: Footage of the ladies at Tarina's Indian dinner (Season Two, Episode Two)

The African dinner hosted in Lethabo's home also strives at creating as 'authentic' an experience as possible, with Lethabo and Mpumi even travelling to the Kwa Mai Mai market to buy "traditional Zulu attire" (Season Two, Episode 11) and a calabash for umqombothi ahead of the festivities. The event called for each of the women to dress in 'African' attire, and saw Tarina and Mpumi arrive in leopard print, while Brinnette arrives in the dress she wore to the gift exchanging ceremony from her wedding the previous season, and Lebo, the hostess and her friend Natasha wear various fashions in shweshwe print. The dinner itself opens with Mpumi ululating in response to Lethabo thanking her guests for coming and "looking all African" (Season Two, Episode 11). It also featured a variety of traditional South African foods, including Mashonja, or Mopane worms, and a toast, led by Mpumi and Tarina: "here's to being an African woman. May we know them, may we be them...may we reward them, appreciate them, be inspired by them…" (Season Two, Episode 11).

Meanwhile, Tarina's Indian dinner, which began with a confessional of Tarina sharing that she was a "proudly Indian girl" (Season Two, Episode Two), served as a way for her to "entrench my very existence as an Indian girl" (Season Two, Episode Two) on the group. The menu for the evening featured an array of Indian foods, and the hostess took a few moments to teach the group Hindi phrases. Tarina also educated the group on the different types of Indian dress, stating that hers was "Anarkali" (Season Two, Episode 11) and explaining the difference between a Sari and a "Chaniya Choli" (Season Two, Episode 11). She also explained that, while she purchased her own dresses in India, they could be easily sourced in South Africa, emphasizing the point to Brinnette, who hadn't seen them in the country. At one point in the evening, she also begins a discussion around the importance of understanding and respecting the different cultures in South Africa, referencing the country's theorization as a "Rainbow Nation" (Season Two, Episode Two) with a multitude of religions, cultures, and traditions (Guy, 2004; Baines, 1998; Evans, 2010).

The shared theme across each of the events mentioned above is a desire on the part of the hostess to teach their guests (and thus the audience) about their culture – something of a necessity in a 'rainbow nation', whose theorization as such was grounded in the goal of finding common ground in a society previously marred by division (Baines, 1998; Beavon, 2000; Guy, 2004; Evans, 2010). This will be discussed more in-depth later in this section.

For the audience familiar with regional practises, like showing respect by shaking hands in a specific way, these are demonstrated visually and not always elaborated upon. Instead, these are presented as something of a 'given', which necessitates local knowledge on the part of the viewer. However, the presentation of certain other traditions (like the narration of the gift-giving ceremony ahead of a traditional wedding or the practise of wearing a Sari) is a means for the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* to open up about what makes their heritage unique.

In line with this, as noted above, there were two notable additional teachable cultural moments in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* that weren't necessarily events in the traditional sense, but nevertheless aimed at highlighting "peculiarly local circumstances" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018:

338) of the city and its surrounds. These came in the form of Brinnette's excursion to Soweto in Season One, and Lethabo's peace offering of Seven Colours in Season Two.

Brinnette's outing saw the spa owner organize a tuk-tuk tour of a section of Soweto embarking from Lebo's Backpackers, and subsequent lunch at Sakhumzi on Vilakazi Street. Through a confessional, Brinnette explained that the trip was specifically organized after she learned that Christall had never been – meaning a tour of the township was in order. Taken aback by the fact that she knew a South African resident who had not been to Soweto, Brinnette used the excursion to educate Christall on Soweto, its culture, and "our traditional dishes" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster), noting that her guest had not even heard of half of them before. It is notable that while 'township tours' are often criticized for voyeurism (Butler, 2010) the treatment of the excursion by the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* did not provide a look at the socioeconomic struggles faced by residents of Soweto. Quite the contrary, there are a number of factors which suggest that Sakhumzi and its Orlando West surrounds are something of a playground for elites. This is evidenced by the luxury vehicles parked outside the restaurant, as well as the nonchalance with which Evodia and Athania enter the establishment wearing head-to-toe Gucci ensembles (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). In fact, despite the viewers' knowledge that Christall has never experienced the space before (which leads to a brief discussion about Soweto and its culture), the event might have taken place anywhere else in the city.

Lethabo's Seven Colours storyline had a similar starting point. During the course of Mpumi's 'cheese, chocolate and wine' evening at Kream Brooklyn, the ladies played a game of "no sip, no shade" (Season Two, Episode Four), which saw Sam confused by the statement, "never have I ever cooked Seven Colours" (Season Two, Episode Four). After Sam explains that she had never heard of the dish before, let alone cooked it, the rest of the group turned to Christall to see if she knew what it was. When it transpired that she did not, Sam's and Christall's shared confusion garnered the response "shame, white people" (Season Two, Episode Four) from Mpumi, and led to Lethabo deciding to right the wrong. In the following episode, she arrives at Christall's Kyalami

home with a home-cooked Seven Colours, with the express intention of being able to "introduce" (Season Two, Episode Five) her fellow housewife to the dish.

The Seven Colours storyline is interesting in itself because, as with the greeting displayed at Naledi's mother's birthday party, no real explanation of the dish is given. This is somewhat surprising, in light of the rest of the cast's surprised reaction to Christall's and Sam's admission. Nevertheless, despite Lethabo using her experience with the meal to "introduce" (Season Two, Episode Five) a cast mate to the dish, viewers are not afforded a description aside from some brief visuals. From these, viewers may be able to deduce that the meal includes meat, alongside an array of vegetables. However, there is no close-up of the food, and the cameras place more attention on Lethabo and Mpumi bringing the meal into the house than the meal itself. Short of gazing intently at Christall's, Mpumi's or Lethabo's plates as they eat together, ascertaining what Seven Colours consists of comes down to a guess, and viewers may be able to establish that pumpkin, beetroot and potatoes are present on each plate. However, the lack of visual representation is evidence that the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* viewer is expected to have an understanding of each component of the dish on their own. Likewise, during the Soweto day trip, when Brinnette shares that Christall "had no clue about half of" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster) the traditional foods on offer at Sakhumzi, she gives no further explanation on what those foods are, either. Again, the audience is given a brief glimpse of the buffet, with the camera giving a mere glance at what is on offer. There is again an expectation that the viewer will recognize elements of the display based on their own knowledge – and if they don't see it visually, they will have an idea from Brinnette's description of "our traditional dishes" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster).

These 'expectations' speak to the distinct South African-ness of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg.* While the inclusion of cultural dishes and practises may not form one of the major foundations of the overall narrative, they nonetheless speak to the local applicability of the franchise. Moreover, the fact that these locally understood inclusions are treated with an air of nonchalance hints at the idea that the series should be taken for granted as a distinctly South

African text. The programming demonstrates the teaching of culture to one another, rather than the culture itself, because the viewer is already familiar with it.

How cultural events highlight the politics of belonging in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*

In each of the instances described above, a common theme of bonding over cultural diversity rises to the fore, and in the case of the Seven Colours storyline, viewers are shown how sharing cultural practises can be a way to ease tensions. The Seven Colours storyline is also interesting when drawing back on the brief note made earlier of South Africa as a 'Rainbow Nation[5]'. As was noted, South Africa was first theorized as the 'Rainbow Nation' in the wake of the end of apartheid (Baines, 1998; Beavon, 2000; Guy, 2004; Evans, 2010), with Archbishop Desmond Tutu largely credited for the term. It is notable that while the phrase immediately conjures up the visual idea of a multitude of races, there were also religious underpinnings to the choice in words (Baines, 1998; Evans, 2010). Indeed, the 'rainbow' in question speaks specifically to the Biblical story of Noah's Ark, demonstrating a real-life interpretation of the calm after the storm. In the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, Lethabo's Seven Colours is a literal embodiment of Rainbow Nationalism. In addition to the meal being the catalyst for Lethabo and Christall's truce, given that a rainbow consists of seven colours, the gesture is essentially a gastronomical example of how sharing in one another's cultures is the key to ending all conflicts in a South African setting.

The sharing of cultures between the cast members paints a picture of what it looks like when wealthy Johannesburg residents of all cultural, racial and religious backgrounds come together. In this way, it demonstrates that the city is a melting pot where the fire that melts is wealth. However, it would be remiss not to mention that there are some instances where the cultural components of social life in the City of Gold point to the great gaps which have yet to be spanned. Indeed, there are a number of references to the diverse cast getting lost in translation. One such example is the issue raised when Lethabo fails to greet Mpho, Bridgette, Brinnette and her friend David at Christall's "Blondes and Billionaires" (Season Two, Episode Eight) party. Through a confessional,

[5] The idea of a Rainbow Nation is not without its detractors. Indeed, as noted by Montle (2020), it is often criticized for being overly idealistic without enacting necessary social reforms to heal the wounds of the past.

Mpho shared having taken umbrage to Lethabo's lack of greeting, explaining that in Tswana culture, "you're supposed to, when you come into a room of people, you come and greet them" (Season Two, Episode Eight). This was a topic discussed in the following episode, when Mpho attempts to explain to Christall that, from a cultural perspective, not greeting is a snub in itself. When Christall reasons that Lethabo was sick at the time and her not greeting was as a result of feeling unwell, Bridgette explains to Mpho, "she wouldn't understand, she's not a Black person" (Season Two, Episode Nine). Viewers are thus shown not only a distinctly local phenomenon in the form of the importance of greeting, but also alerted to the continued barriers to understanding one another, which are regularly informed by race.

Christall, in particular, is regularly used as an example of someone who has a lack of intercultural understanding. This is not only in terms of her insensitive commentary (such as using the phrase "you people" [Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet; Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster]), but also for her lack of exposure to South African cultures other than her own. In addition to not having visited Soweto, Christall has also never been to a traditional wedding, therefore describing Brinnette's as a "once in a lifetime experience" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) while on the phone with Lendy, and "a wedding like no other" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) to her husband, Eddie. As evidenced above, Christall also has very little experience with traditional South African foods – sharing that she was surprised at how "Westernized" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life) the food was at Brinnette's wedding and declaring it "better than I thought by a million miles" (Season One, Episode One: Welcome to the Good Life). In another episode, when at Naledi's mother's birthday, Christall also remarks on how "tolerant" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet) she has been of the "different types of food" (Season One, Episode Two: The Real Private Jet) she's had to encounter since arriving in Botswana for the event.

These tensions do not go unspoken, so when the cast of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg* decide to tackle their issues with one another at Evodia's pyjama party at Fairlawns, Christall speaks directly to feeling like "the odd one out" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep) in the group. She further suggests that the reason she feels that way is because she is "the

only white chick" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep) in the group. This is met with a strong reaction from the rest of the cast, Brinnette even pointing out that "Naledi's father is white, so that makes her half white. Lendy's husband is white, so their kids would be half Black, and half white" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep). Brinnette further asserts her point by taking to her confessional to note "girl, you are not being attacked because you are white and we are Black, you are being attacked because whatever is coming out of your mouth is wrong!" (Season One, Episode Seven: Still Water Run Deep). However, through the narratives of *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, there are times when she is nonetheless framed as somewhat out of place in the series. Nowhere is this more evident than in the episode which documents her first trip to Soweto, when Brinnette explains that she organized the trip because Christall "can't be *living* [emphasis my own] in South Africa and you've never been to Soweto" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). Brinnette's choice of words is interesting because it speaks once again to the earlier note of the politics of belonging in Johannesburg. Christall is not referred to as a 'South African', but rather as someone "living" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster) in the country, someone passing through.

However, Brinnette is not alone in her positioning of Christall as something of an outsider – Christall does it, too. This is evidenced by her comments about the South African national anthem, Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, when she admits knowing "a little bit of it, not the whole song" (Season One, Episode Six: Fashion Show Disaster). It is also shown through her comment when meeting with South African rapper, Gigi Lamayne, which sees Christall ask for advice on breaking into the South African music industry, noting that at present, "everything about me screams, 'American!'" (Season Two, Episode Six).

However, given what has already been said regarding Christall's easy accessibility to high-end consumption in the city, it would be wrong to suggest that she was a complete outsider in Johannesburg. Rather, she inhabits something of a contradiction: she is both a part of Johannesburg society and benefits from all it has to offer, and simultaneously able to distinguish herself from the rest of its residents.

With that said, Christall is not the only one who is seemingly distanced from the rest of the city's residents. Tarina, too, is positioned as something of an outsider when she hosts her Indian dinner party. Here, after criticizing Brinnette and Christall for not having a closer understanding of Diwali and Eid, she asks the former how she knew about Lent, while they don't know about the respective Hindu and Muslim observances. Brinnette responds "because you are living in our country, with our calendar, yes? No?" (Season Two, Episode Two). Tarina, who in another episode emphasizes being "proudly South African" (Season Two, Episode Six) then re-asserts the importance of understanding and respecting other cultures, in line with the ideas of a "Rainbow Nation" (Season Two, Episode Two).

While it may be tempting to suggest that Christall's and Tarina's seeming ability to both inhabit Johannesburg while not being thought of as true Johannesburgers comes down to race (being White and Indian in a predominantly Black ensemble cast), as has been mentioned more than once in this paper, the reality is not that clear cut. On the contrary, many of the other ladies' validity as 'Johannesburgers' is questioned by both their cast mates and themselves. For example, when Mpho is first introduced to the audience, she shares how her upbringing as the adopted, Botswana-born daughter of a White, British couple impacted her identity throughout the years. As she shares in a confessional, "having been adopted, I've had to go through so many phases where I was accepted by some people but not accepted by others" (Season Two, Episode Six). In the same breath, Mpho differentiates herself from the rest of the cast by asserting that she uses her wealth in a way that is different to most South Africans, decrying the fact that "wealth in South Africa, from what I've gathered, is a material thing...I don't believe in material things" (Season Two, Episode Six). She also separates herself through her tagline, in which she asserts, "you say Johannesburg, I say the world" (Season Two, Title Sequence).

Lethabo, too, is also theorized as 'different' from the group. This is made clear in the Season Two finale, when Lebo threatens to sue her to the extent that she will end up back "in the shack you came from" (Season Two, Episode 14) in Seshego, Limpopo. In yet another example (albeit a more jovial one), Lethabo is also theorized as an outsider of sorts when she visits the Kwa Mai Mai market with Mpumi. Here, Mpumi jokes that her shopping partner would need to "learn Zulu

by force" (Season Two, Episode Seven), playfully taunting that she would "show this Pedi girl how it's done" (Season Two, Episode Seven) while dancing with a decorative iwisa, or knobkierie.

However, perhaps the most interesting example of a cast member being 'othered' comes in the form of Brinnette. While speaking to Tarina's existence as an outsider "living in our country, with our calendar" (Season Two, Episode Two), Brinnette is called out on her failure to uphold the idea of a 'Rainbow Nation'. In addition to Tarina's response, Brinnette is also criticized for her lack of knowledge about Diwali and Eid by Mpumi, who quips: "girl, it's in the calendar! Don't be ignorant, educate yourself" (Season Two, Episode Two).

Johannesburg: A City of Multiple Belongings

As exemplified above, the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* makes regular mention of who 'belongs' in the space, and who does not. What is interesting is that there doesn't seem to be a singular idea of who belongs in the space. Thanks to the city's foundations in white supremacy, Christall may be thought of as someone who 'belongs', but as demonstrated by her othering, that isn't always the case. Likewise, Lethabo may have a "name and a surname" (Season Two, Episode Three) recognized in Johannesburg, but her impoverished Limpopo background is used as a casual insult when she is faced with conflict. Brinnette may 'belong' in the sense that her religion has informed the country's calendar, but she doesn't know enough about the 'Rainbow Nation' to qualify as a true citizen. Likewise, Tarina may be a proudly South African Indian woman, but her existence outside of the country's supposedly dominant culture separates her, too. It would appear that, through the use of cultural events and attempts to foster greater diversity, viewers are forced to understand Johannesburg for the paradox that it is.

Concluding remarks

The Real Housewives of Johannesburg demonstrates that existing as a woman in the city is something of an art form. As this chapter has outlined, everything from appearance, to business endeavours, to fashion, to socializing are up for debate. In this way, the programme fits in with the

broader postfeminist expectations of how women should conduct themselves, no matter where in the world they reside. However, that is not to say that the programme negates entirely the local complexities of its setting.

The chapter began with a note on the prevalence of intense beauty regimens on the series, before arguing that the "work done" in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* most often points to the cast members' careers. It was explained that the value of work was intrinsically tied to not only empowerment, but also respectability, as having a successful career meant not needing to rely on transactional relationships. Instead of these types of relationships, it was observed that women should rely on one another and a circle of "girlfriends" (Winch, 2013) to improve their financial and social standing in the city. Foregoing relying on one's female friends for business advice in favour of being placed with a wealthy man was represented as the height of dishonour in a Johannesburg context, and as a result, a discussion of the respectability aspect ensued, which noted how two of the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* accused of being in transactional relationships were ridiculed – with one ultimately having the ability to break her poor behavioural pattern, and the other being condemned for her poor conduct.

This chapter also looked into the monitoring and surveillance of behaviour in social contexts in *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*, and once again, a theme of respectability came to the fore. However, this time the respectability aspect came in the form of respecting the other women in the cast. The chapter considered how dress and conduct could contribute to a housewife's respectability, and also noted the advisory element of the series' "girlfriends", whose omnipresence sought to counsel the women on how to be better guests and hosts. The respectability aspect in social contexts was also considered with regard to cultural practises, and the end of this chapter delved into how local elements were presented in the global text. Here, once again the idea of belonging in Johannesburg was touched upon, and the chapter ultimately concluded that, much like the messy overlaps between how women are advised to behave in every aspect of their lives, the very act of existing in Johannesburg is replete with intricacies. Much like the postfeminist prerequisite for constant improvement, Johannesburg is shown to require its residents to constantly and consistently monitor their belonging in the City of Gold.

Chapter Seven: Final Conclusions

Since the *Real Housewives of Orange County* first hit screens across the world in 2006, the franchise has grown from strength to strength, so much so that today it would be remiss to suggest the franchise was anything short of a pop culture phenomenon. One of the biggest indicators of this is the fact that, 15 years after its inception, the franchise shows few signs of slowing down. As Ramona Singer rightly pointed out, few scripted television programmes have enjoyed the longevity that the *Real Housewives* have (E! Red Carpet and Award Shows, 2018). Moreover, since the commencement of this research, the *Real Housewives of Salt Lake City* became the latest US addition to the franchise, the revival of the *Real Housewives of Miami* was confirmed, and in February 2021, Peacock (an NBC streaming platform) announced that a crossover series featuring housewives from various iterations of the franchise was in the works (Reslen and Dellatto, 2021). The long-term popularity of the franchise is fascinating, but more interesting to this research in particular is that in January 2021, a second South African version of the franchise, the *Real Housewives of Durban*, premiered on Showmax. This iteration of the franchise opened to an incredibly receptive audience, even breaking the streaming platform's records in its first week (DSTV, 2021; Engelbrecht, 2021; Selisho, 2021). As in other territories with a local presence of the show, the *Real Housewives* has established a strong foothold in the South African reality television market – and it all began with *The Real Housewives of Johannesburg*.

At the start of this research, I was intrigued by the number of similarities across the various iterations of the franchise. From similar subject matter, to an almost copied cast, the *Real Housewives* is replete with repetitions. In light of this, I was interested in finding out what set the first South African version of the franchise apart from its international counterparts – particularly in relation to its framing of consumption and femininity in Johannesburg. Using the aforementioned similarities as a starting point, this research made use of a quantitative content analysis to ascertain what it meant to be a wealthy woman in the City of Gold, and the results pointed to one glaring "peculiar local circumstance" (Johnson and Trelease, 2018: 338). That is, the intense focus placed on respectful – and *respectable* – conduct.

The necessity for respectability among Johannesburg's elites is demonstrated through the casts' consumptive practices, as well as the way in which they perform their femininity. In terms of consumption, this paper delved into why certain incidents involving cars (such as Evodia and Mercy's outrage at the thought of Brinnette using Athania's car) were escalated to the degree that they were. Here, existing literature was used to bolster the assertions that for Black South Africans, luxury car ownership is about more than driving a top of the range vehicle: far from being a means to move around the spread-out city and carve out a sense of belonging. It is a means to *social* mobility in a city shaped by racial oppression. The connection between consumption and respectability was also considered in relation to an incident which took place at Bellanita Boutique in the Michelangelo Mall in Sandton. This saw a fight break out between the boutique's owner, the Mogases and Christall, and spoke volumes of the continued barrier to entry to luxury consumption for Black South Africans in Johannesburg – even those who form the city's elites.

As it pertains to respectability and femininity, this paper looked into the paradox that is being a woman in Johannesburg, where one may lay claim to postfeminism in some ways, but where a particular performance of "sexual respectability" (Dosekun, 2015: 24) is a prerequisite for social acceptance. Given the prevalence of hypersexuality in the *Real Housewives* franchise (understandable, given the series' postfeminist leanings), the premier African iteration of the series occupied shaky ground. While hypersexuality continued to have a place in the series, sexual attention was seldom levelled at men, other than husbands or serious boyfriends. Instead, this attention was turned towards the women themselves: a pertinent example being Christall and Brinnette's 'Breakthrough' divorce party which saw the women cringe at the male strippers, and led to Christall chasing the men off the stage in order to let the other women pole dance (Season 2, Episode 10). Hypersexuality is thus condoned within a society where sexual respectability is highly valued, as long as traditional relationships are not under threat.

This research also looked into how respectability is attained through femininity in relation to how one carries oneself in a social setting. Understanding this through the lens of 'party politik', this research considered how women's conduct as a host or guest, and through appropriate dress, was heavily regimented in the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg*. Some of the examples touched upon spoke once again to the idea of sexual respectability in an otherwise postfeminist text, such as

Evodia's choice to don a 'little white dress' to Brinnette's bachelorette party (Season One, Episode Eight). Ideas of who 'may' or 'may not' dress in a sexually suggestive manner were also considered, and it was ultimately noted that there was no definitive rule for women's appropriate party dress – whether in terms of sexiness or not. Rather, they would be at risk of censure no matter what their choice in outfit.

After pondering the ways in which women are expected to behave at social events in Johannesburg society, this research concluded with a consideration of the 'glocal' elements in the series. Noting how events were used as a way to 'teach' one another about their culture, the paper finished with a note on belonging in Johannesburg, in spite of the tensions faced in terms of respectable consumption and performing the 'right' type of femininity.

The Real Housewives of Johannesburg fits in with many of the narratives of the franchise at large, and demonstrates many of the repeated elements of the global text. From its emphasis on consumption, to the omnipresent advisory tone which informs much of the show's narrative, the series is not unique in the sense of a distinctly South African text – but given that it is a part of a global franchise, that is hardly surprising. What sets the Johannesburg iteration apart from its peers is the urgency of respect in a fevered city that provides different senses of belonging and respectability to different women: even if they form the elite class.

Questions to consider for future research

As has been noted throughout this thesis, at the time of writing, little to no literature on the *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* exists. Thus, there is ample opportunity for further research on the premiere African rendition of the franchise. However, based on the findings of this thesis, one might be intrigued to look into how the idea of respectability *Real Housewives of Johannesburg* converses with similar themes in international iterations of the series. *The Real Housewives of Potomac*, for example, has a major focus on etiquette. Interestingly, *The Real Housewives of Potomac* is also a predominantly Black ensemble cast based in Washington, so it would be valuable to consider how ideas of race and respectability intersect, across borders. There is also an opportunity for researchers to consider the ways in which the 'Grande Dame' of Potomac, Karen

Huger, performs her role as the custodian of etiquette in her city, and how that compares with that of the 'Madame' of Johannesburg society, Evodia Mogase.

Also noted in this paper is the fact that, as of January 2021, South Africa has a new iteration of the franchise in the form of *The Real Housewives of Durban*. Having another local version of the series provides an exciting opportunity for further research, as researchers would be able to glean an idea of the intricacies of different South African cities. Do the performances of femininity in Johannesburg differ from those in Durban? How do the shopping sprees in Umhlanga compare with those of Melrose Arch? Only further research will tell.

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Appendix One

Coding Manual

The coding sheet is divided into 7 categories:

1. 'Advising' women's behaviour
2. 'Advising' women's appearance
3. Consumptive practices
4. Expenditure
5. Work
6. The city and South Africa
7. Race

In each of these categories, column 1 of the coding sheet provides a 'reference to' something. While watching each episode, the coder is required to note either 1 or 0 (where 1= reference is present in episode, and 0= reference is not present in episode). Where more than one reference is present in one episode, the respondent may list each of these references, with a semicolon in between (e.g.. if there are three references to a variable in one episode, the respondent would note 1; 1; 1.)

Clarification of sections

Category 1: 'Advising' women's behaviour

In category 1 of the coding sheet, each variable begins with 'reference to how women should/should not behave…' either 'in relation to' other women, men who are romantic partners, men who are NOT romantic partners; or 'as' guests and hostesses.

Given that this category is concerned with 'advice-giving', the coder should note any time they believe advice is being given regarding women's behaviour. The coder can look for the specific words "should/should not", but synonyms like "ought to/ ought not to", "have to", "need to/need not", "must/must now" and similar could also guide the coding process.

Category 2: 'Advising' women's appearance

2.1. Advising women's beauty regimens

Category 2.1 is concerned with beauty treatments.
'Invasive' refers to procedures involving surgery or 'injectables' (e.g. filler or botox).
'Non-invasive' refers to procedures in which no instrument or chemical is inserted into the body. This would include treatments like facials, manicures, pedicures and waxing.

In cases where the respondent is unsure if a procedure is invasive or not, they can indicate its presence in the 'neither invasive or non-invasive' rows.

2.2. 'Advising' women's fashion

Category 2.2 considers how fashion is spoken about in the programme. Coders are requested to look for references to how women 'should/should not' dress for themselves, around their peers, and at an event. Again, these references can be ascertained through wording like "should/should not", "have to", "don't", "need to/need not" and similar.

Category 3: Considering consumptive practises

3.1. Consumption of clothing

Coders are asked to indicate where they are informed verbally or shown visually the consumption of clothing at the following:

- Low-cost shops (such as Pep stores, Mr Price, Jet or informal markets)

- Middle market shops (such as Woolworths, Edgars, Cotton On and similar)
- Luxury fashion brands (such as Versace, Prada, Dior, Louis Vuitton)
- Specialized locations (such as couturiers)

3.2. Consumption of travel

In this subcategory, coders are asked to note when there is a reference to travel within Gauteng, within South Africa, within Southern Africa, and outside of Africa.

3.3. Consumption of transport

Coders are requested to note references to the type of transport owned, used or purchased in the following categories:

- Minibus
- Private car, entry level (such as Fiat Palio, Kia Picanto, Fiat Uno, Toyota Tazz and similar)
- Private car, mid-range (such as Toyota Hilux, Kia Sorrento, Hyundai Tucson and similar)
- Private car, luxury range (Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and similar)

3.4. Consumption of entertainment

In this subcategory, coders are tasked with recording instances of cast members visiting places of entertainment. These include:

- Places of cultural interest (such as historical landmarks);
- Restaurants (broken down into the categories of fast food; medium income restaurants, like Ocean Basket, Spur and Mugg and Bean; and high-income restaurants like Kream, Marble and The Codfather);
- Coders are also asked to note when the cast attend leisurely activities, such as spa visits

Coders are also requested to note when the cast attend ‘events’, such as:

- Concerts
- Parties (hosted by cast members and friends of the cast)
- Work functions (hosted by cast members and friends of the cast)

Category 4: Expenditure

Here, coders are asked to note when a cast member (or friend of the cast) make reference to having paid for something or mentioning an amount of money spent.

This category also asks respondents to note when a cast member uses their location as a means to justify their expenditure. For example, a cast member might say "that's not a bad price for Johannesburg", "that's a normal price in Johannesburg" or similar.

Category 5: Work

Coders are requested to note the number of times a cast member or a friend of the cast mention their profession.

Category 6: The City and South Africa

This section of the coding sheet requires coders to note references to Johannesburg.

- Verbal references to the city (positive, negative and neutral)
- Visual representation of the city (this refers to Greater Johannesburg and its surrounds. While footage of Pretoria may be included here, when the setting is overtly placed in Pretoria [for example, a cast member referencing the location] a note should be made in the coding sheet's 'comments' section)
- Visual representation of cars on the road in the city (entry level, mid-range, or luxury)
- Visual representation of the city in scenes showcasing consumption

Coders are also asked to note when being 'South African' or 'African' is mentioned, and when an African or South African culture is alluded to.

Category 7: Race

In the final category, coders are requested to note when race is mentioned explicitly.