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Reality of Love: The Heteronormative Agenda of ABC's the Bachelor

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REALITY OF LOVE
The Heteronormative Agenda of ABC's *The Bachelor*

Timothy J. Croner

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Media
Studies

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“We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented”
– *The Truman Show*

“Love, like television, must be performed to be real.”
– Misha Kavka, “Love ‘n the Real; or, How I Learned to Love Reality TV”

INTRODUCTION

Looking for Love (In All the Wrong Places)

“A person who reads a book or who watches television or who glances at his watch is not usually interested in how his mind is organized and controlled by these events, still less in what idea of the world is suggested by a book, television, or a watch. But there are men and women who have noticed these things, especially in our own times.”

– Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Are you looking for love? If you are, fear not: contemporary society is littered with methods aimed at helping you find your One. Beyond the age-old practices of asking a friend to set you up on a blind date, or of simply stepping out into the world and making a concerted effort at meeting new people, the process of shifting from “single” to “in a relationship” has become increasingly mediated. The rise of the Internet, for example, has generated a simultaneous rise in online dating services, each specializing in a different subset of interests, hobbies, spiritualities, ages, or any number of other characteristics. But the twenty-first century has also seen the popularization of another method of mediated courtship, perhaps more outlandish and unexpected than the World Wide Web: reality television dating competitions.

Since its debut on ABC in 2002, *The Bachelor* has sparked a revival of reality television’s romantic subgenre. Its unprecedented success has produced two spinoffs—*The Bachelorette* (2003-present) and *Bachelor Pad* (2010-2012)¹—and has inspired competing networks to try their hands at the reality TV dating game—all with their own twists, of course, and with mixed results. The past decade has seen the arrival of programs such as *Joe Millionaire* (Fox, 2003) and *For Love or Money* (NBC, 2003-2004), which draw associations between romance and wealth, *Mr. Personality* (Fox, 2003) and *Dating in the Dark* (ABC, 2009-2010), which explore societal preoccupations with physical attractiveness, and even *Boy Meets Boy* (Bravo, 2003) and *Playing It Straight* (Fox, 2004), half-hearted attempts at introducing a queer perspective into what has predominantly been a heterosexual televisual landscape.

Still, as these programs have come and gone, *The Bachelor* has remained steadfast, anchoring ABC's primetime lineup for over ten years. But while this franchise's formula has proven successful, it has also proven problematic. Structured as a modern day fairytale, *The Bachelor* reifies heterosexuality, relying upon oppressive and archaic gender norms in its effort to glorify the institution of heterosexual marriage. Throughout this thesis, I identify the *Bachelor* franchise as a tool of heteronormativity, suggesting that its narratives surrounding gender, sexuality, class, and race have the potential to be damaging should we view this so-called "mindless" entertainment without a critical lens.

Defining "Reality Television"

Prior to diving into an analysis of the problematic aspects of the *Bachelor* franchise, it is important to present some background on the genesis of reality television. In the introduction to their book *Understanding Reality Television*, Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn assign themselves the shockingly difficult task of defining "reality TV," an effort I characterize as "shockingly difficult" because we live in an era in which docu-esque programming is so pervasive, and the term "reality television" is freely bandied about in everything from *TV Guide* to *The New York Times*.

Despite its difficulty, however, I ask here the same question asked by Holmes and Jermyn: what, exactly, *is* reality television? To begin with, it certainly is not a new phenomenon. The genre has its roots in the established practice of documentary filmmaking; therefore, early attempts at defining a televisual text as "reality TV" emphasized its focus on "real life" and "real people" as crucial criteria (Holmes and Jermyn 5). Early examples of reality television, then, include the hidden camera show *Candid Camera* (1948) and *The People's Court* (1981), which featured real-life cases on its broadcasts. Documentary's influence on the genre is also evident in media scholar John Corner's trajectory of the genre, which begins with crime or emergency services-based texts (a trend he labels

as “docusoaps”), and continues with the “docushow” phase, in which factual-entertainment programming has increasingly incorporated elements of the game show (Holmes and Jermyn 3).

Our contemporary televisual landscape is characterized by a blending of these subgenres, as well as the emergence of the “event” format characteristic of programs such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and *American Idol*; by “event” based, Holmes and Jermyn speak of a shift towards “televisual arenas of formatted environments in which the more traditional observational rhetoric of documentary jostles for space with the discourses of display and performance” (Holmes and Jermyn 5). This new era emerged around the turn of the twenty-first century; Holmes and Jermyn suggest the years between 1999 and 2001 as the moment in which the term “reality TV” gained a wider discursive currency in areas such as the press, television trade, and entertainment journalism (Holmes and Jermyn 2).

As reality TV emerged as an independent genre in the early 2000s, however, so too did criticisms of the format. Because so many contemporary docu-esque programs—*Survivor*, *The Real World*, *The Amazing Race*—include the camera as part of their *mise-en-scene*, participants are constantly reminded that they are being surveilled by millions of viewers and they, therefore, are put on their strategic guard. Critics of reality television take issue with this component of the genre, suggesting that there is nothing “real” about programs in which camera crews openly move around the action and in which participants directly address the camera in routine asides and confessionals (Clissold 50).

Interestingly, these criticisms help us to best understand what is perhaps the most accepted definition of “reality TV” in our contemporary media environment, with Holmes and Jermyn suggesting “that what unites the range of programming conceivably described as ‘Reality TV’ is primarily its discursive, visual and technological *claim* to ‘the real’” (Holmes and Jermyn 5). Likewise, in his book *The Spectacle of the Real*, Geoff King argues that reality TV draws audiences in by offering

“the spectacle of, supposedly, the ‘real’ itself,” a “reality” that can range from the banality of the quotidian to intense interpersonal engagements (King 13).

Finally, following the works of Laurie Ouellette and James Hay in *Better Living Through Reality TV*, I suggest that, as reality TV shows “share a preoccupation with testing, judging, advising, and rewarding the conduct of ‘real’ people in their capacities as contestants, workers, housemates, family members, homeowners, romantic partners, patients, and consumers,” they have come to be regarded as a resource for viewers, sites in which we can learn everything from how to succeed at work to how to be stylish to how to enhance an ordinary house or car to how to win a desirable mate (Ouellette and Hay 2-3). Essentially, because we generally accept reality TV as a depiction of “the real,” audiences have come to regard these programs as acceptable patterns and indicators for social norms, behaviors, and expectations.

The Bachelor Through the Ages

While romance has long been a component to reality-based television, with programs such as *The Dating Game* and *The Newlywed Game* carving a space in popular culture since their first appearances in the 1960s, *The Bachelor* is of a new genre of reality TV dating. In her essay “Love ‘n the Real; or, How I Learned to Love Reality TV,” Misha Kavka classifies the franchise as a component of the “intimate strangers” genre, a subset of reality television that brings “together a group of people with no previous connections and places them in a setting geared to intensify intimacy” (Kavka 97). Kavka argues that the “intimate strangers” trend was initiated by the 1999 arrival of *Big Brother*, and has thrived ever since.

The Bachelor’s genesis began in 2000, when Fox debuted the innovative but crass *Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire?*, a beauty pageant-cum-wedding ceremony from producers Mike Darnell and Mike Fleiss, in which 50 women competed to be the bride of an unknown millionaire, whom

they saw only in silhouette. At the conclusion of the two-hour special, Rick Rockwell, revealed as the millionaire, selected Darva Conger of California as the “winner,” and the two were married on live television moments before jetting off to Barbados for their honeymoon.

While the show proved to be a ratings coup for Fox, attracting nearly 23 million viewers and snagging a whopping 28 share rating, it (perhaps unsurprisingly) generated a healthy amount of controversy—especially once it was revealed that Rockwell had a police record of violence against women, and once Conger sought an annulment shortly after the duo returned to the States. Fox was widely criticized by print, broadcast, and online media for sinking to an abysmal moral low in their programming and, following this damaging PR hit, the network canceled a planned rebroadcast, declined to take *Multimillionaire* to series, and promised to back away from such exploitative fare in the future.

The media whirlwind surrounding the special, however, was enough to generate interest among other networks; while UPN bid to make *Multimillionaire* into a series, executive producer Mike Fleiss turned them down, opting instead to take his premise to ABC. Together, Fleiss and ABC replaced *Multimillionaire*'s Vegas-esque pageantry with Hollywood-style fairytale elegance, premiering *The Bachelor* in March 2002. The program rapidly became one of ABC's highest-rated shows among eighteen- to forty-nine-year-olds, every network's target demographic.

Loosely inspired by Fleiss's *Multimillionaire*, *The Bachelor*'s premise is relatively simple. A successful, handsome, and single man is selected as the Bachelor, and is introduced to a group of twenty-five women from which he is expected to find the One. Over the course of several weeks, the Bachelor dates these women² in an effort to determine with whom he is able to forge the strongest connection. Each episode concludes with a “Rose Ceremony,” in which the Bachelor presents select women with a rose signifying a desire to continue their courtship, thereby eliminating contestants who receive nothing. Season after season, this whirlwind of extravagant dates and global

jetsetting culminates in a final episode in which the Bachelor is expected to propose marriage to his selected mate.

Since its premiere, *The Bachelor* has proven its tremendous franchise power for ABC; as of 2014, eighteen seasons of *The Bachelor* have aired, as have nine seasons of its spinoff *The Bachelorette* (a gender-swapped edition of the original) and three of its spinoff *Bachelor Pad* (in which rejected *Bachelor/ette* contestants reconvene in the *Bachelor* mansion for a second chance at love and a first chance at winning \$250,000). Of course, like *Multimillionaire*, *The Bachelor* has been the subject of fair criticism, receiving particular disapproval for its stereotypical and occasionally demeaning portrayals of women and for its seeming inability to create a space for people of color in its casts.

A *Bachelor* Case Study

Throughout this thesis, I add another voice to these criticisms, analyzing the problematic nature of *The Bachelor's* narratives surrounding gender, sexuality, class, and race. I plan to approach my analysis through a close, oppositional reading of two seasons from the *Bachelor* franchise: *The Bachelor*, season 13 (2009) and *The Bachelorette*, season 8 (2012).

Originally broadcast from January-March 2009, the thirteenth cycle of *The Bachelor* featured Jason Mesnick in the title role. Mesnick had previously been a finalist on the fourth season of *The Bachelorette* (2008), in which DeAnna Papas rejected his proposal in favor of contestant Jesse Csincsak. For *The Bachelor*, Mesnick was a “first” in two ways—he was the first Bachelor to be selected from a pool of *Bachelorette* rejects rather than plucked from relative obscurity³, and, as the father to then three-year-old Ty from a previous marriage, he was the first Bachelor or Bachelorette to be a single parent.

In his season’s finale, Mesnick selected contestant Melissa Rycroft as his winner, although he later had an on-air change of heart, dumping Rycroft in favor of runner-up Molly Malaney. Despite

the somewhat complicated circumstances surrounding their union, Mesnick and Malaney married in 2010 (in a ceremony broadcast as a *Bachelor* special by ABC), and welcomed their first child together in 2013.

Originally broadcast from May-August 2012, the eighth cycle of *The Bachelorette* starred Emily Maynard. Maynard had previously been featured on the fifteenth season of *The Bachelor* (2011), in which she accepted Bachelor Brad Womack's marriage proposal during the season's final episode. The couple had split a few months later, however, and ABC quickly tapped Maynard, a fan favorite from her time on *The Bachelor*, as the next Bachelorette. However, because Maynard, a single mother, did not want to leave her daughter Ricki for the duration of filming, ABC moved *Bachelorette* production to her hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina, for the first time in the franchise's history.

Maynard's finalists included Arie Luyendyk, Jr. and Jef Holm, the latter of whom she selected as the recipient of the final rose. She accepted Holm's marriage proposal during the season's finale, but the couple announced their separation by October 2012. In January 2014, Maynard announced her engagement to Tyler Johnson, who has no affiliation with ABC or the *Bachelor* franchise.

Coming Up...

My analysis of these televisual texts is divided into four sections, each focusing on a different aspect of identity and the ways in which the *Bachelor* franchise prescribes viewers with specific narratives regarding these identities. Chapter 1 will focus on gender identity, exploring *The Bachelor/ette's* reliance upon traditional gender norms in their continued effort to assert the institution of heterosexual marriage. Chapter 2 explores *The Bachelor/ette's* narratives of sexuality, using Judith Butler's understandings of gender performativity as a framework for illuminating the

ways in which these programs construct a gendered and sexualized female body. Chapter 3 argues that the *Bachelor* franchise serves as a narrative of social mobility, pairing extravagance and traditional fairytale tropes to suggest to its female viewers that heterosexual marriage is their primary avenue to financial security and upward mobility. Finally, chapter 4 will explore the discourse surrounding *The Bachelor/ette* and race, arguing that the franchise uses heterosexuality as a tool of racial exclusion, continuously denying people of color the opportunity to participate and, therefore, suggesting that white Americans are the only ones worthy of finding “true love.”

Ultimately, my hope is that this thesis will illuminate for readers the problematic aspects of what we, far too frequently, refer to as “mindless” entertainment. My goal here is not to convince readers to cease their viewership of *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, or any other reality TV. Rather, I am echoing and building upon the theories of John Fiske, who suggests in *Media Matters* that media events are highly important because “they give a visible and material presence to deep and persistent currents of meaning by which American society and American consciousness shape themselves,” (Fiske xv) and, more specifically, of Jennifer L. Pozner, who argues in her book *Reality Bites Back* that viewers “of all ages do ourselves a disservice by watching reality TV with our intellects on pause. We can enjoy the catharsis and fantasy these shows offer, but unless we keep our critical filters on high, we leave ourselves open to serious manipulation” (Pozner 32). I hope that, if nothing else, this thesis serves as a reminder of the importance of critical thinking, even in the presence of something thought of as “mindless.”

CHAPTER 1

“I Would Be a Servant to Him”: Constructing and Performing Gender on *The Bachelor/ette*

“I will make the best wife for Bob because I will be a servant to him. And if he comes home from a long day at the office, I’ll just rub his feet, and have dinner ready for him, and just [giggle] love on him!”

– Christine, contestant, *The Bachelor* Season 4¹

When contestant Stephanie Hogan received her first one-on-one date with Bachelor Jason Mesnick, she was very clear about her intentions: “Really, I just want a man that I feel like I can take care of,” she told Jason. “[Someone that I can] help take care of, and make his life easier when he comes through the door” (*The Bachelor* Episode 1303, 2009). At the end of that same episode, contestant Shannon Bair revealed to Jason, through a sea of tears: “Last season when I saw you with DeAnna, I wanted to, like, jump through that TV ... I cried! I really did, I cried. And I want to be that good person that completes you. [...] And I’m so ready to be a mother. Like, I am *so* ready to be a mother” (*The Bachelor* Episode 1303, 2009).

These confessions, supposedly symbolic of these women “lowering their guards” and proving to Jason that they are capable of “being intimate” and “giving their all” to a relationship, are disturbingly typical on any given episode of *The Bachelor*, a program which works to normalize traditional gender roles and reify heterogendered relations. Such normalization is perhaps the most widespread criticism of the show; one review of *The Bachelor*’s premiere season chastised ABC “for putting on a show that would turn back the clock to an era where there was no respect for women—at all” (Stasi), while another accused the show of being nothing more than a bleak “prime-time cattle call” that degraded women (Lipton).

Coined by Chrys Ingraham, heterogender “is a concept used to demystify the connection between gender and heterosexuality,” referring “to the asymmetrical stratification of the sexes, privileging men and exploiting women, in the institution of patriarchal heterosexuality” (Yep and Camacho 338-339). Programs such as *The Bachelor*, then, are simply cogs in a patriarchal machine.

Its romantic, fantastical structure generates a sort-of twisted, contemporary fairytale for adults, reminding viewers of society's prescribed actions, emotions, and positions for men and women while simultaneously disseminating the message that heterosexual marriage is the ultimate achievement.

Each and every season of *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette*, then, is an attempt to reassert the practicality of heterosexual marriage, especially in an era where the institution is seemingly becoming a relic—whether that be because of divorce, because of an increase in the number of people wanting to remain single, or because of a popularization of “living in sin” or of unconventional families (Bennett, Rachel). In their effort to persuade viewers of the institution's value, *The Bachelor/ette* present their men and their women very distinctly and very carefully: men are equated to “muscled, provider, family man, tough with a heart of gold,” while women are “dolloed up, husband hungry, destined for motherhood, emotional” (Krosschell). This chapter will explore these characterizations and the construction of *Bachelors*, *Bachelorettes*, and their contestants, in an effort to investigate just how deeply rooted a heteronormative agenda is in these programs.

“The Luckiest Guy in the World”: Constructing *Bachelors* and *Bachelorettes*

Nowhere are *The Bachelor's* heterogendered proclivities more evident than in a season's premiere episode, in which said Bachelor is introduced to the twenty-five women from whom he is expected to select his wife. Season in and season out, producers assemble a collection of women which, as media critic Naomi Rockler-Gladen observes, are “portrayed as *so* helpless and *so* male-dependent that it's hard to conceptualize the show as anything other than a satire of screwed up gender roles” (Rockler-Gladen). Unfortunately, *The Bachelor* is far from satire; in fact, it takes itself almost embarrassingly seriously, as if its continued reification of heterosexuality is its requisite civic duty.

Such seriousness is evident from the get-go. Each season introduces its cast members without a trace of jocularity, suggesting that its heteronormative constructs and values are to be taken with the utmost sincerity. Let's explore, for example, our introductions to Jason Mesnick and Emily Maynard on their respective seasons of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. On the one hand, these introductions are quite similar, with neither shying away from the program's insistence on the supposed necessity of finding a partner. We are encouraged to celebrate Jason and Emily for their abilities to overcome heartbreak and put themselves "out there" once more; we feel empathy for Jason as he explains that it "wasn't my decision for the marriage [to his ex-wife] to end, and that's one thing I would love to have in my life" (*The Bachelor* Episode 1301, 2009), and we share in Emily's tears as she explains the tragic, untimely demise of her first fiancée eight years prior. Likewise, we're pleased to hear that both Jason and Emily—both single parents—have the desire to "complete their family," to provide their little ones with that missing piece to their "proper" nuclear family.

On the other hand, the differences between these introductions are striking, illustrating the prominence of traditional gender roles in the *Bachelor/ette's* narrative. When Jason speaks of his upcoming *Bachelor* experience, he emphasizes its role as another awesome experience in a life already full of awesome experiences: "To be given this opportunity, I just feel like the luckiest guy in the world. I've got a great son, a great job, an amazing life, and I'm looking for the perfect person to share it with" (*The Bachelor* Episode 1301, 2009). Emily, meanwhile, speaks of her *Bachelorette* experience as a most meaningful opportunity, as something that will grant her access to that happiness that, thus far, has been elusive: "I can't even begin to tell you how grateful I feel to be the Bachelorette. My ultimate goal in all of this is to meet somebody that I can marry and have children with and that could be that father figure in Ricki's life—which I want for her more than anything" (*The Bachelorette* Episode 801, 2012). While both programs are intended to sell to viewers heteronormative romance, these introductions suggest that, because she is looking for someone to

provide her with an entirely new life rather than someone with whom she can share her current one, the stakes are much higher for Emily, the Bachelorette—and, therefore, for all women, everywhere.

Of course, these introductions only occupy a small segment of each premiere episode; a season opener spends much more time presenting its twenty-five contestants—a practice that itself serves as a fascinating site for the reproduction of normative gender behavior. As far as *The Bachelor* tells it, its female contestants are competing solely for their happy ending. In many ways, “women on *The Bachelor* aren’t competing for a man so much as they’re competing for a life—for their vision of how things are *supposed* to unfold” (Malone). Perhaps, then, this is one reason why *The Bachelor*—despite being a vacuum of heteronormativity—can seem to make such perfect sense: it builds upon the narratives we’ve been fed since early childhood, promising viewers—women especially—that their happy ending *is* a possibility, and within their grasp.

This unwavering desire for a fairytale ending is most evident in *The Bachelor*’s confessional scenes. Confessionals, a typical fixture of reality television, carry a special weight on *The Bachelor*, where they serve as a site of unfiltered desire. As they provide contestants with a forum in which they can, supposedly, voice their ultimate and most intimate goals and aspirations, they simultaneously provide producers—and, by extension, audiences—with plenty of material preaching the gospel of heterosexuality. The rhetoric of the confessional—all telling, clichéd language, absent of specificity and individualized, perspective-driven emotion (Lepucki and Brown)—reveals to viewers the comfort that so many of these women find in the marriage narrative, a comfort founded in our childhood expectations of “happy endings”—and a comfort that viewers are expected, assumed, and encouraged to share.

The Choice is Yours...or is it?: *The Bachelor*’s Gendered Power Dynamics

Despite (or, perhaps, because of) its fairytale façade, power is an integral part of *The Bachelor* narrative. Contestants frequently speak of their budding relationships in strategic terms, wondering

how they can manipulate their actions to advance themselves in this romantic competition. The mansion in which contestants are sequestered quickly devolves into a battlefield of sorts, where spiteful words (and, sometimes, punches) are thrown freely at those deemed “the competition.” And, of course, each episode’s conclusive Rose Ceremony, provides a melodramatic illustration of the power dynamics that characterize these shows, as those contestants deemed less desirable are sent packing, with little to no choice in the matter.

With power such a crucial part of *The Bachelor*, it should be unsurprising that, season after season, gendered power dynamics quickly emerge. Generally, these shows equate power with masculinity: men do the choosing; therefore, men hold the power. On any given season, the Bachelor is granted tremendous proactive power, selecting, week after week, which women remain, while the women are given very limited reactive power, with their only opportunity to exert themselves being the chance to refuse a rose and leave immediately (Yep and Camacho 339). Of course, as *Bachelor* blogger Ash Adams notes, due to the show’s competitive nature, such a scenario is a rare occurrence: “All the women claim to feel that they are the perfect matches for the Bachelor,” fearing the possibility that, if she “leaves the show, she has, in a sense, lost the game” (Adams). Within the *Bachelor* narrative, a powerful woman is someone to be punished—in this case, that punishment is loss and humiliation.

Even after a “winner” has been declared, this uneven, gendered power dynamic continues, as evidenced, all too frequently, by the post-season plans of the final pairing. In the typical *Bachelor* success story, women are expected to drop everything and move wherever the Bachelor desires, and rarely is it the other way around (Carbone). As media critic Jennifer Pozner argues in her analyses of these programs, threaded through the *Bachelor* narrative is the assumption that men “have careers, homes, and social ties too important to alter just for some woman” (Pozner 245)—an assumption that, if challenged by a woman, would label her “deviant” or even “disrespectful.”

But what about *The Bachelorette*? If she is, essentially, in the same position as the Bachelor, selecting which suitors remain, doesn't she hold the power? While *The Bachelorette* may be slightly less patriarchal because it grants its leading player a degree of proactive power, Pozner suggests that "female submissiveness is still imposed as a major theme, even when the roles are supposedly reversed" (Pozner 244). *The Bachelorette's* premiere season, for example, opened with the declaration that "For the first time in TV history, a woman has *all* the *power!*" Additionally, while "the majority of *The Bachelor's* stars have been plucked from obscurity to sit on the proverbial throne and choose among twenty-five women, [...] each star of *The Bachelorette* was previously humiliated and dumped by one of *The Bachelor* boys" (Pozner 244). *The Bachelorette*, then, is not terribly different from *The Bachelor*, in that it is consistently characterized by female submissiveness—or, at least, by the necessity of ending the "suffering" of these women by finding them a man.

A Family Affair

Because many narratives of heterosexuality tend to glorify the family unit, family frequently takes center stage on *The Bachelor/ette*. This emphasis is only magnified in Jason and Emily's respective seasons of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*; as single parents, their *Bachelor* narratives are colored by their familial desires just as frequently as their romantic ones.

As mentioned earlier, our initial introductions to both Jason and Emily emphasize the importance of family in their lives, revealing not only their status as single parents (and their unconditional love for their children), but also, on a larger scale, the importance of strong family values in their lives and in a potential significant other. Despite these assertions, however, it seems that this importance varies in degrees in these two narratives. While Jason's introduction certainly does not ignore his status as a single father—nor the love he holds for his son—his characterization is, ultimately, not defined by his fatherhood. He is not introduced to audiences as Ty's Father;

instead, clips from his earlier appearance on the fourth cycle of *The Bachelorette* open his season, identifying him as, at worst, “That Guy Who Gets Another Chance.” Emily’s season, meanwhile, opens with the following voiceover: “My name is Emily. I’m a single mom, and I cannot believe that I’m the Bachelorette. That’s *wild*” (*The Bachelorette* Episode 801, 2012)—immediately identifying her by her roles as mother and caregiver. Additionally, Emily’s season marks the first time that *Bachelor* production moved outside of Los Angeles for its entire run, shooting instead in her hometown of Charlotte, N.C. so that she would not have to leave her daughter throughout the process—thereby further framing Emily’s quest for love around her desire to provide her daughter with a father figure, and a more complete family tree.

Family plays its largest role in the final episodes of any given season of *The Bachelor/ette*. In the third-to-last episode, for example, once the Bachelor has narrowed the field to four, he attends hometown dates with his remaining contestants; audiences and Bachelor alike are invited into the homes and families of the remaining foursome, acting as voyeur into how well everyone gets along. Each season’s finale then turns the tables, with the Bachelor introducing his two remaining dates to his parents, siblings, and (sometimes) closest friends. In many ways, these episodes serve a similar function as our introductions to a season’s *Bachelor* or *Bachelorette*, reminding viewers not only of the importance of family values, but also illustrating—quite clearly—the benefits and jubilation produced by and from heterosexual marriage. And, of course, these dates also illustrate the familial roles *Bachelor* or *Bachelorette* can eventually expect to fulfill; while children, for example, were sufficiently present in Emily’s *Bachelorette* hometown dates, illuminating her desire to have more children and build a bigger family with her ultimate man-of-choice, kids were relatively absent in Jason’s *Bachelor* hometown dates. Only the daughter of single-mom Stephanie Hogan was significantly featured, and only to highlight what she had at stake: she needed Jason not only as a husband, but as a father to her child, as a provider for her family.

Catfights and Frat Houses: Constructing Contestants' Behavior

Thus far, I have been speaking of the ways in which gender norms are upheld through the construction of *The Bachelor/ette's* leading players, but it is also important to acknowledge the significant ways in which a season's contestants are constructed to illustrate gendered behaviors. Let's begin with the way these programs present the collective behaviors of their contestants. While *The Bachelorette* derives much of its non-romantic entertainment from the goofy, fraternal behavior of its suitors, *The Bachelor* is known for its "cattiness" just as much as it is for its romance. As Michelle Brophy-Baermann observes, *Bachelorette* men "hang together in large groups, down beers, sing songs, pass a lot of gas, [and] do shots," but the "women of the Ladies' Villa," in contrast, "hang in small groups, talk a lot, analyze each other, talk about each other, put on makeup, get into dresses, and lie around the pool. Many of them come across as petty and jealous," largely in thanks to the heteronormative agenda of the *Bachelor* producers (Brophy-Baermann 34-35).

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, *The Bachelor* is, by nature, a competitive experience, and, therefore, female competition and "cattiness" have become something of a hallmark of the *Bachelor* experience. According to *Bachelor* blogger KC Schanbaum, while *The Bachelor* "makes finding your soul mate look glossy and easy" for its parade of prince charmings, encouraging them to "think that they can authoritatively peruse for their wife among harems of women," it prescribes an entirely different tale for women, tricking them into thinking that they "have to fight for and force their feelings on to their potential husbands for him to pick her or else" they will be left doomed to singledom forever (Schanbaum). This sense of competition was most glaringly capitalized on in the first episode of Jason's season, in which the twenty-five women were encouraged to vote for the one girl whom they believed did not deserve to fight for Jason's affections.

The Bachelor, of course, is a television show, airing on network television—a characteristic that makes it vulnerable to the need for ratings. To capture the largest audience possible, producers work to arrange a satisfying cast of characters; female contestants are often manipulated by editors and producers—both during the shoot (alcohol use is perpetually encouraged, contestants are shut off from television, internet, and current events, and are also isolated from their friends and families back home) and during the post-production and editing process—to fulfill certain roles, as producers work to create a narrative that is both more recognizable and more digestible for viewers. In many ways, this threat of post-production manipulation simultaneously feeds into the competitive nature of *The Bachelor*, with women learning to “play the game” and manipulating their feelings in an effort to avoid being constructed as hysterical, love-hungry sociopaths. In every season, for example, there’s a conflict: “the game requires the women profess their love, but strategically, not too early, and not too late” (Lepucki and Brown). The “cattiness” of some of these women, therefore, is born out of a navigation of this obstacle, of their effort to avoid looking like a crazy person on national television.

Didn’t We Almost Have It All?: Rejection on *The Bachelor/ette*

Rejection is par for the course on *The Bachelor/ette*. As Jennifer Pozner puts it, “Reality TV exacts a steep price in exchange for the fantasy of happily ever after for *one* woman (however short-lived),” and that “price is humiliation of *all* women” (Pozner 52). Tears flow freely at the end of any given episode of *The Bachelor*, and producers, of course, swiftly capitalize on such embarrassment and heartbreak to drive home their heteronormative agenda. Cameras zoom in on the tear-soaked faces of the women shattered by romantic rejection; producers, after all, “bank on such scenes to reinforce the notion that single women are simpering spinsters who can never possibly be fulfilled without husbands. From casting to editing to reunion shows, everything builds to that moment

when some sad sack sobs miserably from embarrassment and self-doubt, bemoaning her broken heart” (Pozner 55).

Such scenes, of course, are far more typical of *The Bachelor* than *The Bachelorette*, as rejection carries a different meaning for *The Bachelorette*’s male suitors than it does for *The Bachelor*’s female contestants. For women, *Bachelor* rejection is symbolic of their inability to complete their feminine duty of finding a husband, and, thus, they tend to handle their rejection by looking inward. They evaluate their every move and character trait to discover where, exactly, they went wrong, longing to find their one quirk or characteristic that is preventing their happy ending. The men of *The Bachelorette*, on the other hand, tend to cope with their rejection by looking outward, wondering what could be wrong with the Bachelorette that she does not desire their companionship.

This inward/outward pattern of action is quite evident in Jason and Emily’s respective seasons of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. When Jason rejects contestant Nikki Kaapke, for example, her exit interview is peppered with phrases of self-doubt and self-deprecation; she criticizes herself for not being “pretty enough” or “smart enough” for Jason (*The Bachelor* Episode 1304, 2009), wondering aloud if she will ever be good enough to find love.² When Emily, however, rejects finalist Chris Bukowski following his hometown date, he is irate, saying as he departs: “I’m ten times the man, the [expletive] those other dudes are. She did break my heart, and I still don’t understand” (*The Bachelorette* Episode 808, 2012).

What *The Bachelor/ette*’s rejection narratives reinforce, then, is the idea that a female’s only pathway to happiness is through a man. These shows present a “version of culture where women are taught subtly that self-worth comes through a man,” leading women to believe that rejection by a virtual stranger is grounds for hysterics (Rockler-Gladen). With these images of tear-strewn faces etched into our minds at the conclusion of each episode, we leave our viewing experiences with the lingering threat of what pain awaits should we transgress our traditional gender roles.

Concluding Remarks

The Bachelor and *The Bachelorette* consistently act as a site for the reproduction and reinforcement of heterosexuality and traditional gender roles, whether it be through their heterogendered presentation of a season's cast members (both in their desires and in their behavior), their insistence on the importance of the nuclear family, or their portrayals relationship power dynamics, and of reactions when said dynamics do not rule in their favor. Ultimately, as Jennifer Pozner argues, because they are governed by these heteronormative values, "reality TV's twisted fairytales are [actually] terribly unromantic at their core. They've popularized a trivial and depressing depiction of the concept of love itself. Real love involves a foundation of respect, honesty, and trust, concepts wholly missing from the pale imitations hawked to us by the folks who script 'unscripted' entertainment" (Pozner 59).

CHAPTER 2

Are You a Betty or a Veronica?: Appearance, Sexuality, and *The Bachelor/ette*

“And then I reached the age where being beautiful becomes the most important thing a woman can be.”

– Stephen Sondheim, *Passion*

On one of the first group dates of *The Bachelor*'s thirteenth season, Jason and eight of his remaining suitors stripped down and had busts made of their torsos, which were later decorated and auctioned off to raise funds for the Keep A Breast Foundation. Masquerading as an effort to raise breast cancer awareness and to paint its remaining cast members as a group of solid citizens, this date was really an opportunity for *The Bachelor* to display its penchant for the sexual. The date began with several women rubbing down Jason's shirtless torso with baby oil, commenting on the act's erotic nature in their confessionals: “I got to lube Jason up,” giggled contestant Melissa Rycroft. “I can't even talk about Jason with his shirt off because it makes me blush” (*The Bachelor* Episode 1303, 2009). Soon enough, the date's charitable framework is forgotten, and sexuality takes center stage; the cameras zoom in on the women's silhouettes as they strip down against colorful backlighting, and Jason seizes the opportunity to scope out his dates in a much more intimate setting. At the date's conclusion, contestant Shannon Bair giggles: “This is my first date with Jason, and he basically took my clothes off. And rubbed my boobs” (*The Bachelor* Episode 1303, 2009).

Clearly, sexuality is an integral part of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, reflected in the show in both its construction of its contestants and its overall structure, in which sexual intercourse becomes synonymous with the concept of “falling in love.”

A major focus of this chapter will be the intersection between sexuality and the performative nature of gender. The concept of gender performativity has been perhaps most notably developed by Judith Butler in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” in which she argues that our conception of gender is entirely culturally influenced, framed around the completion of acts that have been labeled by society as gendered. Gender, Butler argues, “is in no way a stable identity or

locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity, instituted through the stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 519). She marks the body as an important site in the development of the gendered experience, heterosexual norms, and compulsory heterosexuality, writing that “the body is a historical situation, [...] and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation” (Butler 521), leading her to argue “that one way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with ‘natural’ appearances and ‘natural’ heterosexual dispositions” (Butler 524).

“I Know I’m Pretty...”: *The Bachelor*’s Obsession with Physical Appearance

In the land of *The Bachelor*, you can’t expect to get anywhere if you’re not attractive—or, rather, if you don’t conform to the typical American standards of what “attractive” means. Media scholar Carol Morgan Bennett argues that, if we’re to take the ABC franchise as any sort of indication, “dateable partners are primarily represented by physical attractiveness,” a preoccupation that starts “with the nature of the show. The participants have little information about the person they select to date, except for a brief video” (Bennett, Carol), while contestants are presented to the Bachelor/ette completely removed from the context of their everyday lives, attributed with nothing more than their age, hometown, and occupation—attributes that often exemplify the striking similarities amongst these women. Jason’s season, for example, featured women ages 22 to 36, with 22 of the women in their twenties and only three in their thirties. Additionally, many were attributed similar occupations; three of the women were teachers, three were “account executives,” two were department store buyers, and four were marketing or sales representatives. Thus, according to *The Bachelor/ette*, at least, “dating is [primarily] an indication of the attractiveness and desirability of a

person. Normal people are attractive, fun, and date often. Abnormal people do not” (Bennett, Carol).

Let’s look a bit further into the ways these women are presented in their introductions to the Bachelor. What are the qualities of the women selected to be on this program? Well, as Naomi Rockler-Gladen observes, there “are basically two women on this show: the skinny blonde with long straight hair and the skinny brunette with long straight hair” (Rockler-Gladen). Additionally, “they’re all very young. Few are over 30, even if *The Bachelor* is older” (Rockler-Gladen)—such was the case on Jason’s season, as Mesnick was 32 at the time of shooting. *The Bachelor*’s obsession with the ageless female is perhaps best exemplified in the first season of its spin-off *Bachelor Pad*, in which a “*Bachelor* contestant reappeared at the age of 39, and while the other contestants were identified on screen by name and age, she was identified as ‘Gwen ??’” (Rockler-Gladen). To further prevent such embarrassment from happening to them and to “further define this satirically narrow definition of beauty, the majority of the women on this show are caked in makeup” (Rockler-Gladen).

As the season progresses (or, rather, as the premiere episode progresses, for an episode of *The Bachelor* sans sexuality is not something we should expect to see anytime soon) and it becomes increasingly clear that physical attractiveness is a necessary quality for any and all contestants to possess, a specific conceptualization of femininity and female beauty is prescribed to audiences, a prescription identified by Gust Yep and Ariana Ochoa Camacho in their essay “The Normalization of Heterogendered Relations in *The Bachelor*”:

The Bachelor clearly reinforces current US standards of female beauty and objectification of the woman’s body. [...] The women [are] mostly presented as objects of the male gaze. This [is] accomplished through two primary techniques. The first uses visual approaches that scan and scrutinize the women’s bodies with the camera focusing on the women’s breasts, buttocks, and legs as they dressed, entered, and left the pool, or disrobed to catch the

Bachelor's attention. The second technique utilized plot devices that created situations for the women to expose their bodies such as pajama parties, water rides in amusement parks, and interactions in hot tubs and pools (Yep and Camacho 339).

Examples of these techniques are abundant even in the early episodes of Jason's season of *The Bachelor*. Beyond the "Keep a Breast" date described in this chapter's introduction, there was the second episode's pool party arranged by Jason in lieu of the typical pre-rose ceremony cocktail party. While Jason argues that the pool party is an opportunity for him to see the girls in a more "laid back" context prior to his next decision regarding whom he should send packing, the camera's panning and scanning of the female bodies suggest another story, presenting these women as objects of the male gaze and, with the rose ceremony (and its promise of rejection) looming, reminding audiences that women "are primarily physical specimens to be surveyed intently by the camera, the male characters in the film, and, of course, the audience" (Douglas 17).

Still, while female contestants are often the subjects of the camera's gaze on *The Bachelor*, the sexualization of men, too, does occur—on both *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. Perhaps because the franchise is primarily directed towards female viewers¹, Jason is sexualized in his introduction to audiences at the beginning of his season. It seems, then, that, at times on "this show, it's the man who is sexualized. It's [Jason] who soaps his abs for the camera. [...] It's clearly a show for women, and I'm not supposed to be thinking about who is the sexiest, only who is the best mate, the most fitting for" Jason (Lepucki and Brown). Additionally, as Rockler-Gladen points out, contestants on *The Bachelorette* are not free from physical scrutiny; as opposed to the contestants on *The Bachelor*, these "men are even harder to tell apart. Tall. Broad shoulders. Lots of muscles. Usually dark hair. There's an occasional 'hipster' guy thrown in, like shaggy *Bachelor* Ben [Flajnik] a few seasons ago" or Jef Holm on Emily's season. "And there's an occasional bald guy. But mostly they all look like That Guy at the Gym" (Rockler-Gladen).

Are You a Betty or a Veronica?: *The Bachelor's* Virgin/Whore Dichotomy

One of the more interesting aspects of the relationship between gender, sexuality, and *The Bachelor/ette* is a clear double standard that exists among sexual expectations and behaviors of men and women. Dana Cloud's studies of these programs suggest that female sexuality is addressed, sure, but only to the extent that it restricts a woman's agency to her appearance rather than action (Cloud 419), and, as Jennifer Pozner points out, only to teach male viewers "that they should not expect (or desire) women as partners in love and in life, only as beautiful, compliant subjects in need of social, sexual, and interpersonal direction" (Pozner 46). And while the show "punishes women who express open sexual desire or demand recognition of it from" (Cloud 419), the program encourages the prevalence of masculine sexuality. An article from a *Bachelor*-centric issue of *People*, for example, reminds audiences that when "the woman is pursued by the man, it usually works. [...] It comes down to biology. That's the natural order. The masculine energy is a turn-on" (Stanger).

On *The Bachelor/ette*, then, female sexuality—coupled with female autonomy—is a dangerous thing. Nowhere is this lesson more apparent than in the season's final episodes, as the Bachelor narrows down his choices to two women, and, as columnist and *Bachelor* critic Willa Paskin argues, a virgin/whore dichotomy emerges between the remaining contestants:

There is the person whom the bachelor/ette is extremely hot for, and the person he or she can imagine 'sharing a life' with. Either through editing or a sort of encouraged pattern of thought, the contestant begins to describe the last two suitors in terms of the virgin-whore dichotomy, wherein the person he or she really wants to have sex with is different from the person he or she thinks is most appropriate and likely to make a better wife, husband, mother, father (Paskin "Sleep").

Perhaps nowhere is this franchise's punishment of female sexuality more clear than in Jason Mesnick's season of *The Bachelor*. Upon narrowing his field of women down to two final suitors—

Melissa Rycroft and Molly Malaney—Mesnick selected Rycroft in the finale—a woman “about whom he would later tell Jimmy Kimmel, ‘the way she looked, I would say, was exactly what I was looking for’” (Straub). Mesnick later came to his senses (conveniently, *right during* the live reunion special), dumping Rycroft on-air and trading her in for Malaney—someone he seemed to have a real connection with. While Mesnick and Malaney have recently celebrated their fourth wedding anniversary and welcomed their first child last year, the ultimate success of Mesnick’s decision does not negate the slut-shaming that occurred on his season of *The Bachelor*. If we’re to listen to Jason, we’re warned not to pick the “hot one,” for she’s not worthy of “forever” or a fairy tale ending.

Though not as dramatic as Jason’s post-final rose, on-air realization, Emily Maynard also narrowed her field of suitors down to two men—Arie, the race car driver whom she “couldn’t stop making out with,” and Jef, who began his relationship with Emily at a slow boil. In the final episode of her season of *The Bachelorette*, Emily realized that, despite her physical affinity for Arie, Jef was the man for her—a decision she reached upon introducing Jef to her daughter and seeing that her family could, finally, come together the way she had always imagined. Emily then dumps Arie immediately, not even waiting until the final rose ceremony. While this scenario certainly presents Jef as the ‘virgin’ and Arie as the ‘whore,’ it is not necessarily a punishment of male sexuality. It is, rather, a reminder of the dangers of female sexuality; as Emily learns to reject her sexual attraction to Arie—thereby ignoring her sexual desires and her right to embrace her female sexuality—for Jef, the man whom she can see being a father to her child, she is buying into the narrative of marrying the man whom society has deemed “appropriate” for her to invite into her life.

Paskin argues that Jason and Emily’s decisions from their respective seasons remind viewers that *The Bachelor*’s “understanding of itself [is] as a show about romance and not about sex, a show about lasting connections and not short-term entertainment,” and so “the contestant almost always ends up picking the appropriate partner, the values partner, the romantic partner, and not the

chemistry one” (Paskin “Sleep”). The virgin/whore dichotomy, then, is simply another heteronormative narrative that emerges within these programs. As producers craft situations and manipulate footage to present a “good girl/bad girl” narrative, audiences become part of the project in the shaming of female sexuality.

A Night to Remember: *The Bachelor/ette*’s Fantasy Suite

While sex is always an underlying narrative of any season of *The Bachelor/ette*—despite its asserted focus on romance—it becomes a central part of the series’ greater narrative in a season’s penultimate episode, or, as Willa Paskin labels it, the “de rigueur fantasy suite episode”:

On any season of ‘The Bachelor/ette,’ toward the end, the show moves down to some romantic, tropical location and gives the main participant a chance to hang out with his or her suitors all night, in a fancy hotel room, without the cameras on. Presumably, on fantasy suite night, the inhabitants of said fantasy suite, a man and a woman who have been making out for weeks and weeks with all their clothes on like frustrated 14-year-olds, do the deed, or something approximating the deed (Paskin “Sleep”).

Of course, leave it to *The Bachelor* to turn something that could be so untoward and gross into something romantic, allowing this very carnal form of evaluating a partner to be discussed only in terms of romance. As a way to keep the unseemliness from entering the foreground, however, *The Bachelor/ette*

is always extremely coy about what went down in the fantasy suite. The morning after, the bachelor/ette never talks about what happened in detail, how it was, whether it was good or bad. One of the most concrete events to occur on the show is left in the vaguest possible terms, lest we recognize how unseemly it is (Paskin “Sleep”).

In terms of its use on *The Bachelor* versus *The Bachelorette*, there seems to be a double standard—one that gets back to the discrepancy between the portrayals of male sexuality and female sexuality on these shows. On Jason’s season, for example the fantasy suite is seen as an integral part of his journey to finding love—as is the deed that occurs inside. Unsure about the progression of his relationship with finalist Jillian Harris, for example, Jason views the fantasy suite as an opportunity to “seal the deal,” so to speak. And so, Jason and Jillian share a steamy night in the fantasy suite, only for Jillian to be eliminated at the end of the episode—how’s that for punishing female sexuality?! After opening up to Jason, Jillian is sent packing, and no one blinks twice about Jason’s decision.

While the fantasy suite *theoretically* plays a similar role on *The Bachelorette*, it has, in actuality, become another site for the contestation of female sexuality. “For the first two *Bachelor* seasons,” Michelle Brophy-Baermann notes, “little attention was paid to the fact that women chose to join the bachelors in their [fantasy] suites. But as soon as word was out that there would be a *Bachelorette*, media critics were in a tizzy about how the double standard might affect ratings. Some predicted the premise just wouldn’t fly with audiences. Who would want to see a woman in charge?” (Brophy-Baermann 34). This fear seems to have permeated the role of the fantasy suite in subsequent seasons of *The Bachelorette*; in Emily’s season, she “forewent the fantasy suite with all her suitors. Her point was that as a mother of a 6-year-old and a role model, she really didn’t want to be seen shagging three guys in three days” (Paskin “Sleep”).

Concluding Remarks

Sexuality plays a significant role in *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. In terms of physical appearance, the show definitely presents viewers with an outlandish ideal: “women are to be thin, have large breasts, nice legs, and perfect appearance. Men are to be physically fit and athletic. Both

sexes should be interesting, but that is secondary. [...] People have to fit a certain ideal before they're even considered a dateable partner" (Bennett, Carol). But the show's emphasis on physical attractiveness is just the surface of its obsession with human sexuality; it subsequently presents viewers with particular narratives and prescriptions regarding the role sex and sexuality should play in the lives of men and women. Its penultimate "fantasy suite" episode is perhaps its most telling regarding its views on gendered sexuality, often times punishing women for partaking in sexual activity while simultaneously celebrating the Bachelor's ability to enjoy "every man's fantasy." Ultimately, in terms of its portrayal of sexuality and beyond, "this type of dating program provides boundaries for people to live within and operates as a social constraint" (Bennett, Carol).

CHAPTER 3

With this Ring: *The Bachelor/ette*, Class, and Social Mobility

“[These] shows are very intentionally cast, edited, and framed to amplify regressive values around gender, race, and class, [and to] underscore advertisers’ desire to get us to think less and buy more”

– Jennifer L. Pozner, *Reality Bites Back*

Despite (or, perhaps, because of) the fact that *The Bachelor* presents itself as a contemporary fairy tale, it is lush with messages regarding the economic aspects of love. Because of its status as a modern-day Cinderella story, no season of *The Bachelor* feels complete without a marriage proposal at its conclusion—not necessarily because of its symbolization of eternal love, but rather because of its signification that the promise of social mobility is being fulfilled for the selected winner. As the Bachelor bestows a ring upon her finger, we, as viewers, are expected to believe that not only has this woman fulfilled her life’s purpose of entering into a heterosexual union, but also that she is now socially mobile, destined for a life in which she will be forever supported by her Bachelor.

Behind the romantic ephemera of these proposals, then, lies a message of male superiority—a concept long intertwined with the institution of marriage, as explained by The Plaid Adder, an anonymous columnist on the website DemocraticUnderground.com:

As the presumptive wage earner and the one who would assume complete legal control over the couple’s property, the man was in a better position to accept his social obligation philosophically; [...] The woman’s feelings about her prospective partner were, practically speaking, irrelevant; the match her family arranged for her would be an offer she couldn’t refuse” (The Plaid Adder).

Historically, then, the Adder argues, marriage has been constructed as an avenue to social mobility to heighten female desire for entering into such partnerships; in order to quell the possibilities of a lack of interest in the institution, it has come to be presented as something that brings with it status, and a more comfortable class location.

In this chapter, I will explore the connections *The Bachelor/ette* draw between love, capitalism, and social and economic class. I argue that these programs present viewers with a dangerous association between marriage and upward social mobility, and suggest that this association is another component to their attempts at reasserting the necessity of heterosexual marriage. Ultimately, through an exploration of both contestant construction and the fairytale structures of these programs, I argue that the *Bachelor* franchise blurs the distinction between love and commodity; in the world of *The Bachelor*, to be a consumer is to be in love, and to be in love is to be a consumer.

Moving On Up

The Bachelor roots its narrative of social mobility in the fact that, historically speaking, men have predominantly served as the economic support for their marital and familial structures. As the Plaid Adder points out, this has contributed to the construction of marriage as an economic necessity for women:

Economic, social, and psychological pressures combined to construct marriage as woman's unavoidable destiny. For a woman to evade marriage would alienate her family and put her very identity as a woman at risk. Outside of marriage, she would never be able to have a sex life without risking an illegitimate pregnancy, and then there was the basic question of how she would survive economically in a world where women above a certain class status were severely discouraged from working outside the home. She would have to marry someone; and once she did, she was pretty much stuck with him (The Plaid Adder).

Michelle Brophy-Baermann argues that this conflation of marriage and mobility is first illustrated through situations of *physical* mobility: "contestants are whisked around the country [and the world] on elaborate dates, and questions of whether prospective dates are willing to relocate if chosen are de rigueur" (Brophy-Baermann 41). Typically, women are expected to drop everything

and move wherever the Bachelor desires, for, as Gina Carbone satirically suggests, they are simply fortunate to have the *opportunity* to move with this man: when “you’re a Bachelor contestant or a rose-giving Bachelorette, it’s just expected that you will move to the man as opposed to him moving to you—or you both moving to a new place together” (Carbone). While men “are assumed to have careers, homes, and social ties too important to alter just for some women” (Pozner 245), it is considered deviant or even disrespectful for a woman to refuse relocation for her man.

Social mobility, too, is evident throughout *The Bachelor*, and immediately: our introductions to both Bachelor and contestant work to make this narrative quite clear. On season thirteen of *The Bachelor*, affluence runs throughout Jason’s introduction; he speaks about having a “great job” (no mention, however, of what that job is), living in a major metropolitan area, and is depicted partaking in a variety of small luxuries (possessing a gym membership, driving sports cars, etc.). But while Jason is introduced by his masculine affluence, his twenty-five suitors are characterized by their femininity. The majority of these women, for example, are attributed occupations traditionally viewed as feminine: contestants Julie, Sharon, and Lauren are all teachers; Ann and Naomi are flight attendants; Shannon is a dental hygienist; and Jackie is a wedding planner (*The Bachelor* Episode 1301, 2009). While *The Bachelor* may feign feminist ideals by packaging these women with their occupations, the majority of these women register as only marginally independent, ready and willing to accept the Bachelor and the promise of economic security he carries.¹

Men are similarly equated with the potential for providing mobility on *The Bachelorette*, despite the fact that, here, they are not, as Jason puts it “in the driver’s seat” (*The Bachelor* Episode 1301 2009). In her introduction, Emily is never attributed with an occupation, nor does she address any sort of professional affiliations. Instead, she is solely characterized by her roles as mother, caretaker, and single woman, even going so far as to say: “More than anything I want a family, and I want to be a wife, and I want a husband. I just want that life” (*The Bachelorette* Episode 801 2012).

Additionally, much like on *The Bachelor*, *Bachelorette* contestants are identified by occupations that are stereotypically gendered; Emily's suitors include Sean, an insurance agent; Nathan, an accountant; Arie, a race car driver; and Jef, an entrepreneur. As we are introduced to these men, the narrative is clear: they have the power, the resources, and the capital to give Emily the life she has always wanted.

All the Right Reasons

A common phrase tossed around on *The Bachelor/ette* is “here for the right reasons,” those “right reasons” being, as Naomi Rockler-Gladen points out, “that they’re committed to the ‘process’” of finding love (Rockler-Gladen). This, inevitably, leads to the demonization of contestants who are discovered to be on these shows for the “wrong reasons,” which often include the desire to be on television, and to capitalize on the fifteen minutes of fame that reality programs promise (Rockler-Gladen).

On season eight of *The Bachelorette*, for example, contestant Ryan Bowers' fellow suitors labeled him as possessing these “wrong reasons,” hopeful that Emily would see through his ruse—or, as contestant Chris Bukowski put it, that she would “figure out that he’s selling her a bag of bad goods” (*The Bachelorette* Episode 806 2012). In a series of confessionals aired throughout a one-on-one date between Ryan and Emily, contestant Jef Holm suggested that Ryan was “in it for, like, the prize of it more,” while contestant Arie Luyendyk, Jr. warned that “Ryan isn’t the guy that he always says he is” (*The Bachelorette* Episode 806 2012).

The immense distaste that emerges for Ryan's behavior throughout his tenure on *The Bachelorette* is fascinating, because it exemplifies the credibility that characterizes the capital and status gained through one method of social mobility (the institution of marriage) while simultaneously discrediting the capital and status gained through an alternative avenue to the same destination (fame

and media exposure). While these shows never acknowledge the social, cultural, and economic capital exchanges and gains that occur amongst a final *Bachelor/ette* pairing, their presentation of reactions to the ulterior motives of contestants such as Ryan suggests that there is but one way to go about achieving social mobility: falling in love.

Once Upon a Time...: *The Bachelor/ette*, Fairy Tales, and Economic Mobility

As I have argued throughout this thesis, *The Bachelor/ette* construct themselves as contemporary fairytales, drawing audiences in through their reliance on the traditional “Prince Rescues Maiden” storyline. This fairytale structure contributes to the narrative of social mobility that permeates the programs; in her article “Why I Watch The Bachelor,” for example, journalist Ash Adams reads these shows through the lens of Roland Barthes’ codes of storytelling, suggesting that the tropes utilized throughout each episode and season are utilized with the intent of constructing a fairytale-esque narrative of upward mobility through marriage. The “semic code,” she writes, “discusses narrative elements, or semes, that add connotations to the story”; in *The Bachelor*, then, “‘mansion’ may signify ‘wealth,’ ‘muscles’ may signify ‘strong,’ and ‘red rose’ may signify ‘love.’ Giving a rose at the end of each ceremony symbolizes that the Bachelor has feelings for the woman receiving it. A woman dressed in an expensive evening gown and jewelry could signify ‘prize’” (Adams).

Returning again to the works of Michelle Brophy-Baermann, she argues that this fairytale framework ensures that a narrative of materialism permeates these programs:

For those chosen to be on *The Bachelor/ette*, life is like a dream. From the limousine that carries contestants to the opening reception, to living in a mansion, to dream dates complete with gourmet food, bubbly champagne, fresh flowers, fancy dresses, exquisite jewelry,

luxurious spa treatments, and celebrity-filled sporting events, to the limousine that whisks losers away, *materialism* is ubiquitous (Brophy-Baermann 42).

One example of such materialism comes from Jason's one-on-one date with contestant Natalie, in which he presents her with a diamond necklace valued at over \$1million to wear throughout the evening. Referred to as the "princess date" by a fellow contestant (*The Bachelor* Episode 1303 2009), Natalie's one-on-one not only reinforced the fairytale nature of *The Bachelor*, but, later, also reinforced the narrative of social mobility prevalent throughout these programs. At the conclusion of their date, Jason chose not to give Natalie a rose, thereby eliminating her from the competition. Prior to her departure, however, a security guard approached her and asked her to remove the million-dollar necklace, a scene which capitalized on Natalie's embarrassment to remind viewers of what was at stake: not only Jason, but the upward mobility and the financial security that a life with him promised.

Concluding Remarks

Brophy-Baermann's analyses of the *Bachelor* franchise suggest that "*The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* offer viewers lessons in more than what it means to be a man or woman, to be masculine or feminine," that they "also provide audiences with an education in Americanism," meaning "the all-American cultural values of individualism, mobility, competition, materialism, and consumption" (Brophy-Baermann 40). A critically minded viewing of even one episode of *The Bachelor/ette* will support her argument: it is clear that, like most television programs, the *Bachelor* franchise is concerned about creating consumers. To this end, however, it commodifies "love," equating the concept with materialism and promising its female viewers that the institution of marriage holds the solutions to all of their financial woes. This commodification is but another attempt by the *Bachelor* franchise to encourage its viewers to embrace the institution of heterosexuality.

CHAPTER 4

One-Sixteenth Cherokee Indian: Race, Heterosexuality, and *The Bachelor/ette*

“Is it ridiculous that there’s a black president before a black Bachelor? Sure, but I wanted the former a lot more anyway.”

—Joshua Alston, “Why ‘The Bachelor’ Is Always White”

In April 2012, Christopher Johnson and Nathaniel Claybrooks, two African-American men, filed a lawsuit in Tennessee federal court against the producers of the *Bachelor* franchise, “claiming they both auditioned for *The Bachelor* in Nashville in August 2011...but were brazenly denied based solely on the color of their skin” (TMZ Staff). Johnson and Claybrooks argued that “producers were afraid to cast them for fear of alienating ‘the show’s majority-white viewership,’” suggesting that, as a result, “producers are teaching the public how to be racist—by demonstrating preferences for white relationships over non-white and interracial relationships” (TMZ Staff). In response, “ABC strenuously insisted that there is no such discrimination at work, but that even if there were, their right to cast only white people if they want to is protected by the First Amendment because of the expressive, creative nature of *The Bachelor/ette*” (Holmes).

This lawsuit, therefore, came to focus on a specific issue: while everyone agreed “that the *content* of shows is protected by the First Amendment, the plaintiffs were arguing that with most shows, *casting* the show is not—it’s more like deciding who you’ll form any other business contract with, and federal antidiscrimination laws would therefore apply” (Holmes). In October 2012, a federal judge dismissed the suit, concluding that “casting *is* protected by the First Amendment,” meaning “that even if the plaintiffs were right that the show was in fact outright refusing to cast people of color, in part to avoid ‘controversy’ over interracial dating, its right to do that would be protected from interference” (Holmes).

While this lawsuit ultimately resulted in a favorable decision for the ABC franchise, it did draw mainstream attention to a long simmering criticism of these programs: their inability to

assemble a cast that is racially and ethnically diverse. This inability, however, is not something that its creators necessarily shy away from. When asked in a 2011 interview, for example, about the possibility of featuring a non-white Bachelor/ette, creator and executive producer Mike Fleiss responded by saying “I think Ashley [*The Bachelorette*, Season 7] is 1/16th Cherokee Indian, but I cannot confirm. But that is my suspicion! We really tried, but sometimes we feel guilty of tokenism. Oh, we have to wedge African-American chicks in there!” (Paskin “Racist”). In this chapter, I will explore *The Bachelor/ette*’s history of racial exclusion, arguing that the repetitive whitewashing of these programs is, in part, influenced by the franchise’s reliance on heterosexuality and heteronormative discourse surrounding interracial relationships.

The Whitest Show on Television

Over the broadcast of its twenty-seven combined seasons, *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* have failed to feature a person of color in the title role¹—not, however, due to a lack of interest from these populations. Numerous online campaigns, launched via blogs and social media, have popped up throughout *The Bachelor*’s first decade, and several of them have gained traction and mainstream media attention—though never enough, apparently, to convince the franchise’s producers to mix-up their successful (white) format. In 2011, for example, Miese Harris, an African-American woman, turned down the opportunity to appear as a contestant on the fifteenth season of *The Bachelor*, instead launching an online campaign to star as the Bachelorette in the series’ upcoming seventh season: “I realized that being the Bachelorette would give me a better opportunity to find love and a stronger platform for all of my creative dreams and charity work,” Harris stated through her campaign, adding “It also would allow me to inspire other black women and girls to dream big and know their worth” (Sieczkowski). Unfortunately for Harris, *Bachelor* producers did not share

her dream of inspiring black women everywhere; ABC ignored her campaign, and Harris was featured on neither *The Bachelor* nor *The Bachelorette*.

Harris is not the only person of color to be passed over by ABC for a leading role in the franchise. Reports in early 2012 suggested that the network was inching closer to featuring a black Bachelor, with Portland-based sportscaster Lamar Hurd in consideration for the role—following an online campaign similar to Harris’s, spearheaded by Hurd’s assistant (Baldwin). Hurd, however, was ultimately sidelined by Sean Lowe; the second runner-up of Emily Maynard’s season of *The Bachelorette* was announced as Bachelor #17 in September 2012.

While ABC executives maintain that the show is continuously exploring the possibilities of casting a person of color in its pivotal role (Braxton), the failed attempts of Harris and Hurd—and the numerous others like them—seem to suggest that producers have very little interest in pursuing a more diverse cast. Journalist Greg Braxton suggests that this disinterest is the product of both an unwillingness to vary the chemistry and formula of a hugely popular series, and of a wariness of the potential controversy that could stem from an interracial romance (Braxton). Seeing as *The Bachelor*’s main project is the reification of the traditional, Braxton’s second point rings especially true; rather than arrange for the possibility of an interracial couple—an “untraditional” pairing that could threaten *The Bachelor*’s attempts at reinforcing the purity of heterosexuality—producers generally avoid this possibility altogether.

Of course, despite the issues that arise from the predominance of whiteness on *The Bachelor/ette*, one has to wonder whether—and how—people of color could and would benefit from an increased inclusion on these programs. While it would, ideally, be beneficial to see a person of color as the Bachelor/ette, we have to question whether we can truly trust this franchise to successfully and progressively present nonwhite bodies in these leading roles. In an article posted to the feminist-minded blog *Jezebel*, for example, Thea Lim suggests that, should we have, say, a Korean

Bachelorette, it is doubtful “we would make it through a single episode without reference to said Bachelorette’s exotic beauty and delicate hands” (Lim). Or, she suggests, “what if we had a Bachelor of color pick a white suitor? We’d have another disastrous portrayal of white beauty being selected over nonwhite” beauty (Lim).² Ultimately, because we cannot assume that a Bachelor/ette of color would be treated, edited, and portrayed the same way as his/her white counterparts, we also cannot assume that inclusion is the answer to the franchise’s racial problems.

Is *The Bachelor* Racist?

Throughout its time on-air, roughly 700 contestants have competed on *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette*. But, just as we have yet to see Bachelors and Bachelorettes of color, we have yet to see a significantly ethnically diverse cast, with the vast majority of the contestants appearing relatively fair skinned. Producers, of course, insist that this dominance of white bodies is no fault of theirs. They allege that they have made attempts to be more inclusive, casting four African-Americans and one Asian-American as contestants in *The Bachelor*’s 2013 cycle (Chozick and Carter), and creator Mike Fleiss argues that he “always want[s] to cast for ethnic diversity,” but, “for whatever reason, they [people of color] don’t come forward. I wish they would” (Braxton). Unfortunately, Fleiss’s argument—already difficult to swallow—grows even weaker when challenged by the campaigns listed earlier in this chapter. How can he argue that people of color “don’t come forward” when numerous accounts of such efforts have garnered mainstream media attention?

Of course, perhaps challenging Fleiss’s argument is not even worthwhile, for when people of color *are* invited to join the program, they rarely stick around for very long, anyway. In her article “Is ‘The Bachelor’ racist?” Willa Paskin observes that “African American participants are [always] some of the first women to be kicked off the show. [...] If the Bachelor doesn’t reject these contestants in the initial rose ceremony (to avoid the overt appearance of racism), then they usually are soon after”

(Paskin “Racist”).³ Such treatment is immediately evident on Emily’s season of *The Bachelorette*; she sends Lerone Anu, the sole African-American contestant, home at the conclusion of the premiere episode, and sends contestants Alessandro Goulart and Alejandro Velez, both of Latin American descent, home shortly after, with neither receiving substantial screen time prior to their departure. Similar behavior was not visible on Jason’s season of *The Bachelor*, but only because, within his initial group of twenty-five women, every single one of them was white.

Because *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* are some of the whitest shows on television, cultural critics point to these programs as examples of the lamentable state of contemporary race relations, pegging the media as a crucial site of continued racial oppression. In his article “Why ‘The Bachelor’ Is Always White,” for example, columnist Joshua Alston suggests that “*The Bachelor* is one of many pop-culture artifacts that highlight the uncomfortable gap between the way we’d like to think of racial integration and the way it actually is,” and that *The Bachelor*’s whiteness highlights “how divided we still are in some respects (Alston). He argues that *The Bachelor*’s racial exclusivity is something of a vicious cycle; because people still overwhelmingly date and marry within their own race and, because white people are often the best audience to target from a ratings standpoint (Alston), *The Bachelor/ette* continually present dating and marriage as a predominantly white activity—thereby suggesting the perpetuation of romantic segregation amongst its viewers.

Concluding Remarks

Beyond its continued reification of traditional gender roles and heterosexuality, one of the biggest criticisms of the *Bachelor* franchise has been its severe lack of diversity. Despite the continued criticism of its whitewashed nature ABC continues to populate *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* with white bodies, thereby associating its heterosexual ideal with whiteness and suggesting that people of color are not worthy of “true love.” Still, one has to question whether the inclusion of people of

color on these programs would be truly beneficial; as *Bachelor* blogger Naomi Rockler-Gladen asks in her blog post “Why This Feminist Loves the Bachelor; or, Pretty White People Behaving Badly,” why would anyone think that putting more minorities on such a trashy reality show would count as progress? (Rockler-Gladen). If, as we have seen, *The Bachelor* is dangerous not only because of its racial exclusion, but also because of its reinforcement of heterogendered relations, would it truly be beneficial to minority populations these programs to cast for greater racial and ethnic diversity?

CONCLUSION

And They Lived Happily Ever After...

“Television is by definition a medium that invites questions about how real its version of reality is. Love by definition is oddly similar, always open to doubts about whether one is ‘really’ in love”

– Misha Kavka, “Love ‘n the Real; or, How I Learned to Love Reality TV”

Throughout this thesis, I have presented critical readings of two seasons from the *Bachelor* franchise, with the intention of illuminating the heteronormative agenda that governs these programs. Because reality television is often labeled as “trashy” and characterized as “mindless entertainment” or a “guilty pleasure,” we, far too frequently, approach these programs with our intellects turned off—a practice which, I argue, has the potential to be incredibly dangerous.

Many (if not all) television programs have an agenda—some message, or some set of ideas that they hope to disseminate to audiences. In the case of *The Bachelor*, this agenda is one that conflicts with a feminist consciousness, reintroducing into our current vernacular and our current televisual landscape oppressive gender roles and a plea for heterosexuality. While *The Bachelor/ette* presents different narratives regarding gender, sexuality, class, and race, they all lead back to the same overriding argument: heterosexual marriage is an institution that is deeply beneficial to our society, and all “good” people embrace its practice.

While I hope that this thesis has enlightened readers on the problematic messages that rest under *The Bachelor*'s polished façade, I did not write it to suggest that all reality television is “bad,” or to encourage viewers to stop watching these programs altogether. I have simply presented here what Stuart Hall would label an oppositional reading. I hope, now, that readers recognize the possibility of a negotiated reading, a method of decoding which, according to Hall, “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule” (Hall 172).

Learning to Love Reality TV

In an essay entitled “Love ‘n the Real; or, How I Learned to Love Reality TV,” Misha Kavka presents a compelling account of how (and why) we are able to enjoy reality television, thereby providing an argument on the benefits of negotiated viewing. Focusing particularly on programs such as *The Bachelor*, which lie within a genre she labels “intimate strangers” television, Kavka argues that reality television’s success stems predominantly from its lessons “not about social interaction, or even about the woeful dissolution of the private sphere, but about media intimacy” (Kavka 93).

Kavka suggests that reality TV shows “produce a sense of reality as an effect of seemingly *direct* transmission,” and, as such, must be considered “sites of ‘constructed unmediation,’ where the technology involved in both production and post-production shapes a final product that comes across as unmediated, or real” (Kavka 94). It is this “constructed unmediation,” she argues, that facilitates a sense of intimacy between program and viewer; “the appeal of reality TV,” she suggests, “lies precisely in its performance of reality in a way that *matters*” (Kavka 94).

Watching an episode of *The Bachelor* can be so pleasurable, then, because of the sense of intimacy it creates between viewer and subject. “In these shows,” Kavka writes, “rather than being voyeurs of hot-tub scenes, we are voyeurs of emotion—but equally participants in it, drawn in by what I call the affect of intimacy” (Kavka 96). The gross popularity of this franchise, then, can be attributed to its ability to, as Kavka puts it, construct an unmediated experience—to appeal to the emotions of its audiences and, in the process, to create a sensation of intimacy that audiences come to embrace.

The Reality of Happily Ever After

I believe that there is a lot of truth in Kavka’s argument, and I would suggest that a negotiated viewing of *The Bachelor* requires knowledge of both the heteronormative agenda

frequently at play in the franchise and of the ways in which reality television constructs this sense of media intimacy. With these tools, however, I argue that it is entirely possible to engage in a *Bachelor* viewing that is simultaneously critical and enjoyable, that recognizes both the pleasure derived from the intimacy established between viewer and screen and the problematic aspects of the narratives being presented.

Thus, at the very least, I hope that readers leave this thesis with the desire to no longer mindlessly engage with mindless entertainment, if not the tools to do so. As I have already said many, many times throughout this thesis, it is not my intention to encourage readers to cease their reality television watching; rather, I hope that they *do* continue watching, negotiating their way through these mediated romantic landscapes, and encouraging others of the importance of always keeping open their critical eye.

NOTES

Introduction: Looking for Love (In All the Wrong Places)

1. A third spinoff, *Bachelor in Paradise*, is slated to premiere in August 2014.
2. Several types of dates are featured on *The Bachelor/ette*. The two most common are one-on-one dates, in which the Bachelor/ette spends an evening with a single suitor, engaging in an adventurous or entertaining activity and an elaborate dinner, and group dates, in which the Bachelor/ette spends the day with a group of suitors, concluding their evening with a small party. On both dates, the Bachelor/ette is expected to bequeath a rose upon a contestant. If a contestant on a one-on-one does not receive the rose, s/he is immediately eliminated from the game. Contestants on group dates who do not receive the rose are not eliminated. Each episode typically features two one-on-one dates and one group date. Other types of dates featured sparingly throughout a season include two-on-one dates, hometown dates, and overnight dates. Two-on-one dates involve the Bachelor/ette spending the day with two suitors, and always end with the suitor *not* given the rose being immediately eliminated. Hometown dates feature the Bachelor/ette traveling to the hometowns of their four remaining suitors, providing them the opportunity to meet their family and friends. Overnight dates occur when only three contestants remain, and involve the Bachelor/ette inviting each contestant to spend a night with him/her in the “fantasy suite.”
3. While every Bachelorette has been selected from a pool of women rejected on *The Bachelor*, Mesnick was the first rejected Bachelor given “another chance at love.” This change in the *Bachelor* formula has since been credited with revitalizing the show (Chozick and Carter) with Bachelors #14 (Jake Pavelka), #16 (Ben Flajnik), #17 (Sean Lowe), and #18 (Juan Pablo Galavis) all selected from previous seasons of *The Bachelorette* (Bachelor #15, Brad Womack, had also filled the role in the show’s eleventh season, in which he selected none of the contestants in the final episode).

Chapter One: “I Would Be a Servant to Him”

1. This quote also appeared in Jennifer L. Pozner’s *Reality Bites Back*, in a chapter also entitled “I Would Be a Servant to Him.” I borrowed this chapter title as a way of reflecting the influence of Pozner’s work on my own.
2. A notable exception to this pattern occurs in the third episode of Jason’s season, in which he sends contestant Natalie home at the conclusion of a one-on-one date.irate, Natalie berates Jason in her post-elimination confessional, at one point stating: “You don’t feel a connection with me? Who do you think you are, God?” (*The Bachelor* Episode 1303 2009). But while Natalie’s reaction may transcend normative gendered behavior, producers frame Natalie’s behavior in a way that makes her seem “crazy” for reacting the way she does. While *Bachelorette* men are able (and perhaps even expected) to fault the Bachelorette for their rejection, Natalie’s attack on Jason is framed in a way that makes her seem petulant and narcissistic.

Chapter Two: Are You a Betty or a Veronica?

1. An article published in *The New York Times* in March 2013 addressed some of *The Bachelor/ette*’s viewership patterns, identifying its viewers as predominantly female. *The Bachelor*’s seventeenth season averaged 8.8 million total viewers and 3.3 million viewers 18 to 49 years old, the group that attracts the most advertisers. Viewers’ median age is 51.1, which is young in broadcast television terms (the average viewer of ABC’s *Dancing with the Stars*, for

example, is 61.6), and it plays especially well with women of financial means: “in homes with more than \$100,000 in income, it scores 34 percent above the television average” (Chozick and Carter).

Chapter Three: With This Ring

1. Inherent in the *Bachelor* narrative, then, are traces of the decades-old “man or career: you cannot have both” dilemma, with these programs continuously suggesting to women that the only “worthwhile” answer is “choose the man.”

Chapter Four: One-Sixteenth Cherokee Indian

1. In January 2014, the eighteenth season of *The Bachelor* premiered, featuring *Bachelorette* reject Juan Pablo Galavis in the title role. ABC heavily promoted Galavis as its first “non-Caucasian Bachelor,” (Schuster) a claim that quickly inspired impassioned dialogue across the Internet regarding Juan Pablo’s light-skinned appearance. In a facetious article written for the *New York Post*, for example, Dana Schuster stated that the Venezuelan (born and schooled, however, in New York) “looks so white he could easily slip into a Mitt Romney family photo” (Schuster). Likewise, an article written by Jethro Nededog for *The Wrap* questioned whether Galavis was “a truly representative choice for Latinos” (Nededog), arguing that *The Bachelor*’s “step” towards equality was really nothing more than a “half-inch.”
2. Additionally, Lim argues that while a white/nonwhite pairing “could be portrayed as just your run-of-the-mill miracle of love thing, [...] it could also turn into something nauseatingly post-racial, with the couple getting back-pats for being so brave and courageous; missing the point that you should date someone just because you like them, and not out of some twisted desire to end racism by humping someone of another race” (Lim).
3. These early eliminations also mean that contestants of color fail to become contenders to take the lead role in the next iteration of the series, as s/he is often picked from the prior season’s high-profile losers (Paskin “Racist”), as I have mentioned before.

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