

Married to the Narrative: Shared and Contrasting Ideologies in *Indian Matchmaking* and *Love is Blind*

Though both reality dating shows *Love is Blind* and *Indian Matchmaking* perpetuate distinct ideologies surrounding dating and marriage within the different societies they showcase, they share the greater, over-arching ideology that marriage is a main goal for everyone, necessary to achieve happiness and completion in one's life. *Love is Blind*, an American show, follows singles as they blindly speed date other contestants to find their "soul mate". It's a highly individual process that relies heavily on an interrogation between contestants who are looking for matches that check their boxes all without ever laying eyes on one another. Conversely, *Indian Matchmaking* follows Mumbai matchmaker Sima Taparia on her house calls to various Indian families with eligible men and women, pairing them off based on personal and familial compatibility, background, and appearance. Participants and their families are presented with only 1-3 potential matches and select one to date based on a single sheet of paper, a resume of sorts called a "biodata". Despite the two very different methods of achieving a "perfect match", the pieces of media implicitly make it clear to the viewer that the end goal of marriage is both desirable and necessary.

The shared, greater ideology of *Love is Blind* and *Indian Matchmaking* can be explained through the culturalist perspective that analyzes ideology through the intersection of social institutions, economics, and systemic divisions of people and resources. Ideologies – the specific ideas or principles that are cyclically perpetuated within a society can reinforce the societal structure that they comment on. Every piece of media perpetuates one or more distinct ideologies, and reality dating is no different. Media and texts can interpellate to audiences in a way that perpetuates specific ideologies (Becker 2018, 15). Interpellation refers to media's ability to "hail" or call out to a viewer's specific ideology, reinforcing and internalizing it for viewers whether they realize it or not. Interpellation is a way societies perpetuate their systemic ideologies, as viewers can recognize and accept the presented ideology as their own. This is true for audiences of *Love is Blind* and *Indian Matchmaking*. By showcasing marriage as a necessary and desirable life goal, both shows reinforce the idea that personal happiness is inextricably linked to finding a lifelong partner. This cycle of societally perpetuated ideologies that reinforce specific institutions and the interpellation of those ideologies within widespread media contribute to a misperception of reality called false consciousness. A Marxist theory, false consciousness describes how ideologies can prevent people from objectively seeing the reality of a social construct or economic system (Becker 2018, 14). These dating shows reinforce the false consciousness that idealizes and oversimplifies the reality of marriage and legal partnership, sustaining that it's necessary for self-fulfillment and completion.

The premise of both reality dating shows is matching subjects with lifelong partners, but they perpetuate a more invisible dominant ideology: that marriage is necessary to be successful and happy – and more specifically that there is a "right way to do it" – by only demonstrating heteronormative pairings and by emphasizing that everyone reaches a point in life when it's time

to “settle down”. Contestants from the first episode of each show, Jessica (*LIB*) and Aparna (*IM*) are both 34 and feel pressure to find love and marriage as soon as possible due to their ages. Without ever acknowledging their specific reasonings, the shows both assume that viewers understand the pressure to marry and start a family before a certain age, interpellating to audiences that share these dominant ideologies and playing on the collective false consciousness that marriage is the “end goal”. This greater, shared ideology, apparent in both pieces of media, is so intrinsic to the subjects and their stories that it’s never outright stated and is interpellated to viewers implicitly. Aparna (*IM*) specifically, is a great example of this underlying theme. She is a successful, driven lawyer and writer who is very set in her ways. She is introverted and opinionated, even saying “Do we have to see our husbands all the time?...Because I’d rather not I think.” (06:41) Despite being content to be alone, she endeavors to find a husband and no one on the show questions her reasons for doing so. Her family and friends encourage her to do so. This is due to the dominant ideology that there comes a time in everyone’s life when they need to get married to progress, as it’s the natural order of one’s life. Aparna hints at this when she says “I’d like to move forward and get married” (07:31), implicitly synonymizing the two concepts. These messages of both reality dating shows and their existence at large “gamifies” finding a spouse, perpetuating the idea that one must be married to “win” both the show and in the eyes of the greater society or culture they inhabit. These shows both establish and reinforce that to find a lifelong partner is to progress in the game of life, and to get married is to fulfill a prerequisite to personal success and happiness.

Despite sharing this greater belief, the shows diverge regarding the “correct” process of finding a match, reflecting the contrasting ideologies of the cultures each show represents. Where *Indian Matchmaking* is a highly collectivist endeavor, *Love is Blind* is an individual experience. Contestants in *Indian Matchmaking* embark on journeys of finding love with their families. The involvement and the approval of their family members are critical in selecting an appropriate match. Factors such as family compatibility and family background are some of the most important to consider when choosing a potential spouse. Though contestant Nadia is characterized as delightful and beautiful, Sima Taparia expresses immense concern for her Guyanese background when finding matches, demonstrating that disposition and personality are secondary to more economic and socially systemic factors. Conversely, on *Love is Blind*, contestants are encouraged to detach from every other contributing factor and focus on personality. In the highly individualistic experiment, dyads speed date in pods that prevent them from seeing one another so that race, age, and more superficial traits like height, weight, and overall attractiveness don’t interfere with the emotional compatibility portion of finding a match. This jarring contrast of what each show deems to be the most important aspect of finding a mate reflects what each respective culture, Indians and Americans, values most. It punctuates how relationships are perceived and navigated differently within the two societies, highlighting how varied related ideologies can be despite sharing the common frame that marriage is a life goal necessary for personal fulfillment.

While *Love is Blind* and *Indian Matchmaking* originate from distinct cultural contexts and promote different approaches to finding a life partner, they both implicitly reinforce the overarching ideology that a heteronormative, monogamous marriage is essential for personal happiness and fulfillment by demonstrating only heterosexual pairings and stigmatizing being unmarried in one's mid-thirties. *Indian Matchmaking* emphasizes the importance of family involvement, compromise, and physical compatibility, reflecting a collectivist approach deeply rooted in Indian society. On the other hand, *Love is Blind* advocates for individual choice, emotional connection, and the idea that true love can transcend physical appearance, mirroring the more individualistic values of American culture. Despite these differences, both shows contribute to a shared narrative that transcends the two cultural boundaries and equates marriage with success and contentment, perpetuating a false consciousness that marriage is the ideal and ultimate goal for everyone.

References

Becker, Ron. "Ideology" in *The Craft of Criticism: Critical Media Studies in Practice*, edited by Michael Kackman and Mary Celest Kearney, 11-22. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018.

Mundhra, Smriti, dir. *Indian Matchmaking*. Season 1, episode 1, "Slim, Trim, and Educated." Aired July 2020, on Netflix.

Smith, Brian, dir. *Love is Blind*. Season 1, episode 1, "Is Love Blind?" Aired February 2020 on Netflix.