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Every Rose Has Its Thorn: A Feminist Critique of How The Bachelor Communicates Ideal Femininity

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EVERY ROSE HAS ITS THORN: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF HOW *THE BACHELOR*
COMMUNICATES IDEAL FEMININITY

KATY BIDDLE

94 Pages

This study investigated the messages ABC's *The Bachelor* sends about ideal femininity. Specifically, the first and twentieth seasons were analyzed through a liberal feminist lens to determine if the women on *The Bachelor* aligned with stereotypical representations of women in media. I focused my attention on the women who progressed to the final three within the competition and the women who were depicted as the villains within the series. Then, I compared the first season's portrayal of the contestants with the twentieth season's portrayal. The three themes that were uncovered were sexuality, confidence, and "ladylike" behaviors. Ultimately, I argue that the show portrays women as having to have stereotypical feminine attributes in order to be considered an ideal woman. Furthermore, the twentieth season is more critical of women than the first season and gives women less agency than they were portrayed as having when the show first aired in 2002. Implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: *The Bachelor*; Reality television; Media representation; Gender roles; Liberal feminism

EVERY ROSE HAS ITS THORN: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF HOW *THE BACHELOR*
COMMUNICATES IDEAL FEMININITY

KATY BIDDLE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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COMMUNICATES IDEAL FEMININITY

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CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | i |
| CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Existing Research on Feminism and Media | 4 |
| Reality Television Research | 4 |
| Feminist Perspectives within Media | 6 |
| Research on <i>The Bachelor</i> | 9 |
| Methodology | 11 |
| Thesis Outline | 14 |
| CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 16 |
| Introduction | 16 |
| Feminism | 16 |
| Why Television Studies | 18 |
| Representation of Women in Television | 21 |
| Reality Television as a Genre | 23 |
| Representation in Reality Television | 27 |
| Conclusion | 30 |
| CHAPTER III: METHODS | 32 |
| Chosen Texts | 36 |
| Types of Women in the Show | 37 |
| Scenarios to Observe | 38 |
| Ideal Femininity | 39 |

| | |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS | 42 |
| Sexuality and Physicality | 42 |
| Sexuality | 43 |
| Ill-timed sexual interactions | 43 |
| Sexual interactions at the right time | 50 |
| Physical Proximity | 57 |
| Confidence and Vulnerability | 60 |
| Over-confidence | 61 |
| Lack of Confidence | 63 |
| Low vs. High Levels of Vulnerability | 64 |
| Ladylike Behaviors | 66 |
| Women’s Roles | 67 |
| Ladylike Attitudes | 69 |
| Differences Between Season One and Season 20 | 71 |
| Conclusion | 74 |
| CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION | 76 |
| Implications | 76 |
| Future Research | 80 |
| Conclusion | 83 |
| REFERENCES | 85 |

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My first boss, Hannah, was objectively beautiful. She was blonde with a perfectly symmetrical face, dazzling white smile, and big, blue eyes. Her husband was equally as handsome and had a career as a professional athlete. Her toddler son was the perfect baby: perpetually cheerful, never cried, and always looked charming in his designer clothes. In addition to the seemingly perfect home life, Hannah owned her own company and called all the shots at work. She answered to nobody and made running a company appear to be as simple a task as ironing a blouse. Throughout my tenure as her employee, her clients would appear at the office with bonus checks written out to Hannah for tens of thousands of dollars to reward her stunning performance. She did this all with poise, grace, and a smile. In short, Hannah was the epitome of the woman I wanted to be. She had it all: beauty, love, and money. Therefore, when Hannah invited me to her home to watch her favorite television show, *The Bachelor*, I immediately accepted her invitation. As I sat on her large sectional sofa in her two-story condo located in the trendiest part of the city, I realized that the current season of *The Bachelor* was almost over and I had no inkling of who any of the main characters were. Despite this, I absorbed as much information as I could because if a woman like Hannah was invested in this show, I wanted to be too. Just as young women look to television shows like *The Bachelor* to find role models and the ideal image of a woman to live up to, I looked to Hannah as being the perfect woman.

This particular season of *The Bachelor* featured Iowa farmer Chris Soules on his quest for love. Airing in 2015, the finale had 9.68 million viewers (Carbone, 2017). First airing in 2002, the premise of the reality television program is that one man, “the bachelor”, simultaneously dates upward of 20 women. Through the process of elimination, the man eventually decides that one woman is “the one” and proposes to her in the season finale. The women, like most

television stars, generally boast a large bust size, low body mass index, and a closet full of designer gowns. These characteristics, coupled with the drama that occurs when 20 women fight for the attention of the same man, make *The Bachelor* an enticing television program for women of all ages with the twentieth season finale reaching 9.58 million viewers (Carbone, 2017). The program is one of ABC's most popular shows among women viewers ages 18-49, so while some men do watch the show, ABC relies on women viewers to keep the show's ratings high (Consoli, 2013). The creator and producer of the show is a 53-year-old man named Mike Fleiss. Fleiss is known for producing *The Bachelor*, its spinoffs, and horror films such as *Hostel*, and the 2003 remake of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Though he was married to his high school sweetheart when he first created the show in 2002, Fleiss has since divorced her and married a former Miss America winner 30 years his junior (IMDb, 2018).

This drama in *The Bachelor* routinely consists of typical events such as break-ups, rejections, heated arguments, and romantic trysts in hot tubs. Episode after episode, viewers can see beautiful women with tears making their mascara run down their faces as they wonder why the bachelor does not love them. More dramatic events that happen include contestants having secret boyfriends back at home, contestants spreading lies about each other, or even physical fights between contestants. In most *Bachelor* seasons, one or two women become "the villains" of the show and go to extra lengths to win the bachelor's affection. Typically, these women will engage in promiscuous behaviors, which in turn makes the other women call them names questioning their character and purity. Generally, at the climax of the villain's story arc, she will betray another woman on the show. For example, in "Episode 6: Bahamas" of the twentieth season of *The Bachelor* (2016), Leah went to Bachelor Ben's room "after hours" to tell him that another contestant who appeared to be the frontrunner was not genuine and was falsely claiming

to have feelings for Ben. Leah hoped this would win Ben over, but in typical *Bachelor* fashion, the lead was able to see through Leah's bad intentions and sent her home immediately.

ABC intentionally appeals to viewers' interest in romance in the creation of *The Bachelor* episodes. Due to the format and content of the show, whether intentionally or not, ABC sends messages to viewers about what comprises the ideal woman. Society itself tends to privilege a certain performance of femininity. Through the competitive nature of *The Bachelor*, the ideal is presented through active comparison with other representations of femininity. Though all television programs provide models of masculinity and femininity for viewers, dating shows more explicitly present ideas of what men and women should behave like in order to win the heart of the opposite sex. Branded as "reality," television shows like *The Bachelor* have the potential to influence viewers' perception of gender roles even more so than other types of programs. One by one, women are eliminated from the competition for the bachelor's heart as the show progresses. By having one woman "win" in the season finale, viewers can deduce that the winner represents the best woman with the most potential as a spouse. This should concern researchers because viewers of this television show might perceive what behaviors and attributes of a woman make her the ideal spouse and, by extension, the ideal woman. This show, while dubbed "reality," is staged and highly edited. This is problematic because viewers might perceive the messages the show sends as more realistic than if the show were to be labeled as a typical, scripted television program. Even if viewers are aware that the show is not realistic, they may still buy into the program's messages about ideal femininity. The majority of viewers probably do not look like the women or live the same lavish lifestyle they do. Thus, it is important to study what themes arise in *The Bachelor* that portray the ideal woman to see if they match up with reality. In this thesis, I seek the answer to the following research questions:

RQ₁: What messages does *The Bachelor* present viewers about ideal femininity?

RQ₂: Has *The Bachelor*'s representations of ideal femininity changed during the course of the show's 20 seasons?

Existing Research on Feminism and Media

Bountiful research examining feminism, media, and their intersection exists within the field of communication. More specifically, critical research about *The Bachelor* has explored sexism and racism within the television series. Despite the staggering amount of existing feminist research in television, including an entire book written solely about critical viewings of *The Bachelor* (Dubrofsky, 2011), no study has answered the questions this study asks, which is what does *The Bachelor* communicate to viewers about what attributes comprise the ideal woman. Exploring existing literature on feminist perspectives within media, reality television, and *The Bachelor* demonstrates the importance of taking a different approach to the study of this television show and other media.

Reality Television Research

Reality television can uniquely affect audiences due to its claim to represent real life. Reiss and Wiltz (2004) found sixteen human motives that inform the content of reality television: social contact, curiosity, honor, family, independence, power, order, idealism, social status, vengeance, eating, romance, physical exercise, acceptance, tranquility, and saving. Viewers choose to watch reality television programs in order to live vicariously through the participants on the screen so that they can fulfill one or more of these human motives. Of the motives, social status was found to be the most influential factor for the majority of reality television viewers, according to a qualitative study by Reiss and Wiltz (2014). Other scholars found that a common reason young people watched reality television was because one or more influential people in

their social sphere did and they did not want to feel left out (Lundy & Park, 2008). Though reality television covers a breadth of topics, the overarching theme is that it is supposed to represent reality. However, viewers question the realness of the content of reality television programs to varying degrees (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Often, viewers understand that while the contestants on a reality television program might be engaging in an activity such as eating bugs on *Survivor*, some aspects of the situation are contrived by producers and directors. Viewers still consider the programs to be reality, not because of the reality of the situations themselves, but how contestants on reality programs respond to the situations. Even though the events that unfold on a reality television program might be incited by a producer's idea at what makes entertaining television, viewers still consider the emotional reactions of contestants to be realistic.

Even though viewers are aware of the disparity between reality television programs and their own reality, they can still become immersed in the programs. The more an audience member watches a particular program, the more immersed in the show they will become. This leads to two main effects: increased pleasure from the content and taking the content more seriously. This means that the more someone watches a reality television show, the more they are influenced (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). Additionally, scholars have found there is a positive relationship between viewing of reality television shows and accepting the values the shows communicate. This relationship is enhanced by how realistic the viewers perceive the show to be. This can be particularly troublesome if the program is promoting problematic or hegemonic values. For example, a 2007 study conducted on viewers of reality dating shows found that as viewers watched the show more, they were more likely to view women as sex objects and that men are driven by sex (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007). This study

demonstrates that reality dating shows like *The Bachelor* do, in fact, send powerful messages to viewers about both women and men. This means that the messages *The Bachelor* sends about ideal femininity may be just as influential.

Feminist Perspectives within Media

Feminism provides a useful lens for viewing reality television as well as other types of media. Van Zoonen (1996) described three different feminist approaches scholars have used in their approach to media: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. While each sect of feminism seeks to uphold the value of women in society, the theories approach this goal in a different manner. Socialist feminism views women's role within class and economic systems and recognizes the role of women within capitalism. Ultimately, the goal of socialist feminism is to restructure the labor force such that women and men equally share both the economic and domestic burdens of a household. Radical feminism claims that men inherently seek to dominate women and thus should be cut from women's communities. On the contrary, liberal feminism attempts to create equality among both genders by discussing "irrational prejudice and stereotypes about the supposedly natural role of women as wives and mothers" (Van Zoonen, 1996, pp. 33). Liberal feminism's quest to equalize men and women by uncovering the assumptions society makes about the supposed role of women makes it the appropriate lens for my thesis as I sought to examine how *The Bachelor* portrays the ideal woman within the context of being a potential spouse.

The feminist lens has been applied to media messages by many scholars. For example, Hylmö (2006) conducted a study on films targeting teenage audiences to investigate what messages were sent to young women in regards to future vocational choices. She found that the women in the films she analyzed typically worked blue collar jobs that left them unsatisfied and

that the films ultimately sent the message that women can rely on a man in a white-collar position to take care of them financially and emotionally. Nash (2002) looked at books as a medium and found that adolescent women were typically portrayed as in trouble and in need of a savior, typically a man. Nash (2002) argued that this was problematic in that it communicated to young women that they could not save themselves or be independent.

Countless studies have applied a feminist lens to television content. Modleski (1983) studied daytime television and soap operas and how they target women as audience members. She noted that the genre of soap operas tended to utilize themes that were directed at women more than men including unwed mothers, rape, questionable paternity, marrying for money, and the trope of the evil woman. Modleski (1983) said that daytime television utilized these themes that drew women in as audience members because they targeted housewives who were home during the daytime. Modleski (1983) argued that the reason this genre in particular appealed to women was because of the way it portrayed these themes and how families were portrayed in a fantastic way. In soap operas, viewers see generations of a singular family which is typically directly oppositional to a woman's reality of being at home with only her nuclear family. Furthermore, the plot of a soap opera rarely progresses as characters endure setbacks constantly. This serves to mimic reality for women who work tirelessly in their homes every day only to have to perform the exact same actions the next day when they are left at home to take care of the house and children again.

Other scholars have also studied the phenomenon of what draws women to a particular television show. Jenkins (1994) studied television from an audience perspective and looked at *Star Trek* and women "trekkies." He found that women became fans and joined the trekkie lifestyle in order to feel as though they were participating in something greater than themselves.

Ultimately, the women were looking for greater dignity and so they decided to join a large group of people who bonded over one thing: *Star Trek*. However, Jenkins (1994) also found that when these same women wrote fan-fiction about *Star Trek* characters, they often utilized the same themes as soap operas used such as romantic relationships. This is drastically different than a real *Star Trek* episode that was action-centered. Jenkins (1994) argued the reason behind this trend was hegemonic norms. Women have been socialized to read media texts in such a way that they understand the characters and make inferences beyond what is explicitly stated. Often, plotlines written by men do not satisfy women's desires and thus they need to transcend the work itself to create more character development. This, Jenkins (1994) argued, is why 90% of fan-fiction is written by women.

Some scholars have found that an increase in awareness for feminist issues has improved the quality of media messages. Even so, women are still typically represented in terms of their relationship to men rather than as a protagonist in her own right (Dow, 1990; Van Zoonen, 1996). The rise of feminism in the 1960s brought about television programs like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* which featured a strong female lead. Dow (1990) found that while an increase in female leads was beneficial for women, it could be problematic when the shows unintentionally perpetuate hegemony. For example, in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the lead character has a career outside the home. However, she typically also fills the role of a wife or mother-figure to her co-workers and friends. Dow (1990) argues that this sends the message to women that even if they have their own successful careers, their worth still comes from the role they play as a caretaker for others. Decades later, feminist trends still influenced television programming. Weiser (2004) analyzed programs on Nickelodeon aimed at young women. She found that since the popularization of the concept of "girl power" there has been an increase in strong female

leads. The popularization of programs like *As Told by Ginger* and *Clarissa Explains it All* give more role models for adolescent women. In both shows, the lead characters were independent and funny. By pandering to young women, Nickelodeon gave more power to women as media consumers.

Critical viewings of television series have illuminated feminist issues that exist in both reality and the media. This has led to a plethora of research through a feminist lens on reality television in particular. For example, the issue of agency, and women's lack thereof, has been observed in the television show *A Baby Story* in a study by Sears and Godderis (2011). The study revealed that though women and their labor were key components of the show, the fathers and male doctors were largely responsible for making medical decisions on behalf of the new mother. Often, the feminist issues being illuminated within television studies revolve around race, specifically minorities. Numerous studies point to under-representation of black and Hispanic women, particularly within reality television. For example, black women are often portrayed as angry and are frequently shown fighting or yelling while Hispanic women are portrayed as hyper-sexual (Bell-Jordan, 2008; Dubrofsky, 2006; Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008; Orbe 2008; Tyree, 2011). While these studies can all further the conversation about how television programs communicate about women, *The Bachelor* is unique in that it features 25 women as main characters and eventually elevates one woman above the rest as being the best, at least in the eyes of the man she is competing for.

Research on *The Bachelor*

In addition to studies conducted on reality television shows, a slew of studies have been devoted to *The Bachelor* specifically. One such example is Specht's and Beam's (2006) semiotic analysis of the show to explore what agricultural stereotypes have been perpetuated by imagery

within the show during its 19th season. They found that the program showed agricultural life as “cutesy” and the women as being sexual. Other scholars have pointed out problematic areas of the show concerning diversity. Historically, *The Bachelor* and its spinoff *The Bachelorette* tend to contain entirely white casts or show contestants of color being eliminated early in the season. Additionally, Hispanic women on the show are usually sexualized more than the white women on the show while the camera focuses on their hips rather than their faces. The lack of diversity is not only problematic for contestants and viewers, but legally has affected the show as well. In 2012, ABC faced a lawsuit after turning away black men who were auditioning to be on the show (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008; Honeycutt, 2013).

An entire book, *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television: Watching the Bachelor and The Bachelorette* (2011) features Dubrofsky’s study on the series using surveillance theory to analyze the characters and components of the show. Her book focuses on the theory of surveillance and how the knowledge of being on camera as well as editing by the production team changes the contestants’ behavior and the portrayal of such. The book includes chapters about feminism, race, authenticity, and emotion. The book briefly touches on the subject of the “ideal woman” which Dubrofsky measures by which woman wins the final rose (Dubrofsky, 2011). The only time Dubrofsky discusses “feminine” behavior in her book is in her chapter on emotionality. In the chapter, she argues that *The Bachelor* tells women that they must walk a tightrope of emotionality where they do showcase their feelings and desires for love and for the bachelor in particular while refraining from appearing too emotional or having outbursts.

I wanted to uncover more behaviors and attributes that *The Bachelor* communicates to viewers as being linked to femininity. While Dubrofsky does question if the program tells viewers what makes the ideal woman, she only focuses on emotionality and race. While she

takes a content approach to her analysis, she takes little consideration of the fact that the producers have thousands of hours of footage they could use for the program. This allows them to carefully select which footage to include in the episodes which range from one to two hours long. Considering the producers know which women will progress to the final episode, they have the ability to construct the episodes so that they can communicate about these women in a certain way. The producers must present these women as likeable so that viewers can rejoice when the bachelor proposes to his perfect match in the season finale. More than merely a woman's race or emotional outbursts, I set out to discover which behaviors and attributes the producers emphasize in regards to the contestants who win the bachelor's heart and engagement ring.

Methodology

The Bachelor is a program that continues to influence today's reality television content. Since 2002 when *The Bachelor* first aired, the high viewership has spurred spin-offs including *The Bachelorette*, *Bachelor Pad*, *Bachelor in Paradise*, as well as international versions of *The Bachelor*. Additionally, other networks have taken to showing their own dating shows in similar formats such as *Flavor of Love* and *Joe Millionaire*. In this thesis, I will specifically study *The Bachelor* because it was a springboard for these other reality dating programs so it is essential to see what messages it conveys. There is plenty of material to study through a feminist lens to determine what messages are sent about women. Due to the popularity of *The Bachelor* and that it has such longevity, I used the first and twentieth seasons of *The Bachelor* in order to investigate media messages about women and if these messages changed over the course of 14 years (breaks between seasons last anywhere from 6 months to one year).

Statistically, the lives of American women have changed drastically in the past two decades. In 1998, there was only one female CEO of a *Fortune* 500 company. That number

increased to 12 women in 2011 and doubled to 24 in 2014 (Fairchild, 2014). Women have also acquired more positions in American politics. In 1992, the “Year of the Woman,” the number of female United States senators doubled to four and the number of female United States representatives increased from 28 to 47. Today, women make up 18.5% of representatives and 20% of the Senate (Warner, 2014). In this thesis, I seek to investigate whether media representations of women are keeping up with the changes in societal norms by comparing the representation of women in the first and twentieth seasons of *The Bachelor*. If the representations of women in *The Bachelor* are more positive in the twentieth season than the first, that would show that media representation is following our culture as it continues to hold women in higher esteem. However, if the representation of women in the media has not changed, then young women are receiving conflicting messages about how society views them. While some media messages might be lauding women in government and the progression of women’s rights, other messages might still be reducing women to their looks and reproductive capacity. A young woman is apt to experience cognitive dissonance if she sees a woman running for president on the news and then settles in for the night to watch her favorite reality television show and finds women to only be worthwhile television material if they meet certain standards of beauty and femininity.

There is a spin-off series of *The Bachelor* called *The Bachelorette* which is similarly structured as the original, but features a woman as the main figure of the show and more than 20 eligible young men vying for her love and devotion. While *The Bachelorette* surely sends messages about the ideal woman and may be worthwhile in a future study, I will only be using *The Bachelor* as an artifact for this study because the show features multiple women instead of just one woman as the leading character of the show. The competitive nature of *The Bachelor*

will showcase how women compete with one another and are compared to one another by the media. While the show may start with 25 women, by the end only one will be selected as the winner and thus be considered the most ideal marriage candidate. To the viewers, this communicates that the winner of the season is the best woman to serve as a wife and mother for the bachelor. All of the contestants have at least some qualities that the program presents as ideal femininity at least in that they are all young and physically attractive. All of the finalists are presented in such a way that marks them as being ideal women in that they could be viable options for the bachelor's final rose. This ideal is based on society's traditional views of women and their role as wives and mothers. Though other contestants might be portrayed as having more competence in the business realm or as being more humorous, these qualities do not match the traditional model for ideal femininity. Additionally, the program allows for directly comparing the ideal woman to her less-than-ideal competitors which allows for more powerful messages about what attributes comprise the ideal woman.

The women who get further along in the competition are perceived as a better potential wife by the bachelor himself and thus by viewers of the show. Thus, the way that the winners of the show are represented will send messages to viewers about what attributes make a woman an ideal romantic partner and potential wife. In addition to the women who find love and success on the show, there is typically at least one woman who fills the role of the villain and is portrayed as a poor match for the bachelor. I found that she is represented quite differently than the winners of the show. Furthermore, I investigated how she was portrayed when she was in intimate settings with the bachelor as opposed to when she was surrounded by her competitors. If she exhibited characteristics when she was with the bachelor that led him to keep her on the show longer while

she exhibited different characteristics when he was not in the room, it stands that those characteristics only the bachelor saw are perceived as those that make an ideal romantic partner.

In order to determine what themes emerged, I watched the first season of the show which is comprised of six episodes and the twentieth season which consists of 12 episodes. In these seasons, I looked at the characters who are identifiable as the villain of the season and the two women who make it to the final rose ceremony in order to determine what visual and verbal representations of femininity were presented through these characters. I compared and contrasted how these women presented themselves, how the other women on the show spoke about them and reacted to them nonverbally through facial expressions, proximity, etc., and how the male lead reacted to both the villain and the final two contestants. By comparing and contrasting these representations, I was able to identify what themes *The Bachelor* portrays about the ideal woman. After finding the themes in both seasons about ideal femininity, I compared and contrasted my findings from each season to determine if the media's representation of women has changed since 2002 when it first aired. I paid particularly close attention to what messages the show posits about the winners and the villains as well as how competition among the women is communicated throughout both seasons.

Thesis Outline

In the remainder of this thesis, I will delve into representations of women in the media, particularly women competing on *The Bachelor* and their implications for viewers. Chapter Two will synthesize the massive amount of previous research in regards to women in the media and highlight the gap within feminist research and reality television. Although television in general and even reality television has been studied through a feminist lens, typically studies are conducted to uncover disparity in the treatment of women versus how their male counterparts are

treated, or to showcase the different ways minorities are portrayed. The literature lacks research studies that investigate the messages *The Bachelor* sends about women.

Chapter Three will focus on my methodology including what liberal feminist theory says about typical representation of femininity and how I applied it to *The Bachelor* seasons I chose to analyze. Chapter Four will consist of an analysis of *The Bachelor*'s representation of women, specifically how *The Bachelor* portrays its idea of the ideal woman and her worth as a potential mate. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss this representation of women, its potential implications, and directions for future research on this subject.

In this study, I found that *The Bachelor* portrays the ideal woman as physically attractive, humble, heterosexual, and family-oriented. This means that physical imperfections, high intelligence, and high confidence make a woman less desirable to a man and thus less feminine. I also expected that the program's overall messages about femininity will not have changed significantly since the show's inception in 2002. This was indeed the case, and is extremely problematic as American culture is attempting to move toward egalitarianism. As American society attempts to promote women's equality and express to women of all ages that they have dignity and worth regardless of their physical appearance, career, or family, a popular television program like *The Bachelor* can derail these messages by becoming part of a broader cultural message bringing women back to the days of being stuck in the kitchen without the chance to do as they please and be valued for their humanity rather than their sexual appeal or ability and desire to care for a husband and children.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over 9.5 million viewers tuned in to watch Ben Higgins choose his fiancée in the 20th season of ABC's *The Bachelor* (Kissell, 2016). Viewers waited with bated breath as they watched Ben struggle between JoJo, a feisty saleswoman, and Lauren, a blonde bombshell flight attendant. With a massive audience comes the potential for massive influence. Reality television shows, such as ABC's *The Bachelor*, seem to tell viewers what life is supposed to be like. Glamorous women go on dates with tall, handsome men that include helicopter rides, horse-drawn carriages, and hot tubs that can appear in the middle of nowhere. This may be the “reality” for these *Bachelor* contestants, but for the majority of viewers at home the most they can expect out of a date is dinner at Applebee's followed by a trip to the movie theater. This disparity between reality and the reality put forth by television programs has potential to cause cognitive dissonance and potentially harmful effects in the lives of viewers. Thus, television programs such as *The Bachelor* should be studied in order to determine what messages the program sends to viewers watching these programs about their own reality. Specifically, I examined *The Bachelor* to find what messages it sends about ideal femininity. Next, I will review previous research about liberal feminism, television studies, representation of women in television, reality television, and research on *The Bachelor* in particular.

Feminism

Feminism is grounded in the idea that men and women deserve equality in the eyes of the law. The feminist movement in America initially gained traction in the early 1900s when women fought for the right to vote. Decades later, the movement shifted from basic constitutional rights to matters of employment and treatment in the home (Friedan, 1963; Levine, 2005). Despite its

name, today feminism does not only call for the inclusion of women, but for minorities as well. Foss and Foss (2004) define feminism as a commitment to equality and respect for all life. The overall purpose of feminism is to eliminate oppression and domination (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 2004). Since the 1960s, scholars have recognized the need to critically analyze media through a feminist lens. This is because media tends to be owned by men and reinforce their hegemonic power while their control of media messages goes unchallenged (Dyer, 1987). Van Zoonen (1996) described three different feminist approaches that scholars utilize to criticize media. The first, socialist feminism, examines women's role within economic systems and capitalism in particular. Its goal is to restructure the labor force so that men and women bear equal loads of work. Radical feminism claims that men always seek to dominate women and reaches the conclusion that women should eliminate interactions with men. Liberal feminism tries to create equality between men and women by examining prejudice and stereotypes, particularly the seemingly natural role of women as wives and mothers. Furthermore, liberal feminism as an ideology argues that inequalities between the sexes are harmful and whichever sex is given less privileges than the other is enslaved by the inequalities (Gerson, 2002).

Liberal feminism has been used to study a myriad of topics. Scholars have looked at disparities in the work place, both broadly and specifically at womanly issues such as breastfeeding at work (Cobble, 1999; Galtry, 2000; Schultz, 2010; Vogel, 1990). They have also taken a look at politics (Loke, Bachman, & Harp, Phillips, 2017; 1998; Walters, 2018). Scholars have even taken a feminist approach to study advertising (LaWare, Moutsatos, 2013; Murray, 2013; Ourahmoune, Binninger, & Robert, 2013). Though the topics are varied, scholars across subjects have reached the conclusion that societal structures reinforce inequalities between the sexes. Because *The Bachelor* reinforces a predominant cultural notion that women's greatest

value lies in fulfilling the role of a wife, it makes sense to approach the text through the lens of liberal feminism. Thus, this is the approach I took in this study.

Why Television Studies

Feminism has been applied across a multitude of subjects, and media texts have been a particularly popular target. Previous scholars have used feminism to analyze different forms of media including film and television. As feminism became more popular, feminist scholars looked to media to find examples of hegemony and inequality in order to address the issue (Gray & Lotz, 2012). Thus, the rise of feminist scholarship directly led to the emergence of television studies. For decades, the study of television was seen as irrelevant and unworthy of discourse. In comparison with film or theatre, scholars saw television as common and low-brow. Through the progression of cultural and feminist studies, television studies came to be respected among communication scholarship (Brundson, 2000). Gray and Lotz (2012) stated that television studies is important because television as a medium is highly prevalent in everyday life for the general public. Since television became a common item found in the home, parents and scholars alike have sought to determine what its effect is the general population, particularly children. This led to social scientific research to determine who is watching television, why they are watching television, and what the potential effects of television may be. As early as 1955, scholars were calling upon intellectuals and public agencies to study television because of the possible threat it might pose to society (Lazarsfeld, 1955). This threat was due largely to the messages that could potentially be sent directly into a household through a television screen. Even seemingly innocent messages could be guilty of perpetuating stereotypes or otherwise sending messages to children that their parents may not be comfortable with (Smythe, 1954).

Television programs, no matter the genre, disseminate a message to viewers. As with any form of mass media, this message is multi-faceted. Adorno (1954), part of the Frankfurt School, said television's ability to send messages is precisely why it must be studied as a medium. Not only does a television program have obvious messages it intends to send, but due to the multiple meanings of words and symbols, there will always be deeper, "hidden" messages as well. Adorno (1954) stated, "the hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be 'looked through,' but is likely to sink into the spectator's mind" (Adorno, 1954, p. 221). Thus, it is essential that scholars study not only the latent message of any given television program, but the potential underlying messages as well.

Different methodologies can be utilized to study television. One of these approaches is the textual approach, which serves to analyze specific features of a television program including genre, dialogue, lighting, blocking, etc. (Gray & Lotz, 2012). This relates to differing views on the communication process in general and whether it is sender-oriented, receiver-oriented, or message-oriented. Focusing on the sender of messages relayed in television leads scholars to specific camera angles and editing choices. For example, Barker (1985) observed character blocking and camera lighting to determine what message television producers were attempting to disseminate to their audience. Character blocking can be used to place emphasis on particular characters, props, or ideas. Scholars with a message-oriented view of communication can inspect television programs as a text. Within any television program there are abounding symbols that arise from characters, wardrobe choices, dialogue, plot, and even the timing of commercial breaks. Television studies scholars in the past have used the concept of semiotics to study how audiences meaning from these symbols (Fiske, 1985). However, the subjectivity of meaning has

led scholars to analyze television in conjunction with the audience who may be viewing the program.

It is nearly impossible to separate a message entirely from its receiver, for the simple fact that words and symbols communicate different ideas to different audiences. A book, for example, is likely to denote different meanings to a highly literate school teacher and an uneducated child. Differences in gender, class, and race can all create different meanings from different symbols. Thus, television studies cannot be separated from the study of class and other dividing features (Fiske, 1985). All symbols must be both encoded and decoded, meaning they are sent in a certain manner and then received in a manner that may or may not match the sender's intent. Different audiences decode messages in different ways dependent upon their position in society. Hall (1980) discussed hegemonic-dominant interpretations of symbols and how class and gender politicize messages. According to Hall (1980), the dominant culture of society dictates how words and symbols are interpreted. This means that television programs can rely on culture to tell an audience how to interpret a message. This means that a writer of a television program can be less blatant when sending a message. Instead, they can be subtle in crafting their message and let the audience do the heavy work of decoding certain messages. This directly reflects previous research that states that television can contain both latent and explicit messages.

Van Zoonen (1994) said that Hall's conception of encoding and decoding is particularly useful when analyzing media and that when conducting a media analysis there are three prime "moments" to observe—production, text, and reception. All three of these "moments" are critical to study according to Van Zoonen, because as Hall (1980) said, encoding and decoding happens simultaneously. This means that while media producers are encoding messages, media

consumers are simultaneously decoding them. While the messages sometimes coincide, at other times they do not align. This results in a dance between producers and consumers where meaning is attempted to be created and shared. This process, cultural negotiation, means that producers use cultural cues and audience perceptions to further their own messages, but they cannot always completely control the meanings that viewers may draw from their media texts (Gledhill, 1988). What this means is that in order to effectively analyze media texts, researchers need to consider multiple factors. Researchers must consider possible intents of producers, the symbols within the texts, the audience's attitudes and decoding tendencies, and the culture in which the media is introduced. When using a feminist lens to analyze how women are generally portrayed in media, all of these factors are substantial.

Representation of Women in Television

This negotiation of meaning influences how production companies create their content. For example, d'Acci (1987) found that networks like CBS took potential audience reactions into account when writing scripts for television programs. CBS and other networks "presented women as primarily young, white, middle-class, stereotypically 'attractive,' and domesticated. They specifically portrayed women as wives, mothers, heterosexual sex objects, subsidiaries of men, and as 'vulnerable' and 'sympathetic' characters" (d'Acci, 1987, p. 11). This was problematic for networks as they attempted to include topical material in their programs and give relevant female representation, balancing this relevant representation with the traditional representation. In *Cagney and Lacey*, CBS tried to discuss women's issues that were especially relevant in the 1970s. For example, one episode featured a minor character choosing to have an abortion. While some outside organizations such as Planned Parenthood applauded the network for this storyline that was uncommon in television, the National Right to Life Committee vocally

opposed the episode. Another controversy the network faced was when they replaced one of the lead actresses with a more “feminine” woman. The National Gay Task Force protested the network and its effort to “shield the series from the connotations of lesbianism” (d’Acci, 1987, p. 11). CBS was worried about the program because its representation of women did not align with the other popular programs at the time such as *Beverly Hillbillies* or *Three’s Company*. The creators of the series wanted to make a program that focused on two women who were partners and friends rather than competitors. Ultimately, d’Acci argues that the network fell prey to the hegemonic structures that dictate female television characters align with a certain image.

Hegemonic structures can pose extra threat to people with certain identities, particularly women. With the progression of feminist causes in America, the presentation of women in television has changed to a certain extent, but still typically shows women as “dutiful, caring mothers and glamorous, efficient hostesses” as well as “competent and independent” (Dyer, 1987, p. 9). Furthermore, with the progression of the women’s liberation movement there came a demand for women to be represented in a greater number in television programs and their commercials. Production companies responded to audience demands and created more women characters and even women-centered dramas such as *Cagney and Lacey*. Additionally, television genres were formed with women in mind (Dyer, 1987).

This means that certain television programs are more susceptible to certain interpretations and thus require extra scrutiny by scholars, due to the way these television programs and genres are marketed. Television programs marketed toward women should be closely examined since they are providing representations of their viewers within their programs. For example, the genre of soap operas is geared toward women and thus the messages are likely to both have an effect on women and provide representations of women that are appealing to women viewers. Soap

operas are marketed toward women in multiple ways. The series air during the day, a time when traditionally only women are home to watch television. The genre also relies on traditionally “feminine” qualities and interests such as romance and drama. The genre makes direct appeals to women’s mothering instincts by making certain characters sympathetic or in drastic need of a parental figure to guide them in life. However, soap operas also present themes such as unwed mothers, rape, questionable paternity, evil women, marrying for money, being a housewife, and other themes that primarily affect women specifically (Modleski, 1961).

Reality Television as a Genre

Soap operas have been formed to make direct appeals to women for decades. In the current climate of television, a new genre has stepped to the forefront of the industry’s fight to catch the attention of a female audience. To understand how reality television’s effects on the female audience, one must first unpack what a television genre is. Television programs can be divided into genres just as films and literature can. Genres are based on certain characteristics, plotlines, and production techniques. Atallah (1985) stated that genres are not merely a way to organize content, but are a way of organizing themes, discourses, and signifiers. There are three overarching themes of genre: content, treatment of subject matter, and presumed effects (Atallah, 1985). Each genre has its own way of handling subject material. A program classified as western, for example, would portray a fight between two characters differently than a soap opera would. This is due, in part, to the different audiences attracted to different genres. Considering the audience of a western program is likely to be different than the audience of a soap opera, it is logical for producers to script the programs differently. Thus, understanding the institution as a whole and how it creates content with a specific target audience in mind is critical in understanding genre (Atallah, 1985).

Television viewers have been enjoying watching real people live their lives on screen since quiz shows became popular in the 1950s. The first reality television program was *An American Family*, which aired in the 1970s. Later, daytime talk shows and funniest home video programs became popular. While scholars refer to these programs as the early workings of reality television, it was not until *The Real World*, which first aired in 1991, that viewers began to see the characteristics that mark reality television as they know it today (Ouellette & Murray, 2004). Reality television has its own form of handling content, treatment of subject matter, and presumed effects. The primary focus of reality television producers is to satisfy an audience. There are many reasons viewers tune in to reality television, including vicarious participation, social utility, and personal utility (Barton, 2009).

Scholars Reiss and Wiltz (2004) found that the content of reality television is formed by sixteen human motives: social contact, curiosity, honor, family, independence, power, order, idealism, social status, vengeance, eating, romance, physical exercise, acceptance, tranquility, and saving. Reality television audiences choose to watch reality television programs so that they can live vicariously through contestants on the programs in order to fulfill one or more of these human motives. Of these sixteen motives, Reiss and Wiltz (2014) found, through qualitative study, that social status was the most influential factor for the majority of reality television viewers. This explains why shows such as *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, featuring the wealthy Kardashian family, are so popular even though there is little to no plot development. Differing motivations can be directly linked to the formation and following of different reality television programs. For example, curiosity could motivate people to watch shows such as *Mythbusters* while romance could influence viewers to tune in to shows such as *The Bachelor*.

Reality television can span various content including physical competitions, cooking, house hunting, makeovers, quests for romance, or family life. The one concept that ties these vastly different subject materials together under the genre of reality television is that it is all meant to represent reality. This idea has led scholars to wonder whether reality television viewers truly thought the programs they watched were accurate representations of reality. Scholarship has shown that while reality television is, per its name, supposed to represent reality, viewers of such programs are aware that the situations portrayed on television are often contrived by producers and writers. The “realness” of reality television is questioned by fans to varying degrees (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). In other words, though viewers know that contestants on television shows such as *Survivor* might truly be eating bugs on a desert island, certain aspects of the situations within the episodes are the result of choices made by producers and directors rather than situations that came about organically.

As the genre developed, it became less and less realistic in terms of how it is presented. Chvasta and Fassett (2003) said that “shows of recent years are highly produced,” meaning that every effort is taken to make the audience forget that the people they are watching are on camera. Boom microphones are edited out and narrators are made to blend into the background. Even so, viewers understand that this is not truly reality. However, they still consider programs such as *Survivor* to represent “the reality of the human condition” (Chvasta & Fassett, 2003). This is not the only way that reality television has changed from its inception. The type of programming has changed as well. Early reality television programs focused on interesting settings such as the wild west. Later, ordinary people became the public’s fascination as shows like *Judge Judy*, *Divorce Court*, and *America’s Funniest Home Videos* became popular. In the late 1990s, reality television changed to feature “real people in extraordinary situations.” These “situations” include

lasting on an island on *Survivor*, chasing criminals on *Cops*, being stuck in a house under constant surveillance on *Big Brother*, and even going on the ultimate scavenger hunt around the world on *The Amazing Race* (Baker, 2003). These reality television programs in the early 2000s were so popular, that youth growing up with them accepted the characteristics of this genre and now expect the same from current reality television programs. Today, youth expect reality television to be “entertaining real,” meaning that they understand it might not match their reality, but they consider it a reality all the same (Ouellette & Murray, 2004).

Though fans are aware of the lack of reality within reality television, this does not deter audience members from becoming immersed in the programs. Due to an individual’s personal motives as laid out by Reiss and Wiltz (2004), a reality television viewer will tune in to a certain show in order to live vicariously through reality television stars. As viewers watch a particular program more and more, they become immersed deeper within the show. This increase in immersion has two main effects on viewers. The first effect is that there is an increase in pleasure drawn from the content for the viewer. This finding is logical considering that the more familiar a viewer is with television characters the more invested they will be in the outcomes of situations those characters are a part of. The second effect deeper immersion has on viewers is that the situations being portrayed have more gravity in the eyes of the viewer than they would if the viewer was less invested in the program. In other words, the program’s potential effects hold more weight for frequent, invested viewers than for sporadic, apathetic viewers (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007).

Television as a medium serves to represent reality, or some form of it, to its viewers (Smythe, 1954). This representation is precisely what makes television worthy of study and discourse. Since all television serves in this form, reality television in particular takes this

concept one step further. Unlike science fiction or westerns, reality television programs are not claiming to tell a fictional story. Rather, they are presenting the stories told as though they are true and real, even if the situations are contrived. This can potentially lead to effects on viewers as they compare their own lives to the lives of reality television stars. Scholars have considered this reason enough to study the genre of reality television, particularly how reality television programs present their subjects.

Representation in Reality Television

Due to the potential harmful effects on viewers, recent scholarship has focused on reality television's representation of women and other minorities. Though some recent shows feature strong female leads with ample representation of single mothers, female friendship, and other female types that are representative of the feminist movement, other shows are more problematic (Brundson, D'Acci, & Spigel, 1997). In documentary-style reality television shows like TLC's *A Baby Story*, birth and motherhood is shown through rose-colored lenses. The show typically features couples having perfectly healthy babies and the after-birth is not mentioned, let alone shown on film. Rather, the shows focus on the parents' happy tears as their healthy baby is held up for all to admire. Though this depiction is not accurate to true birth, the show was extremely popular when it aired, particularly with its target audience, 18-34 year old women. Maher (2004) argues this is problematic for women viewers as they use the show to escape from their reality. Though Maher says there is nothing quite wrong with wanting to escape, when television's "reality" does not match up with any possible true reality, women are set up for disappointment.

Other programs consistently portray women, particularly their bodies, negatively. In *Cops*, for example, female police officers are routinely portrayed as weaker and less effective than their male counterparts (Callais & Szozda, 2006). In plastic surgery programs, women are

shown perfecting their bodies through surgery. In these programs, a woman is willing to risk a surgical procedure to perfect her body. In this way, having the “perfect” female physique is shown to be more important than health and as the only means to happiness. Particularly problematic is programs like *Extreme Makeover* where even average people are depicted as too imperfect and in need of corrective surgery (Heinricy, 2006). This is just one example of how television shows disparage women’s bodies. Countless studies have shown that television depicts women as either in need of correction, or unrealistically thin and beautiful. This, in turn, leads to staggering reports of female viewers feeling inadequate (Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, & Williams, 2000; Engeln-Maddox, 2005; Halliwell, Malson, & Tischner, 2011; Hendriks, 2002; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004).

Television programs are frequently criticized in scholarship for representing women who are minorities in a negative manner. Programs tend to either erase race or show minorities as stereotypical, such as hypersexual Latina women or angry black women (Bell-Jordan, 2008; Boylorn, 2008; Orbe, 2008; Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008; Tyree, 2011; Dubrofsky, 2006). Programs tend to give contestants of color limited air-time. For example, in *The Bachelor*, women of color rarely make it past the first or second round of the competition. Even when women do progress past the first or second episode of the series, they are often simply put in the background of the shot rather than in the foreground where they can be focused on by the camera and audience members. When minorities are not in the background, they are often portrayed in a negative light. For example, Hispanic women are typically portrayed as oversexualized. Cameras tend to focus on their hips and butts. Usually, Hispanic women are shown dancing or doing other suggestive actions. Black women are also shown in a negative light. Black women are often portrayed as stereotypical, angry black women. Programs manage to do this by showing black

women fighting amongst each other or yelling at other contestants on reality television shows. These examples demonstrate that the majority of the time, reality television shows only portray minorities as either non-existent or inferior.

Scholarship has uncovered another issue within reality television and how it pertains to women. TLC's show *A Baby Story* focuses on women as they prepare and eventually give birth. Marketed as a heartwarming tale of the formation of a family, it actually shows women without any power or agency. This is an inherently feminine event, as only women can give birth. One would think that the show would portray women as strong and life-giving. However, through content analysis, Sears and Godderis (2011) found that the fathers of the newborn babies and the doctors delivering the babies were the characters on the show who had the ability to make all the important decisions, including decisions that directly pertained to the woman's body. For example, though medicine like Pitocin affects the women's body directly, women on the show are never shown deciding whether or not they would like it to be administered to them. On the contrary, doctors are given all the agency when it comes to what is going to happen to the woman's body (Sears & Godderis, 2011). This is problematic in that women viewing the show might think that they do not have any agency in their own medical or reproductive decisions. While this is just one example, television programs across all genres promote stereotypical sex-roles. This means that women are shown as being less happy than men, having less autonomy than men, and are more likely to be shown taking care of children and a home (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 2009; McArthur & Eisen, 1976; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999).

Specific to dating shows such as *The Bachelor*, research shows that the programs send messages about ideal femininity through competition. Dubrofsky (2011) discussed *The Bachelor's* emphasis on emotionality in the series. She found that emotionality was pivotal to the

women's success on the show. Women who were too emotional were seen as irrational and did not progress in the competition. On the other hand, women who were not emotional enough were described as cold-hearted and also sent home. This meant women had to walk a tightrope of emotionality, only revealing their feelings when it best suited the bachelor. Additionally, though the show portrayed emotional outbursts as a negative, these outbursts were often the climax of the episode. Dubrofsky (2011) went as far as to compare emotional escapades on the show to pornography, calling emotional break-downs the "money shot." Dubrofsky (2011) also noted that the ideal woman had to be white. Women of color were only tokens and background characters. Johnston (2006) also studied *The Bachelor* and dating shows like it. She noted that the show followed suit of eighteenth-century low-brow fiction when constructing images of women. According to Johnston (2006), the show created a dichotomy of the good girl/bad girl. "Good" girls were domestic, beautiful, and virtuous while "bad" girls were too flirtatious and turned away from domesticity. The "good" girl is ultimately set up as the ideal woman because she is described in opposition to the "bad" girl. I utilized Johnston's findings about the dichotomy of the "good" girl/"bad" girl in my study by comparing the winners with the villains on *The Bachelor*.

Conclusion

Feminism contends that women have been disadvantaged throughout history as they strive to free themselves from the chains of oppression and gain equality with men. While evidence of this inequality and oppression has been identified in various aspects of American society today, television programs are one arena where the inequality is especially evident and easily observable. Through stereotyping women in general and women of specific races in particular, making certain groups of people invisible on the screen, and portraying women with a

complete lack of agency, television programs serve to take away the progress society has seemingly made and put women in general and women of specific races in particular in a place of subordination. Through the study of television programs, particularly reality television programs which claim to represent the truth, scholars can determine how television furthers the hegemonic cycle and what audience members should be wary of as they watch television programs fervently or even casually.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The Bachelor was created in 2002 by producer Mike Fleiss (IMDB, 2018). The program is a reality show that centers around one man who dates 25 women simultaneously in order to find one woman to spend the rest of his life with. During each episode, the bachelor has roses he gives out to the women that signify that they get the opportunity to move on in the competition and continue dating the bachelor. If a woman does not receive a rose, she is sent home. The bachelor gets to know the women by going on dates and attending cocktail parties with them. In the series, there are three types of dates: group dates, solo dates, and two-on-ones. Group dates are dates where multiple women accompany the bachelor to some sort of activity. Solo dates are the traditional dates one might think of when they think of a date. This is simply one woman getting alone time with the bachelor. Two-on-one dates are dates where two women go on a date with the bachelor at the same time. At the end of the date, one woman receives a rose and the other is eliminated and immediately sent home. The concept of a two-on-one date did not exist in the first season of the show. Rather, it was first seen in Season 14 of the show. Critics speculate that this ploy was invented to escalate drama on the show and to create a scenario in which the season's villain can be exposed by their true colors and be sent home by the protagonist (Bricker, 2017). This newer plot development provides the producers an opportunity to show a villainous woman in opposition with another woman in order to showcase what attributes make a woman more or less ideal with distinct clarity.

Bachelor contestants interact with the women in multiple spheres. The women all live together in a house called "Bachelor Mansion." Since the women give up all technology, including their cell phones, when they are on the set they constantly spend time with each other without distraction. The camera captures many of these interactions between the women when

they lounge around Bachelor Mansion with nothing to distract them from their boredom but each other. Another aspect of *The Bachelor* where viewers get to see the women's private thoughts are in the "confessional" moments. In these scenarios, the women can privately tell the camera and producers their thoughts on their experiences with the bachelor and with the other women. In these particular moments, the women have the opportunity to be more vulnerable and to reflect on previous events. Rose ceremonies are an iconic part of the series and occur at the end of every episode. At the end of each episode, the bachelor has a certain number of roses to hand out to the women. If the bachelor wants a woman to stay in the competition for another week, he will call her name at the rose ceremony and ask her to accept his rose. The women left without roses at the end of the ceremony are promptly sent home. The rose ceremonies are stressful situations for both the women whose hearts are on the line and the bachelor who knows he is about to cause emotional distress for the women who do not receive roses.

The genre of reality television plays a role in how I approached my analysis of *The Bachelor*. For industrial arts such as film and television, "the concept of genre can bring into play the system of production, structural analysis of the text, and the reception process with the audience conceived as an interpretive community" (Feuer, 1992, p. 144). Reality television producers claim that the genre replicates actual reality (Stiernstedt & Jakobsson, 2017). This is pertinent to how it is produced, analyzed, and received.

Though some aspects of the show have changed since its inception, the overall premise is the same. In each season, an eligible bachelor whittles down his dating pool from 25 women to just two whom he then must choose from in the season finale. In each episode, the bachelor takes the women on dates that will reveal things about their personality and beliefs that will help the protagonist decide whether each woman is a good potential spouse for him. Often, the group

dates are competition-based, which allows for the bachelor to see the women when they are in high-stress situations. Typically, this causes an increase of emotional responses such as jealousy and teary outbursts. Based on how the women react to their surroundings, the bachelor can make a judgment about whether he wants to keep them in the competition for his heart. As the show progresses, the competition gets more intense as feelings continue to develop. The heightened drama surely fuels viewers. Furthermore, while each woman has the chance to end up with the bachelor, only one will win his heart. This simple fact tasks the producers with the challenge of creating heroes and villains, turning the women who progress far into the competition as “favorites” so that viewers will cheer for them to continue in the competition and their desire to watch the show will be reinforced when their favorites progress. Similarly, villains add drama to the plot of each episode, giving viewers interesting content to watch. Though the finalists must be shown in a positive light, the viewers cannot make the winner too obvious to viewers, lest the drama and suspense be completely removed from the final rose ceremonies.

The audience of *The Bachelor* has come to expect certain aspects of the show to occur in the same way every season. For example, every episode is supposed to end with a rose ceremony. The final moments leading up to and during the rose ceremony are filled with drama as women tell the confessionals their fears, regrets, and hopes in regards to their relationship with the bachelor. The final four women in the competition go on “hometown dates” where the bachelor meets their families. Near the end of the season, the final three women get the privilege of going on “fantasy suite” dates where each woman is allowed off-camera time alone with the bachelor. Though the couple can use this time to talk about important matters they would rather not discuss on national television such as religion, views on marriage and children, etc., the focus of these dates is typically the physical intimacy that occurs off camera.

The fans, called Bachelor Nation, have even come to expect which women will go far in the competition based on how they are portrayed and how much airtime they receive. Before even a single episode is edited, the entirety of the real events have unfolded. The entire competition has occurred before producers make the episodes. This gives the producers the opportunity to construct a narrative through the season complete with protagonists, an antagonist, and heightened drama. Though the show does brand itself as “reality,” the producers know which women will go further in the competition and which will be easy to villainize for good television. This gives producers the opportunity to craft the episodes in such a way to emphasize positive traits of the women they want the audience to admire, and emphasize negative traits of the women they want to villainize. Thus, the entire show is calibrated to present a winner that viewers will rejoice over when she receives the final rose and an engagement ring at the end of the series. The show does not air until after the events of the competition have played out in their entirety. It is crucial to understand that ABC is producing an image, not merely streaming live television. Although reality television is perceived as real by some viewers, the program is merely an edited recalibrated version of real events (Stiernstedt & Jacobsson, 2017).

The fact that the bachelor’s decision has already been made influences every choice the editing team makes. The women who make it to the finale must have fans in order to boost ratings. If the final two women were disliked by viewers, ratings would plummet. Rather, producers want viewers to identify with the women in the finale so that they will want to watch the climactic moment of the show. Then, viewers can either rejoice when their favorite wins, or be devastated with their favorite contestant. Either way, they can follow the lives of their favorite in the tabloids and on social media after the show is done airing, which only serves the production company even more. The producers help viewers identify with the finalists in a

number of ways. First, viewers of the show are expecting certain behavior from the women. Just as Bachelor Nation waits for the sloppy, drunk woman to arrive in the first episode, it also waits for the sweet, demure woman who will sneak up and steal the bachelor's heart. The show presents the women who make it furthest in the competition as the perfect woman who fans of the show will want to watch on television. The way the show presents these women has implications for viewers. Female viewers will expect the winners to align with society's expectations of femininity. Further, the viewers will want to become more like the winners as they seek what society tells them is the ultimate goal—love and marriage.

Chosen Texts

The texts I analyzed were Season One and Season 20 of *The Bachelor*. Season One aired in 2002 during prime time on ABC and had six episodes with one-hour timeslots. Season 20 aired in 2016 on ABC during prime time as well. Season 20 was considerably longer than the first season with ten episodes that had two-hour timeslots (Classic TV Database 2018). I chose these two seasons that happened 14 years apart so that I could determine whether the show's messages about femininity have changed over time. This is an important question to investigate since women's role in American society has changed in recent years while women rise in political ranks and in the workplace. Though Season One was not nearly as regimented as Season 20 in terms of plot and character development, I predicted that some similarities would emerge. The reason Season One was less deterministic in terms of what would happen to the contestants was that it was the first time the show had aired. By the time Season 20 was filmed and aired, the show had developed patterns that viewers came to expect. While I could have analyzed spin-off series such as *The Bachelorette*, *Bachelor Pad*, or *Bachelor in Paradise*, I chose to observe only *The Bachelor* because it features 25 women fighting for the love of one man who is painted as

the ultimate goal of masculinity solely because he has so many women vying for his attention. Since the bachelor is representative of the ideal masculinity, it stands that whomever he picks to propose to at the end of the show is representative of the ideal feminine counterpart. The premise of the show is that the perfect couple will emerge in the finale when the perfect man and perfect woman declare their love for each other.

Types of Women in the Show

More specifically, I compared and contrasted three different classifications of women within the show. The three categories I placed the women in were potential winners, villains, and peripheral characters. I defined “potential winners” as the women who progressed to the final three contestants. These three women all have the privilege of going to the “fantasy suite” dates. These dates are different from previous dates in the show because there is a portion that is not filmed. This means the bachelor and his date have the ability to have conversations about intimate details of their lives without an audience. Furthermore, the dates typically last overnight, meaning footage after the date usually implies that the bachelor and his date had sexual intercourse. This particular episode is critical to my study since sexuality is so important to the idea of ideal femininity. In this study, I found that the winners did sleep with the bachelor but were portrayed as being appropriately chaste throughout other episodes. This concept serves to reinforce gender norms that state that men initiate sexual intimacy with women who will eventually relent to give men what they want. If ideal women behave this way, it is reasonable to assume that the villains portrayed in opposition to them will behave differently. I defined the villains of the show as the women who are disliked by the other contestants. It is important to note that the other women’s opinions are what make a contestant a villain. The bachelor himself may still have favorable opinions of a villain. The peripheral women are those who are neither

villainized or finalists in the show. Dubrofsky (2009) found that these women can serve as representation for women of all shapes, colors, ages, etc. The peripheral women might serve a role on the show to move the plot forward and provide competition for the eventual winner, but they are clearly not right for the bachelor in the eyes of the viewers due to the way producers frame them within the show. Whether these women be portrayed as not pretty enough or as not having enough personality, they are sent home without a clear reason from the bachelor. Though villains are sent home for a particular reason, the bachelor sends peripheral women home with a simple good-bye and little explanation, leaving the viewers to piece together their own reasoning as to why a woman was not seen as worthy enough to receive a rose.

Scenarios to Observe

In this study, I observed the women in four different situations that are depicted on the show including interactions with the bachelor on dates, interactions with the other women, private moments in confessional booths, and at the rose ceremonies. After I observed the three categories of women in the four different types of situations depicted in the series, I was able to determine if the portrayal of the women was positive or negative overall. Then, I compared the portrayal of the potential winners with the villains and the peripheral women. I did this for both Season One and Season 20 in order to determine what attributes each season said made up the image of an ideal woman. After coming to these conclusions, I compared the two seasons to determine if the messages stayed the same or changed.

The idea that *The Bachelor* provides representations of the ideal woman is critical to study. Considering the liberal feminist lens, this television program can undo decades of work by women who sought to have women seen as being worthwhile for their humanity rather than their attributes. *The Bachelor* paints the picture of a perfect woman directly oppositional to women

who fall short of the ideal. Then, the program goes on to have the ideal woman win the heart of the man she loves while everyone else is sent home alone. This tells viewers that in order to be successful and win in life and love, a woman must behave a certain way, look a certain way, and be a certain way. Any woman who strays from the archetype of femininity then is left without love or a future as a wife and mother, even if that is what she desires. The idea of an ideal woman means that society can continue to view women as worthwhile only in their role as a supporting figure for men, rather than worthwhile in their own right.

Ideal Femininity

Feminist media scholars have noted that when it comes to media representations of women, women are portrayed as one who fulfills the role of a wife, mother, or housekeeper for men, a sex object, or a person who is trying to be beautiful for men (Van Zoonen, 1994). Analyses of television programs in particular show that typically, women are presented as fulfilling appropriate roles (Dow, 1996). “Not only does television tell us that women don’t matter very much except as housewives and mothers, but also it symbolically denigrates them by portraying them as incompetent, inferior, and always subservient to men” (Van Zoonen, 1994). Previous research denotes character traits make a woman favorable or unfavorable based on how these traits affect her ability to fulfill these roles. Actions that make a woman appear unfavorable in television series in particular include cursing, burping, making crude comments, and using professional power over men. Traits that make a woman appear more feminine are to be a “doting, quite, floor scrubbing Cinderella” who cooks and takes care of men (Gray, 2009). Across western, eastern, and southern countries, women are portrayed in television programs favorably when they are shown as “young and conventionally pretty, defined in relation to their husband, father, son, boss or another man, and portrayed as passive, indecisive, submissive,

dependent, etc.” (Van Zoonen, 1994, p. 17). These are the criteria I used in my study when I measured whether the women in *The Bachelor* were portrayed as ideal women.

Based on the aforementioned criteria for ideal femininity, I analyzed *The Bachelor* to see if the women on the show fall within the criteria for an ideal woman or as the opposite. To do this, I watched the two seasons in their entirety, knowing which woman won and exactly when each woman was removed from the competition. **This way, I was able to directly compare the women who made it to the final three with their counterparts** under the assumption that the finalists would be representative of ideal femininity while the others were representative of women who fell short of the ideal. I looked at both verbal and nonverbal communication including communication between the women, communication between the women and the bachelor, private confessional moments with the bachelor or with individual female contestants with the camera, and the women being filmed by themselves. The show typically depicts interactions between the women when they are away from the bachelor. The women who are stuck at bachelor mansion while others are on a date are regularly featured in the show. Often, this is when the show features catty moments and negative comments from the women at home about whomever is out with the bachelor. In my observations, I took note of what the women wore, their facial expressions, hand gestures, and physical movement. I also observed tone of voice as well as what was said both by and about the women.

Other aspects of the women I took note of was what the women’s careers were. While Season One did not discuss the women’s specific careers at length, Season 20 had graphics with the women’s name, age, and occupation on-screen when the women were introduced and every time they spoke in a confessional scene. Another aspect of the women I took note of was whether they had ever been married or had children. Since the traditional definition of an ideal woman

relies on her being a caretaker, being a mother would affect whether a woman meets that definition. Of course, if a woman on *The Bachelor* has children, they must be from a previous relationship. Though the bachelor himself might find her role as a mother attractive, he might not be interested in pursuing a woman who has children with a different man. After watching Season One and Season 20, I looked to see if the representations of femininity on *The Bachelor* fell into a pattern. Specifically, I looked to see if the final three contestants were portrayed in a way that aligned with the prevailing notions of ideal femininity in US while the women who did not make it to the final three were portrayed as falling short of that representation or even shown in a way that directly contradicts that image.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

After conducting my analysis of Seasons One and 20 of *The Bachelor*, I found that three main themes emerged when presenting the female participants on the show as ideal or problematic. These themes include sexuality and physicality, confidence and vulnerability, and ladylike behavior. Through my analysis, I concluded that sexuality was a double-edged sword when it came to whether a woman was presented as a good mate. While women were expected to engage in sexual behavior, those who flaunted their sexuality too early in the eyes of the bachelor or the other contestants were painted with a scarlet letter and presented to the audience as unfit to move on in the competition. In regards to physicality, contestants who were shown on screen seeking proximity to the bachelor and other contestants were shown in a more positive light than contestants who kept distance between themselves and the other individuals on screen. Overly confident women who boasted about their relationships were typically eliminated from the competition and disliked by other contestants. Other women who were portrayed as lacking confidence received extra affirmation from the bachelor. Similarly, women who were portrayed as vulnerable when they revealed their feelings to the bachelor even though they were clearly uncomfortable doing so were praised and allowed to move forward in the competition while those who were closed off were sent home. Finally, women whose unladylike behavior such as cursing and binge-drinking were emphasized were sent home while women who doted on the bachelor and obeyed their male family members made it far in the competition.

Sexuality and Physicality

In my analysis of the first and 20th season of *The Bachelor* I found that one common theme that emerged was the program's emphasis on the importance of how sexuality is expressed and other physical aspects of the contestants including their proximity to other contestants,

proximity to the bachelor himself, and other forms of nonverbal communication and physical attributes. These characteristics and behaviors are markers of both ideal femininity and its antithesis, depending on the scenario.

Sexuality

In *The Bachelor*, women's sexuality is used to convey both positive and negative feelings about women. The distinction between positive and negative sexuality comes down to timing and appropriateness on the program. Sexual interactions that occur early in the show are deemed premature by the other women and are thus framed as negative. Later in the show, sexual interactions are viewed positively because they demonstrate closeness between the bachelor and the particular woman. This message has remained constant throughout the series.

Ill-timed sexual interactions. In both seasons of the program that I analyzed, I found that pre-mature sexual interactions between the women and the bachelor were presented as negative. I considered sexual interactions to include both sexual intercourse and kissing. In Season One, the first woman to kiss Bachelor Alex is contestant LaNease Adams. In the episode, the women are on a group date in Las Vegas and LaNease and Alex take a gondola ride through the Venetian hotel. The gondola operator tells the couple that Italian tradition states that every time a gondola goes under a bridge, the couple must kiss for good luck. While the first bridge leads to an innocent peck, the subsequent bridges lead to steamy make-out scenes between Alex and LaNease. When LaNease gets off the gondola, she tells the camera in a confessional scene that she does not want to tell the other women that she kissed Alex for fear that the other women will disapprove and dislike her (Fleiss, 2002b). It's important to note that LaNease is a black woman, which means she's already out of the running as the winner of the bachelor's heart according to previous research on *The Bachelor* (Dubrofsky, 2011). Since LaNease is already

seen as a less ideal woman, any action that she completes on the show will already be tainted in the eyes of the audience.

LaNease is not the only contestant from Season One who kept quiet about getting physical with Alex. On the very first one-on-one date of the season, contestant Amanda Marsh gets physical with Alex on the floor of a private room in a Japanese restaurant. From the beginning of the date when Amanda and Alex walk into their private dining room, they are displeased with how far apart their seats are at the dinner table. After physically moving their place setting, they get cozy and lie down on the floor to kiss. The camera shows their embrace for a few minutes until a waitress walks in on the couple, causing them to stop. Both Alex and Amanda then say how embarrassed they are to have been caught in a compromising position. When Amanda return from the date, the women surrounded her and asked her to tell them everything that happened. Amanda told them every detail about the date with the exception of her steamy physical interactions with Alex. After Amanda tells the other women about her date, the program cuts to a confessional scene where Amanda explains why she withheld certain information from the other women. Amanda told viewers through the camera that she felt the other woman would judge her for getting so physical so quickly with Alex (Fleiss, 2002c).

Even though LaNease and Amanda both made out with Alex on the first date, the two women's responses afterward differentiate the two. Both make-out sessions occur at least partially in front of somebody else. In LaNease's case, the gondola rider was feet away the entire time. For Amanda, the waitress walks in the room while Alex is on top of her. Although LaNease was hesitant to tell the other women about how physical she became with Alex, she shows no remorse or embarrassment for her public display of affection. Amanda, on the other hand, is extremely embarrassed and overcompensates by being overly polite to the waitress and to Alex

the rest of the night (Fleiss, 2002c). Based on these different responses by the women Amanda is still portrayed as more ideal than LaNease, even though they engage in similar displays of public affection. Amanda's repentance for her early physical intimacy signifies to the audience that she is the more appropriate choice for Alex.

Amanda's suspicions about getting judged by the other women may have been accurate considering the women's reactions when they find out that LaNease had kissed Alex on the first group date. While the kisses occurred during the second episode of the season, they were still subject matter for the program during the following episode. In Episode Three, there is a scene involving a group of contestants sitting together on a couch at Bachelor Mansion discussing their thoughts on the dating process thus far. LaNease admits that she had kissed Alex multiple times the week prior. As she goes into detail about her romantic experience with Alex on the gondola ride, the camera cuts to several women in confessional moments saying how shocked they are that LaNease would kiss Alex on the first date. Several women, including eventual winner Amanda, express both their disbelief and their disapproval of LaNease's behavior, deeming it "too soon" to make out with Alex (Fleiss, 2002c).

The episode's focus on the women's critique of LaNease sends a message to viewers that women will critique one another for being too sexual too fast. Women on *The Bachelor*, even those who do not make it to the end of the competition, are painted as ideal women throughout the series based on the fact that they were selected by producers to compete on the show for the bachelor's heart. When the ideal woman is shown criticizing another woman for a behavior, it communicates that the particular behavior is indeed inappropriate. Furthermore, the fact that LaNease is cut from the competition just minutes after the footage of other women critiquing her activities draws a connection between her intimacy with Alex and her departure from the show.

The other contestants' reactions to LaNease add potency to the judgment of LaNease. Though LaNease obviously thinks her behavior is acceptable, the other women do not. Their collective criticism coupled with Alex sending LaNease home communicate that women who unapologetically engage in sexual behavior too early in a relationship are not fit for marriage (Fleiss, 2002c).

While LaNease openly admits to kissing Alex multiple times on their first group date and Amanda had a secret make-out session with Alex during hers, another top contestant on the first season very firmly stated that she did not kiss on the first date. Shannon Oliver came in third place on Season One and was clearly well-liked by the bachelor based on their interactions on the program. Throughout the season, Shannon was painted as a likable woman who viewers would want to emulate. Based on the live audience's reaction during *The Bachelor*'s special titled "Women Tell All" where the eliminated women return in front of a live studio audience to talk to program host Chris Harrison about the season, Bachelor Nation embraced Shannon as a lovable contestant. Throughout the season, other contestants compare her to a princess because of her classic beauty and elegant demeanor. In the very first episode, several of the women use their confessional time to discuss their jealousy of Shannon. In this way, the program set Shannon on a pedestal by showing the other women say they wanted to be in her shoes. If the women on *The Bachelor*, who are already portrayed as representing what women want to be—beautiful and within reach of marrying a successful, attractive man—say that they wish they were more like a particular contestant and jealous of her beauty and relationship with the bachelor, then that particular woman must represent an even higher ideal of womanhood and femininity. Shannon, this ideal, blatantly says that she does not kiss on the first date (Fleiss, 2002c). In fact, she would not kiss Alex until the fifth and penultimate episode of the season

when they decide that the title of “boyfriend” would be appropriate for Alex in relation to Shannon (Fleiss, 2002e).

Shannon’s first date with Alex was what fairytales are made of. The date begins with a limo ride that brings the couple to a boutique where she tries on designer gowns while Alex tells her how beautiful she is. Upon picking a floor-length, black, jewel-encrusted gown, Shannon finds out she gets to wear Harry Winston earrings and a necklace which cost upward of \$500,000 for the evening. Then, the couple has a candlelit dinner and are serenaded by a string quartet. While the couple slow dance on a balcony, the program cuts to a confessional scene with Shannon where she compares herself to a Disney Princess and Julia Roberts from *Pretty Woman* (Fleiss, 2002c). On this date, Shannon leads the life little girls and grown women dream of living. She wears designer gowns, expensive jewelry, and has her Prince Charming whisk her away to a balcony to dance. Throughout the date, confessional scenes show Shannon being grateful for her experience because it was unlike anything she had ever done before. Simultaneously, it was obvious that something is missing. At the beginning of their date, Alex flirts with Shannon by telling her a “story” about a princess named Shannon who kissed a frog. It is then that Shannon interjects and said, “wait, you know I don’t kiss on the first date, right?” (Fleiss, 2002c). While the rest of the date appears magical, from the beginning it is showcased to amplify what was missing—the princess’s kiss. While Alex is disgruntled by the end of the date by his lack of physical intimacy with Shannon, she promises him that if he gives her a rose, she will give him a kiss (Fleiss, 2002c).

In this way, Shannon is bartering her sexuality in exchange for commitment. In *The Bachelor*, roses represent commitment. Thus, Shannon said that she needed a commitment from Alex before she would have any sort of sexual contact with him. Since Shannon is representative

of the ideal woman as she made it to the final three, this means that this idea of waiting until the “appropriate” time to have sexual contact with a man, even as innocent of contact as kissing, is vital to the idea of femininity.

Another contestant who made it halfway through the competition also stated that she did not kiss on the first date. While Rhonda was making her dating rules well known to the camera, to the other contestants, and to the bachelor, she was being shown as a front-runner while other women discussed her obvious chemistry with Alex. The bachelor himself said he saw a lot of potential in a future with her (Fleiss, 2002b). Shannon’s rules for her behavior may seem severe, but Alex still gives her a rose at the end of the episode, signifying that she was a better candidate for becoming his wife and potential mother of his children than the other women like LaNease who made out with him on the first date. It is important to note the distinction between Amanda, the winner of the season, and LaNease, who did not receive a rose the very episode that her rendezvous with Alex is made public. Even though both women had intimate relations with Alex on their first date, LaNease makes hers public while Amanda does not. This communicates the idea that early sexual conduct within a relationship might be acceptable, but not if it is communicated to outsiders. LaNease and Alex’s early physicality is a significant event in the second episode of *The Bachelor* but LaNease makes it a point to keep her affairs a secret and still receives a rose. The moment she shares the information, she is sent home. Amanda, on the other hand, did the “ladylike” thing by keeping her encounter a secret. Of course, it is entirely possible that Amanda does divulge her secret to other contestants. However, what viewers see is Amanda keeping her rendezvous a secret while LaNease discusses her encounter with Alex. The producers constructed Amanda as the ideal woman when they portray her as sexually available but also discreet.

The storyline of LaNease's and Amanda's first dates could very well resonate with viewers. Women in heterosexual relationships are expected to let men pursue them. Furthermore, women are expected to hold off on men's physical advances, at least until an appropriate time. The point is, women should eventually give in to a man's sexual desires, but she must keep him waiting in order to be seen as truly feminine. Both LaNease and Amanda violated this social norm, just as real women do. However, LaNease was unapologetic about her rule-breaking while Amanda was. This might make Amanda more relatable to viewers who crave to be accepted by society, their peers, and by men.

While Alex was excited to kiss LaNease on the first date, in the 20th season of the show, bachelor Ben Higgins was displeased when contestant Lace surprised him with a kiss upon meeting him when she arrived at Bachelor Mansion. When Lace got out of the limo, she asked Ben to close his eyes so she could give him a surprise. Next, she plants a kiss on his lips. Ben immediately opens his eyes, awkwardly laughs, but looks disgruntled. Based on his facial expression, it is clear that he is displeased with the immediate physical signs of affection. Later on in the episode, Lace asks Ben for another kiss so that she can improve upon the first one. Ben pauses for a long time and then denies her request saying that he does not want to get wrapped up in the physical before they get to know each other emotionally. Lace is so distraught by his denial that she decides to drink copious amounts of alcohol and winds up making a drunken fool of herself by the end of the episode (Fleiss, 2016a). I will go more into detail about her drunken behavior later in this chapter.

Lace turns into the laughing stock of the women during the first few episodes of the 20th season due to her drinking and emotional outbursts. The fact that Lace is mocked by the other women (who make it quite a bit further in the competition) makes her unlikable to the audience.

The fact that Lace is disliked for her other behaviors makes everything she does open for scrutiny, including her pre-mature kiss with Ben. This scrutiny, paired with Ben's obvious dislike of the kiss and denial of a second, shows that the pattern of expected male-female behavior is upheld within *The Bachelor*. In the show, men are still expected to pursue the women and the women are expected to be chaste. By kissing Ben, Lace took away his ability to pursue her. This, paired with her heavy drinking, portrays her as too aggressive and bold, the opposite of feminine. Between LaNease's confession and subsequent exit from the show and Lace's early, unappreciated kiss juxtaposed against more successful contestants like Shannon and her refusal to kiss Alex on the first date, it is established that women who engage in sexual behaviors early in the dating process, particularly those who initiate the contact with the man and those who disclose their behaviors to other women, are less likely to progress in *The Bachelor*. This ultimately means that these women are less suitable as a potential spouse, meaning they are presented as being less worthy and less feminine.

Sexual interactions at the right time. However, this is not to say that engaging in sexual behaviors with the bachelor was seen in a negative light in all cases. Rather, the show differentiates between sexual encounters depending on if the timing of these encounters is deemed appropriate by the bachelor and the other women. While some of the women were villainized for their sexual behavior, others were lauded. Amanda won her season of *The Bachelor* and was hyper-sexualized throughout the series. From the very first episode, the bachelor spoke to the camera about Amanda's fake breasts and how attractive they were. In the second episode, Amanda had a hyper-sexualized encounter with Alex in a mud bath among four other women. The group-date was deemed a "spa date" where the bachelor and five women enjoyed a mud bath while they got to know each other. Not only is Alex physically close to

Amanda in the mud bath and rubbing her arm, but when the date is nearing a close he washes the mud off her body personally while the other women have to wash themselves. Another finalist, Trista, even mentions the two of them in a confessional moment, noting that she did not want to interfere with Alex and Amanda's intimate moment in the shower.

Interestingly, Trista and the other women are not shown judging Amanda for her intimate behavior with Alex. Though the women can tell that the two are getting close and describe the moment as intimate and sexual, they do not find it inappropriate. Perhaps this is because the women interpret Amanda's and Alex's interaction as being initiated by Alex. Throughout the season, the women comment on the clear connection between Amanda and Alex, and even tell Alex that it is clear he has very strong feelings for Amanda. Since the contact is seemingly initiated by Alex, the women have no problem with the physical intimacy. Meanwhile, when the women do not witness physical intimacy first-hand, they tend to assume the women initiated contact and it is thus inappropriate. When LaNease made out with Alex on the first date, the women were nowhere in sight. When they criticize her, they put the blame for the encounter on LaNease. Meanwhile, when Alex initiates contact that is arguably more intimate than kissing with all your clothes on by rubbing mud off of Amanda while they are in the shower in swimsuits, the women are not shown criticizing Amanda at all. It is important to note that it is possible that other women were complaining about Amanda and the viewers did not get to see the complaints. If ABC purposefully cut out scenes of other women criticizing Amanda, they might have been trying to preserve the eventual winner's reputation and let the viewers decide for themselves how they should feel about her. Furthermore, through this process the producers automatically present all of Amanda's behaviors as examples of ideal femininity because as the eventual winner, she is the model of ideal femininity.

Amanda continues to get sexually intimate with Alex throughout the season when she makes out with Alex on the floor of a Japanese restaurant on their first one-on-one date and gets even more intimate during the “fantasy suite” date. A fantasy suite date is an overnight date the bachelor goes on with each of the final three women individually. The couple gets the entire day to do activities together, and then has a romantic dinner. During the dinner, the bachelor reveals a card written to the couple from show host Chris Harrison which invites the two to “forgo their individual bedrooms and stay as a couple in the fantasy suite” (Fleiss, 2002e; Fleiss, 2016i). When the couple stays in the fantasy suite, they have the privilege of getting away from cameras. This gives the couple the opportunity to talk privately about issues they might not want to talk about in front of a production crew. It also gives the couple the opportunity to have sexual intercourse. While fans and contestants are familiar with fantasy suites today, first time *Bachelor* contestants did not know that the fantasy suites, or overnight dates, existed. Thus, Amanda, Trista, and Shannon had no idea what was coming when they left for their respective dates with Alex in Season One. Though they knew they would be at their destination for more than 24 hours since they traveled a long way for these dates (Amanda went to New York City, Trista went to Hawaii, and Shannon went to Lake Tahoe), they could not have possibly been prepared for the opportunity to stay overnight in the same room as Alex. Amanda was the first *Bachelor* contestant to receive a fateful date card from Chris Harrison offering a key to a suite for the contestant to share with the bachelor sans camera. She readily accepted the offer, and though it was never explicitly expressed on camera, presumably had sex with Alex.

Before and after this presumed intimate sexual encounter, Amanda alluded to sexual activity throughout the series. On her first one-on-one date with Alex, she tells him all about the Wonder Woman costume she has in her closet and how she likes to dress like Wonder Woman

around the house. She drifts off in the conversation, listing other costumes she has in her closet. The Amanda who constantly alludes to costumed roleplay, is the same Amanda who ends up the winner of Season One. Not only did Amanda have a Wonder Woman costume, but said she also had a cowgirl costume and stated that she wanted to make Alex wear assless chaps. Though this overtly sexual behavior seems to go against stereotypical feminine behavior, Amanda only talks about sex in the privacy of a confessional or alone with Alex. She is never shown talking to other women about her sexual activity. As the eventual winner, Amanda serves to be a representative of the perfect woman. Her blatant sexuality is kept private, meaning that adventurous sexuality is a part of the ideal woman, but only if she keeps it private between her and her partner. Amanda talks about her sexual experiences in such a way that it benefits Alex and is kept hidden from the other women. Since Amanda is only shown making mention of sex in front of Alex or to the camera alone, she stays consistent with the picture of the ideal woman that falls in line with society's standards.

In Episode Five of the season, Alex takes the final three women on exotic dates. Amanda's date is the first shown in the episode. The couple goes to New York City and has a full day and night together. At the beginning of the date, Amanda tells the camera that she is excited to see how physical she and Alex will become. Later, the two go to a restaurant where they open the note from host Chris Harrison inviting them to stay in the fantasy suite. When Alex reads the invitation to Amanda, her face lights up. The two stopped eating their dinner and "practically ran out of that restaurant" (Fleiss, 2002c). When they get to their hotel suite, Amanda eagerly tells Alex that she wants to tear his suit off. Then, the couple order a dessert called "sex in the sheets." The dessert consisted of mousse, a bowl of chocolate sauce, a bowl of caramel sauce, and a plastic sheet. Though the episode does not show any video of the two

indulging in this treat, it does show pictures of Amanda covered in the sauces. The rest is left up to the imagination of viewers, but it is presumed that the two had sexual intercourse.

While Amanda is rewarded for her sexuality at the end of the season with the final rose, Alex constantly affirms her both to her face and in confessional moments to the camera. One way he does this is by paying closer attention to her than to the other women on the show. Throughout the series, other contestants comment on how Alex and Amanda have a clear connection. In the third episode of the season, Alex tells the camera how attracted he is to Amanda and then goes on to say, “you should build a family with someone you’re really attracted to” (Fleiss, 2002c). Here, Alex is saying that sexual attraction is how a man should choose his wife. His statement effectively links a woman’s sexuality with her worthiness, at least in the eyes of men.

While Amanda is hyper-sexual, Shannon refuses to have intercourse with Alex. Earlier episodes focus on Shannon’s refusal to kiss Alex because they were not exclusively dating. In Episode Five, Shannon explains to Alex that she cannot be physically intimate whatsoever until they are officially dating. Alex asks her to pretend that they are exclusive and she asks if she can call him her boyfriend. This distinction of Alex being her “boyfriend” makes Shannon comfortable in engaging in more sexual behaviors than before. While the most intimate encounter the couple had up until this point in the season was slow dancing while a live band watched from the other side of the room, the fifth episode (Fleiss, 2002e) shows the couple making out on a ski lift and getting cozy in a hot tub.

For Shannon, the surprise of a fantasy suite date card leads to anger and frustration. At this point in the episode, Alex had already spent the night in a fantasy suite with Amanda. When he reads the note from Chris Harrison offering Shannon the same opportunity, her smiling face

instantly becomes somber. While the couple had been sitting close together on the floor of their log cabin, Shannon moves away as soon as Alex reads the card. She agrees to go look at the fantasy suite, but as soon as they got there the camera only shows them pacing and yelling at each other. Shannon reacted exactly opposite of Amanda, who was excited and eager to get to the fantasy suite to have sex with Alex. Although Shannon and Alex ask the cameras to leave so that they can have an honest discussion off camera, it is clear to viewers that the couple never gets physically intimate, unlike Alex's previous date with Amanda (Fleiss, 2002e).

Trista's overnight date was foiled by the stomach flu. While she and Alex gallivant around Hawaii, he becomes ill. Trista winds up taking care of Alex while he is sick in bed. Though he is sick, the two are still shown cuddling under the comforter while lying close together. Though they do not have the opportunity, their close proximity and camera confessionals where they each say how deeply they felt about one another leave viewers to assume that the two would have had sexual intercourse if given the opportunity (Fleiss, 2002e) In the next episode, the two wind up spending a night together because Alex asked the producers of the show for more time with Trista since their date in Hawaii was cut short (Fleiss, 2002f).

Of the three women who have the opportunity to have sexual intercourse with Alex, only Shannon refuses outright. The structure of the program makes the relationships seem as though the natural progression is to become sexually intimate in the penultimate episode when the couples are offered the opportunity. In this way, *The Bachelor* defined when the appropriate time for sexual relations was—the fantasy suite date. While Amanda falls into line with the progression of the show and Trista attempts to, Shannon refuses. Thus, though it is appropriate by the program's standard for all three women to have intercourse with Alex, Shannon fails to

fall in line with expectations. Subsequently, Shannon is not given a rose by the end of the episode and is sent home (Fleiss, 2002e).

One difference between the first and twentieth seasons of *The Bachelor* is that contestants in recent seasons are aware of what the fantasy suite is and the expectations associated with it. The three finalists in Season 20 all presumably have sexual intercourse with Ben as all three are shown waking up in bed next to him the morning after their overnight date. The season spent considerably less time focusing on the question of whether each finalist would have sex with the bachelor in this season compared to the first. Presumably, this is because by the 20th season, the contestants were well-versed in *Bachelor* traditions and knew what fantasy suite dates entailed. Over the course of 20 seasons, the bachelors, contestants, and viewers came to understand that fantasy dates were equivalent with sexual intercourse. This meant the show focused less on sex during the fantasy suite episode than it did in the early season. Simply put, the fantasy suite had lost its shock factor that made it so intriguing in Season One. It is unclear whether the loss of shock value is because contestants expected the fantasy suite, or because cohabitation rates are on the rise in the United States (Stepler, 2017). With a rise in cohabitation rates and a decrease in marriage rates, it is less shocking for an unmarried couple to spend the night together.

One Season 20 contestant whose sexuality was emphasized is Caila, who came in third place. When Ben has the opportunity to go to Caila's hometown, she takes him on a date to the toy factory where her father works. The two build a playhouse together while they wear hard hats and tool belts. Throughout their time at the factory, the two passionately make out several times. In a confessional moment, Ben looks at the camera and says "hard hat...power tools... I never thought I would find a toy factory so sexy" (Fleiss, 2016h). In earlier episodes that season, Ben and Caila are constantly making out and groping each other. Then, Ben calls Caila a "sex

panther” to the camera in a confessional moment (Fleiss, 2016d). When Ben talks about how sexy she is, he is always smiling. His laudatory statements about her sexuality show that on *The Bachelor*, sexuality, when clearly wanted by the bachelor and at the appropriate time, is seen as a positive aspect of a woman.

JoJo, the runner-up of Season 20, also had a strong sexual component to her relationship with Ben. Not only did the camera show ample footage of the two sitting close together and resting their hands on one another’s thighs, but the two have an intense make-out session on a roof while they await a helicopter to take just the two of them away on a one-on-one date that was steamy enough to make the other women upset and walk away from the window they were watching from. In one episode, JoJo expresses concern in the confessional because she fears that she might not know Ben well enough because they have had more passionate moments than conversations (Fleiss, 2016d). Clearly, Ben does not mind the unbalance in their relationship since he keeps JoJo around until the very last rose ceremony.

Physical Proximity

Ben likely continues to give JoJo roses throughout the competition for reasons aside from their sexual connection, one of which is the nonverbal communication JoJo uses such as being close in proximity to other women and Ben when she spends time with them. Being in close physical proximity is another theme I found in my analysis of both seasons as a marker of ideal femininity. The show often portrays contestants close together whether they be in a limo riding to an exotic destination for a group date or relaxing together at Bachelor Mansion. Typically, the women are shown being close together when they were getting along and happy with one another. Often, footage of women sitting close together is juxtaposed against footage of a woman sitting by herself or far away from the others. This communicates that while some of the women

are well-liked and close friends with the group of women on the show, others are more distant and even ostracized.

One such example is when Jubilee, a contestant on Season 20, is shown sitting far away from the other women with her arms crossed during a group date. At this point in the series, it is already clear that Ben and Jubilee might not be a match made in heaven. Though the two went on a one-on-one date and clearly have some interest in each other, Ben is not nearly as physically intimate with her and spends more time soothing her hurt feelings in one-on-one time than he does getting to know her. In the sixth episode of the season, it is clear Jubilee and the other women were not getting along. I will talk about the women's verbal communication later in this chapter, but their nonverbal communication was clear. The footage emphasizes that Jubilee is physically withdrawn from the rest of the women in the house. Clips of the women chatting and laughing, sitting so close together on the couch they were touching, is played immediately before and after images of Jubilee sitting alone and far away from the others. Just minutes after this footage, Ben asked Jubilee to leave the competition, citing the reason of her being withdrawn (Fleiss, 2016f).

Meanwhile, the women who make it furthest in the competition are usually shown sitting close together, playing with each other's hair, and resting their heads on each other's shoulders. When Emily does not receive a rose, the final five contestants hug her and rub her back while she cries (Fleiss, 2016g). Close physical interactions such as these show that the women support one another and get along with each other. This is directly oppositional to the contestants like Jubilee who are portrayed as withdrawn by the show because they are never depicted as close to the other women.

Physical proximity to Ben was just as important, if not more so, as physical proximity to the other women. In the episode where Jubilee is asked to leave, she refuses to stand close to Ben during the group date. During the date, the women take a Spanish lesson and take turns talking to Ben in front of the classroom in Spanish. While the other women stand close to Ben and hold his hands, Jubilee holds onto his hands but stands as far away as possible. With her arms stick-straight in front of her, it is clear to everyone in the room that Jubilee is uncomfortable. The majority of the women on the group date use their confessional time to complain about Jubilee's nonverbal communication. They say it was clear she was uncomfortable with Ben and that she comes across as rude. Later in the date, just before Ben sends her home, he tries to grab her hand to lead her away to talk and she swats it away and crosses her arms. The awkwardness of Jubilee's earlier encounter with Ben, the other women's commentary on the situation, and this final straw of swatting his hand away seem to build up to a pivotal moment for Jubilee that determines she is unfit to continue on the show. The sequence of events make it seem as though her physical discomfort with the other contestants and with Ben is what make her a bad contestant who does not deserve a rose.

While Season One does not emphasize the women's physical proximity to one another, it does showcase different women's physical proximity to the bachelor. Amanda, the winner of the show, consistently sits right next to Alex from the first group date, even though there are always other women around. Though Alex is surrounded by women in a mud bath during the first group date, he sits closest to Amanda and the only other woman he has physical contact with is Trista. The camera spends ample time focusing on just how close Alex and Amanda are and zooms in on Alex rubbing Trista's arm multiple times during the scene. These two women are the final two contestants on that season.

Shannon uses her physical proximity to Alex to clearly communicate with him her feelings. After Alex meets Shannon's parents, he rides away with her in a limo. There, Alex asks her to tell him more about her rules for dating and how that relates to sex. Though she had been sitting right next to him, the question makes her upset and she moves away, crosses her arms, and looks away (Fleiss, 2002d). She ultimately refuses to answer, but she does receive a rose. On the next episode, the two go to Lake Tahoe together. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the couple begins to fight after Alex reads the fantasy suite card. Although Shannon tells viewers at the end of the episode that the couple did stay up late talking and had positive interactions, the last thing that viewers see is Shannon sitting down on a couch while Alex is several feet away (Fleiss, 2002e). The two are physically distant, which could be linked to being emotionally distant. Ultimately Shannon does not receive a rose which comes as no surprise since they spent their date fighting.

Through my analysis I found that physical proximity is critical to the image of the ideal woman. The contestants that serve as representations of ideal femininity are typically shown as being in close proximity to other contestants and the bachelor. In opposition, those who are representative of women who do not meet the standard are shown sitting by themselves or creating physical distance between themselves and the bachelor.

Confidence and Vulnerability

The Bachelor hones in on confidence and vulnerability throughout both Season One and Season 20. Both of these emotions are intrinsically linked to an individual contestant's relationship with the bachelor. When I say confidence, I mean a contestant's confidence in her relationship with the bachelor and confidence that she will move forward in the competition. In regards to vulnerability, I am specifically looking at a woman's vulnerability within her

relationship with the bachelor rather than her openness in confessionals or with the other women at Bachelor Mansion. In my analysis, I found that high levels of confidence and low levels of vulnerability were considered negative traits while low levels of confidence and high levels of vulnerability were seen as positive traits.

Over-confidence

In my analysis, I found that too much confidence was linked to women being sent home from the competition and even being painted as a villain. It is important to remember that viewers only know what is shown to them. This means that other women might have been confident as well, but producers chose to only show women who were about to be removed from the competition as having confidence, reinforcing the idea that over-confidence is unattractive. Although Season One does not showcase overly confident women in the same way Season 20 does, during the hometown dates only one woman tells the confessional that she is confident she will get a rose and move on to the next round in the competition while the other three are portrayed as concerned about their chances. The single confident woman, Kim, does not receive a rose in that episode (Fleiss, 2002d). Similarly, another Season One contestant, Amy, confesses how confident she is immediately before she is sent home on Episode Two (Fleiss, 2002b). Amy says, "I have the qualities he's looking for in a wife." Amy gets very little airtime in either of the two episodes she is in. Rather, the only solo time she gets on camera is of her being confident and talking about her Ivy League education and how that will get her far in this competition. This confidence, paired with her subsequent departure communicates that being too confident will come back to bite contestants. In other words, the confident and intelligent women are sent home from *The Bachelor*. In a similar situation, a woman on Season 20 confessed her confidence in a confessional scene during a rose ceremony and is then sent home. Jami says that she is "70-71

percent confident” that she will receive a rose from Ben (Fleiss, 2016c). Jami’s oddly specific confidence does her no good in the competition as she does not receive a rose that episode. In regards to intelligence, Amy is removed from the show just after the episode focuses on her Ivy League education and in Season 20 Olivia boasts to Ben about her intelligence and explains her emotional distance from the other women in the house by claiming they cannot hold intelligent conversation with her (Fleiss, 2016f). These two instances communicate to viewers that intelligent women do not conform to the image of the ideal woman.

In a more extreme case, Season 20 uses a woman’s confidence to turn her into a villain. Olivia is a controversial character for many reasons. She is the villain of the season because the footage that was aired typically showed her in a negative light. Additionally, there is plenty of footage of other women saying disparaging remarks about her. I will discuss this footage and some of Olivia’s negative characteristics later in this chapter. *The Bachelor* villain is now a trope in the series, although this did not exist in this way in the first season. By Season 20, fans came to expect that one woman would be the villain of the show and would probably make it far into the competition. In the case of Olivia, she made it to Episode Six where she was sent home on a two-on-one date. Viewers expect the villains to be kept on the show because they add drama to the series. Villains make the episodes more exciting to watch and add to the overall arc of the series’ plot.

Olivia’s confidence comes across as brazen and disrespectful. In the very first episode she receives what is called “the first impression rose.” This is the very first rose given out on the season and represents the bachelor’s first instincts in attraction. When Olivia receives this rose, she is excited just as any other woman would be. Unfortunately for Olivia, she brags about receiving this rose to the other women. This makes the other women upset for obvious reasons.

In a later episode, Olivia refers to herself as “wifey” because she is so confident that she will win the entire competition. Olivia talks about Ben as if they are exclusively dating and seems very confident that he has eyes only for her. She is often shown saying things such as “I would be shocked if I didn’t get a rose,” “I’m confident and that’s intimidating,” or “Ben is my man.” Again and again she interrupts other women’s time with Ben because she sees their relationship as inferior to her own relationship with Ben (Fleiss, 2016b; Fleiss, 2016c; Fleiss, 2016d; Fleiss, 2016e). Her confidence alienates her from the other women and it is clear that they do not like her. I will discuss more of her relationship with the other contestants later in this chapter.

Olivia’s confidence is particularly brazen and misplaced in Episode Six just before she is sent home. As is typical for *Bachelor* villains, Olivia winds up being asked to go on a two-on-one date with Ben and Emily. The premise of a two-on-one date is that one woman receives a rose and the other is immediately sent home. Olivia and Emily butt heads throughout the season and Emily is consistently shown badmouthing Olivia to the confessional and to Ben. Before the date, Olivia says that she does not see Emily as a threat because “she’s young, she’s a bird.” She goes on to say that “Emily is the same age as me, but I feel like I’m babysitting” (Fleiss, 2016f). Olivia acts as though she already has the rose on the date. She tells Ben she loves him and tells the camera how confident she is in their relationship. Ultimately, this behavior does not pay off and Olivia is left standing alone on a beach as the wind and waves whip around her while Emily leaves on a boat with Ben (Fleiss, 2016f).

Lack of Confidence

While contestants portrayed as overly confident are either immediately sent home or villainized for their confidence, the women who clearly lack confidence are lauded for it by the bachelor. In Season One, Trista makes her lack of confidence in all romantic relationships very

clear. On the first group date, she says that she has been cheated on before and that directly affects her confidence in herself and her relationships. Shannon also shows a lack of confidence throughout the season, such as when she says “I wouldn’t be surprised if I didn’t get a rose.” In that same episode, she is given the rose that moves her into the final three contestants (Fleiss, 2002d). In this way, a common theme among women who made it to the final three is their expression of a lack of confidence in relationships.

This trend is consistent with the 20th season. Runner-up JoJo expresses concern from the beginning of the season that Ben does not notice her and she does not stand out among the other women. She also expresses that she had been cheated on in her last relationship and is subsequently concerned about future boyfriends cheating on her. In one episode, Ben tells JoJo that he finds her lack of confidence attractive. Specifically, he says that he likes how she still does not realize how much he likes her despite the number of times he tells her so (Fleiss, 2016f). Ben’s affirmations of JoJo’s lack of confidence serves to elevate the unconfident women above those who do have confidence. While the women who boast about their likelihood of receiving a rose are typically sent home, the women who are unsure typically stay and even receive praise for their emotions. In this way, the show consistently shows that a high level of confidence is a negative trait in women, while a low level of confidence is ideal.

Low vs. High Levels of Vulnerability

While low levels of confidence were ideal, low levels of vulnerability are seen as a negative trait in contestants. Of the final three contestants in Season One, Shannon reveals the least amount of information about herself. Similarly, Trista is described by Alex as having a “wall” around her (Fleiss, 2002c). Amanda, on the other hand, is open about her feelings for Alex and about her past. She is very up front with Alex and his family about her previous

marriage and annulment, even though she knows that might be a deal breaker for Alex and his Catholic family. The open, vulnerable Amanda winds up winning the competition. Trista eventually opens up to Alex during the fantasy suite date. Though the episode does not show their private conversation, in a confessional moment Trista does tell the camera that she told Alex things she had only told a few people before (Fleiss, 2002e). Meanwhile, audience members are led to believe that Shannon never opens up to Alex. In fact, she tells Alex, “some of the questions you ask, I’m not going to answer” (Fleiss, 2002e). Shannon does not receive a rose and advance to the finale of Season One, communicating to audience members that her lack of vulnerability makes her less ideal than Trista and Amanda who are open with Alex.

Season 20 plays out in a similar way. Of the final three contestants, the two who make it to the final rose ceremony are more vulnerable and open with Ben throughout the season. On her first one-on-one date with Ben, Lauren tells him that she wants to meet his family. She is immediately embarrassed by her admission, but Ben becomes enamored with her due to her openness (Fleiss, 2016b). Meanwhile, on Caila’s first one-on-one date with Ben, he expresses concerns that she smiles too much and would not be open about her feelings in negative situations. Later, he expresses in a confessional that Caila might be “too smiley,” and wonders if he can “get below the surface” (Fleiss, 2016d). Ultimately, Ben decides that he cannot get below the surface and does not offer her a rose after their fantasy suite date (Fleiss, 2016i).

On *The Bachelor* there is an assumption that the bachelor will not tell contestants that he loves them. If the bachelor tells one woman he loves her, it will take away from the show’s dramatic resolution when viewers finally get to see who he chose. In the episode that features fantasy suites, Lauren says, “the ultimate vulnerability is telling someone you love them knowing they won’t say it back.” Though Lauren does not expect a response from Ben, she is

rewarded for her willingness to be vulnerable when Ben tells her he loves her as well.

Unfortunately for Lauren, in the same episode, JoJo has a similar interaction with Ben. She tells the confessional how terrified she is to tell Ben how she feels. However, she conquers her fear and tells Ben she loves him. She is also rewarded for her vulnerability when Ben responds, “I love you, too” (Fleiss, 2016i).

The contestants who are closest to becoming the woman the bachelor chooses, are generally more vulnerable than the women who are eliminated early in the competition. Though one obvious explanation for this is that it is unreasonable for a woman to tell the bachelor she loves him after knowing him for a week, it is also clear that the bachelor tends to let women who are more vulnerable advance in the competition. The men typically praise the women when they are vulnerable and express their concerns when women are less open or forthcoming. This demonstrates that vulnerable women are seen as more ideal and better suited to be a romantic partner than those who do not share their feelings so willingly.

Ladylike Behaviors

Typically, when the women are open about their feelings, they get emotional. Being emotional is just one trait linked to ideal femininity (Dubfrofsky, 2011). Other behaviors that are classically attributed to ideal femininity are taking care of others and doting on men (Gray, 2009). Furthermore, research says that media portray the ideal woman as conventionally pretty and fulfilling a role in relation to a man. This means that the ideal woman is a good wife, mother, daughter, and sister (Van Zoonen, 1994). Behaviors that detract from a woman’s femininity are cursing and drinking. In my analysis, I found that *The Bachelor* was consistent with these findings both in the first and twentieth seasons as women praised for their ability and willingness

to care for others were praised and those who were shown drinking to excess or cursing were villainized.

Women's Roles

In both seasons that I analyzed, the bachelor continuously discusses the contestants in their capacity to serve as a potential wife and mother. In Season One, Amanda is one of the youngest contestants at the age of 23. However, she has already been married and had an annulment. When she meets Alex's family, they ask her about her past. She is honest and goes on to explain that when she was a young girl, her friends were looking forward to being in their mid-20s. Amanda, on the other hand, looked forward to being middle-aged. She has always been excited to be a wife and a mother. In fact, her first husband had kids and she enjoyed being a step-mother. When Amanda leaves, Alex talks to his parents and sisters about her. His sister notes that Amanda is clearly "on the baby train" and says that makes her a better choice than the other finalist because Alex wants to have children right away (Fleiss, 2002f).

Trista also demonstrates her ability to be a good wife to Alex. On their overnight date in Hawaii, Alex gets sick first on a helicopter ride and then again later in the day. He winds up bedridden with a stomach bug. Trista surprises Alex by coming to his room to take care of him while he is stuck in bed. Alex is pleased with Trista's ability and willingness to take care of him. He tells the camera that Trista's care-taking feels "intimate" and that she "scored points with me in Hawaii" (Fleiss, 2002e). Alex is clearly attracted to women who he perceives as being good caretakers. In regard to third-place contestant Shannon, he says he has visions of her as the mother of his children. The possibility of Shannon taking care of his future children makes Alex want to give Shannon a rose and keep her in the running for becoming his wife (Fleiss, 2002c). There is only one other woman that Alex says has potential for being a good wife. Though Alex

says Rhonda is good wife potential due to her maturity, she does not make it past Episode Three for unstated reasons (Fleiss, 2002c). Alex does not comment on any other contestants' abilities to be a good wife or mother. Though Alex makes no mention of the abilities to be a wife or mother in regards to the women who are insignificant to the overall plot line of the season, he emphasizes the possibility of the final three women to serve him as his wife or the mother of his children. Thus, the season promotes the idea that in order to be considered the best woman, a contestant must be able to fulfill the role of a wife and mother.

Ben has a similar thought process. When he finds out that contestant Amanda is the mother of two daughters, his face lights up. Though she is scared to tell him for fear it will make him send her home, he assures her by telling her that he is looking for a woman who will be a mother to his children. He spends the rest of his time with Amanda that episode talking to her about her children, asking her questions about them, and even making hair barrettes with roses on them to send to her two daughters (Fleiss, 2016b).

Not only does the show emphasize the women's role as a potential wife and mother, but it showcases the women in relation to their fathers and brothers. When Alex visits Amanda's hometown, her older brothers question him extensively about his life, his habits, and his intentions. Since Amanda's father died when she was 11, she says she sees her oldest brother as a father figure. In the same episode, Trista's and Shannon's fathers ask more questions than their mothers. At Kim's house, her father shows Alex his room full of hunting trophies. The camera pans the room showing deer, moose, and even a large bear. The family asks Alex about his own experiences, or rather lack of experiences, with hunting and is sure to tell him how skilled Kim's father is with a gun (Fleiss, 2002d). All three dates emphasize that the fathers and brothers are protective of the women, while the women's mothers are more passive and supportive of the

process. This promotes the idea that these women are passive and in need of a man to protect them.

The 20th season is no different. Winner Lauren's dad grills Ben and asks him tough questions about his views on marriage and whether he is ready to propose to any woman. JoJo's brothers act similarly. While JoJo's mother tells both Ben and JoJo she is supportive of their relationship, her brothers tell JoJo they do not think Ben is as invested as she is. Then, they accuse Ben of being manipulative brainwashing their sister along with the other women. They continuously use the phrase "as a brother" when they attack Ben. They even say they "are very, very attached to their sister" and tell Ben that if he plans to propose he will have to relocate to Dallas rather than ask JoJo to relocate to Denver. Caila's dad, while less intense than JoJo's brothers, describes himself as "skeptical" of Ben while her mother urges her to tell Ben she loves him so that they can take their relationship to the next level. Amanda's father is also incredibly protective of Amanda and is shown repeatedly reminding Ben that if he chooses to pursue a relationship with Amanda he will have to instantly jump into fatherhood (Fleiss, 2016h). In this way, the 20th season continues the trend that began in 2002. The women are perpetuated as helpless and in need of a father figure to keep them from the potential of getting their fragile feelings hurt.

Ladylike Attitudes

Though some of the women were clearly upset at their fathers and brothers for giving the bachelor a difficult time, none of them openly challenge their families. This passive behavior is just one way the show perpetuates traditional stereotypes of women. Additionally, the show tends to show the ideal women as being overly gracious. In both seasons, the women who make it to the final three constantly thank the bachelor for taking them on dates. In Season 20, one

woman's lack of gratitude is emphasized as the women complain to each other and the camera about how she is not a good fit for Ben. Jubilee is not portrayed in a positive light in Season 20 because she puts physical distance between herself and the other contestants as well as the bachelor. Additionally, the other women complain about her attitude. One main incident that leads the women to complain about her was that when she has a one-on-one with Ben, she is scared to get in a helicopter with him due to her fear of flying. Rather than stating she is scared, she asks the women, "does anybody else want to go on my date?" The other women are outraged at Jubilee's question. They say that she is ungrateful, and even tell Ben as much. Though Jubilee gets a rose on that particular episode, the women do not forgive or forget her transgression. On the next episode, the women keep complaining about Jubilee, and even Ben knows how the women feel after he sees another woman confront Jubilee, making her cry. After the confrontation, Jubilee winds up being sent home without a rose (Fleiss, 2016f).

Gratitude is just one aspect of politeness and ladylike behavior the women are expected to align with. Cursing and binge-drinking are other behaviors on the show that are deemed as unacceptable. Lace, a contestant on Season 20, is deemed "50 shades of crazy" by contestant Caila after Lace has multiple drunken outbursts during group dates and rose ceremonies (Fleiss, 2016a). Since the other women all say negative things about Lace to each other and the cameras, it is understandable to consider Lace as a non-ideal example of a woman. Lace is the only contestant on season 20 to get consistently bleeped out for cursing. The only other time a contestant is bleeped out is when Jubilee gets a one-on-one date and yells in excitement. As I previously stated, Jubilee is painted in a negative light throughout that episode, including when she is bleeped out for cursing. Lace is also the only contestant on Season 20 to get criticized for drinking too much and to get obviously drunk, even though most of the women consistently have

glasses of alcohol in their hands (Fleiss, 2016a). One common trope in *Bachelor* seasons is “the drunk one.” Typically, there is one contestant who is portrayed as a bad match for the bachelor because she drinks too much and is thus a better fit for *Girls Gone Wild* than *The Bachelor*. In Season One, Cathy is shown at the dinner table with an entire pitcher of margarita just for herself. The other women must take care of her and each tell the confessional that Cathy is too wild for Alex. Subsequently, Cathy is sent home (Fleiss, 2002c).

In Season 20, Lace winds up apologizing to Ben for getting too drunk and emotional and removes herself from the show. When she tells Ben that she is leaving, she tells him he “deserves more” (Fleiss, 2016c). Though Lace is the only contestant in Season 20 who is shown drinking or cursing too much to be considered feminine, one has to wonder if other contestants who were otherwise painted as ladylike drank too much alcohol or cursed consistently. Audience members will never know since they only see the footage that producers craft together to showcase each woman in a particular way.

Differences Between Season One and Season 20

Though the themes of ideal femininity have remained fairly constant between Season One and Season 20, there have been some changes in the series since its inception. In the very first episode of *Bachelor* history, the series presents the female contestants as competent and in control. The host, Chris Harrison, describes the contestants as “real women” and goes on to say, “they’re looking for a husband and if they don’t like you, they will reject you right here on national television” (Fleiss, 2002a). On the contrary, the idea that a contestant might turn down the bachelor or not be interested in him is never discussed in Season 20. In Season One, Chris Harrison emphasizes the contestants’ intelligence and says that many of the women present have their master’s degree or their doctorate degree. This puts them on the same plane as the bachelor

since Alex has his bachelor's degree from Harvard and his MBA from Stanford. Later, he reminds the women that they are "totally empowered here" (Fleiss, 2002a). In this way, the women are presented as in control of their romantic lives and as having just as much, if not more power than Alex.

Season 20 tells a different story. By the time Season 20 aired in 2016, the franchise began to list the women's careers and ages under their name whenever they were shown on the television screen. In Season 20, there are multiple "careers" that were illegitimate. For example, one woman is branded a "chicken enthusiast" while twins Emily and Haley's careers are listed simply as "twin" even though they both have jobs as waitresses (Fleiss, 2016a). The women's careers are discussed in Season One, but mainly just in Episode One by the host when he introduces the women to Alex and viewers. After the first episode, the only time a contestant's career is featured is when Alex's family makes fun of Trista for being a cheerleader. Alex corrects them and says she is a professional dancer, not a cheerleader (Fleiss, 2016f). In Season 20, the women's careers are rarely talked about on the show, but they are constantly on the screen. This means that viewers are constantly reminded of the career and age of the women. The fact that these women are presented as having "careers" that result in no pay or value to society undermines their value. Furthermore, this presents the bachelor as having more power and agency within the show. In Season One, Alex has his MBA from Stanford University. In contrast, Ben is a software salesman in Season 20. Regardless of how much money he made, there is no level of higher education needed to have a career in sales and the show never discusses his academic accolades. Perhaps the achievements of the bachelors themselves have decreased over the years, resulting in ABC presenting the women as lower-achieving in order to bolster the position of the bachelor. The need to make sure the bachelor holds higher status in

society than whomever he chooses is another way the show idealizes stereotypical gender roles. This puts the bachelor “in charge” and portrays him as the breadwinner in his relationship while the women he dates are portrayed as subservient.

The single woman who does boast of her intelligence of Season 20 is demonized for doing so. One plot device that producers use in Season 20 that does not occur in Season One is the villainized woman. Though multiple women are criticized in Season One and are portrayed less positively than the rest, none are quite as blatantly demonized as Olivia in Season 20. Aside from her overconfidence as I discussed earlier in this chapter, she is also portrayed as being too intelligent to function socially and having physical imperfections, which the other women do not have. For example, the camera zooms in on her face when it is contorted into unappealing expressions in multiple episodes (Fleiss, 2016b; Fleiss 2016c, Fleiss 2016d; Fleiss 2016e). At other times, the other women criticize her for having strange-looking toes and bad breath (Fleiss, 2016c; Fleiss, 2016e). Olivia is constantly attacked in the confessionals and face-to-face by the other women, whether it be for her physical imperfections or for her behavior. Since the other women are all shown critiquing her, it is clear to the audience that she is the villain of the show. Since these other contestants are ideal, anyone they do not like or approve of is then portrayed as the opposite. When Ben asks Olivia why she does not get along with the other contestants, she cites her intelligence as the reason. She claims that the other women are not intelligent enough to hold conversations with her and that she would rather read a book than talk to the other women. Ben sends her home within minutes of this confession (Fleiss, 2016f). Olivia’s portrayal as the lone smart woman alienates her even further and communicates that if one woman is more intelligent than the women around her, she is not the best choice for a man looking for a romantic partner.

Conclusion

The show has evolved since its inception in such a way that presents women as less capable and having less agency. Though the contestants in Season One are praised for their scholarly accolades and careers, the women of Season 20 are not. Not only are their careers not discussed, but some women are even identified by false careers in order to provide entertainment for viewers. Other trends were the same in both seasons. Season One and Season 20 both focus on the sexuality of the women. They portray the ideal women as chaste until a certain point at which they give in to the bachelor's sexual desires. Other, less ideal women are too overtly sexual and take away the bachelor's ability to pursue them by making the first move themselves. Other physical interactions also delineate between the idealized women and the rest. In both seasons, the more idealized women are portrayed as trying to put themselves in proximity with the bachelor and the other women. In opposition, women are portrayed as purposefully creating space between themselves and others. Typically, this behavior occurs just before that woman is sent home from the competition.

My analysis also revealed that women who are portrayed as overly confident do not fit the mold of the ideal woman. When women are shown telling other women or the camera that they are confident they will move forward in the competition, they are always sent home from the competition. Other traits that make a woman seemingly less feminine or fit for marriage are drunkenness and cursing. Traits that the idealized women do possess on the show are being open with their feelings even when they are shown as hesitant or fearful, being a caretaker, and having strong men in their lives that are protective of them. Ultimately, this means that *The Bachelor* portrays women as weak and in need of a man. A woman's need for a man is stressed in both seasons that I analyzed when the contestants are constantly shown discussing their past

relationships and as having overbearing fathers and brothers. This tendency of *The Bachelor* is unsurprising as it falls in line with other media representations of women. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will discuss these conclusions as well as their implications and provide ideas for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The Bachelor follows suit with other media in how it presents femininity. In this study, I analyzed Season One and Season 20 of the series in order to determine what messages the show sends about women and to investigate if the messages have changed between the first season in 2002 and the current season. I found that both seasons portrayed ideal women as being traditionally feminine in their mannerisms and sexuality. The show also portrayed some women as villains in order to draw attention to the behaviors that present a woman as being either ideal or inferior. Ideal women were sexual when it suited the bachelor's needs, used physical proximity to communicate closeness with the bachelor and with their friends, and behaved in a stereotypically "ladylike" way. Villains on the show were portrayed as being overtly sexual at inappropriate times and engaged in behaviors such as binge-drinking and cursing. Season 20 also emphasizes physical imperfections of the villainized women. This portrayal of women in a television program that targets female viewers between 18 and 34 years of age has its implications. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss these implications, directions for future research, and conclude my findings from this study.

Implications

While the representation of women in television shows has come far from the stay-at-home wife and mother that have been mainstays of television for decades, women are still perpetually presented as having to fit a certain mold in order to be considered ideal. Reality television shows such as *The Bachelor* target women aged 18-49. This age group could be particularly vulnerable to messages about how to become the ideal woman or the ideal wife. *The Bachelor* provides a road map for viewers that tells them how to love and be loved. Regardless of whether viewers' reality

The portrayal of women's sexuality in the show might be even more troubling than the presentation of the ideal woman as lacking confidence. In the show, women are expected to engage in sexual activity, but only in private and when and only when a man initiates the contact. This takes away a woman's agency when it comes to her sexuality. Furthermore, if a woman does not want to engage in any sexual activity, *The Bachelor* ideology dictates that she is less worthy than other women in the eyes of men. In the 14-year time gap between Season One and Season 20, representation of women's sexuality did not change within the show. In Season One, Alex kept Shannon in the competition hoping she would eventually relent and have sexual intercourse with him. When she refused, she was sent home. In Season 20 it was still expected that the women would have intercourse with the bachelor. In fact, it was so expected that when the women finally received their invitation to stay in the fantasy suite, there was hardly any fuss or excitement about the relational milestone the couple was reaching.

Though the representation of women's sexuality stayed largely the same from Season One to Season 20, the messages about women's intelligence and capabilities were more negative in the later season. While the women of Season One are well-educated and praised for their professional careers, the women of Season 20 have careers such as "twin" and "chicken enthusiast." Obviously, these are not real careers and thus undermine whatever it is that these women actually do for a living. This finding was surprising to me as women are more likely to hold higher positions in the work force now than when the show originally aired (Fairchild, 2014). My analysis shows that although women might be holding higher positions at work, the media still present them as lower on the totem pole than men. Further, the show seems to communicate that a woman's career does not matter, particularly if she is searching for a husband. In other words, as long as a woman can win the affection of a man, she has no need for

a “real job” to support herself. This message conflicts with the general idea of contemporary feminism: that women can “have it all” if they choose to do so. In other words, women can have a career and be a good wife and mother. *The Bachelor* seems to communicate that if a woman wants to have the ideal relationship then she cannot have a strong career. In other words, if a woman expects to marry the ideal man, she must be completely devoted to him and thus cannot have a career outside of the home.

It is important to recognize that the symbols of ideal femininity in *The Bachelor* can be decoded differently by different viewers. What some might perceive to be the ideal woman, others might find lacking. This means that the show and its representations of women are left up to interpretation by the viewer. While for some, the images might be realistic and attainable, other viewers only watch the show to laugh at the unrealistic scenarios and exaggerated personas. Other viewers lie between these two extremes and realize that the program is constructed but still wish that this was the reality in America today. The program presents an ideal version of femininity, but it also presents an idealized version of love. Both these representations reflect what our culture tends to propagate about these subjects. Media and culture influence and reinforce one another’s values. The fact that the show’s portrayal of women did not change in the twenty seasons shows that our culture’s ideas about femininity have probably stayed stagnant despite the rise of women holding high-paying positions at Fortune 500 companies. Considering the feminist movement and its effects on society, particularly the workplace, I have to wonder if the careful construction of ideal women in *The Bachelor* and other television programs is not a stubborn response to the change that is happening in the real world.

Though the constructed images of ideal femininity largely stayed the same from Season One to Season 20, some aspects of femininity were more exaggerated in Season 20. This could be because viewers who have religiously followed the show come to expect certain behaviors to be connected to a woman being sent home from the competition or receiving a rose from the bachelor. My own mother, who admittedly does not watch the show critically, says, “whiners go home” every time she watches a woman complain to the bachelor about another contestant. Through years of watching the show, she has come to expect that when a woman complains about another woman in order to make herself look better, she is typically asked to leave. This is just one example of what viewers expect to happen on the show. Producers know what their viewers expect and thus have to exaggerate certain behaviors to follow the tropes that they have constructed since 2002. The additional episodes and time in recent seasons give even more time to show women being catty or otherwise dramatic. Though Season One only had six episodes with an hour of television time, Season 20 had 10 episodes with two-hour timeslots. The longer episodes in Season 20 gives viewers more opportunities to identify with some contestants and vilify others, making the meanings drawn from the program even more substantial than earlier seasons like Season One which only had six, shorter episodes.

Perhaps the most important factor of my research is that the show presents the women as being in opposition to each other. Though the women on the show are competing for the bachelor’s heart, the producers present the different images of these women as competing for the spot as the one perfect woman within the competition. Competing personalities and images are constantly juxtaposed in order to emphasize certain qualities as being laudable or laughable. For every frame of a serene woman, there is another of a woman being gawkish or awkward. In this way, my research demonstrates that television programs like *The Bachelor* pit women against

each other. While the women, or rather the representations of the women, are fighting each other to be the best, the entire group of women is losing their agency and dignity.

Future Research

I chose to analyze the first and twentieth seasons of *The Bachelor* to analyze the messages they send about women. In order to make my findings more generalizable, I would like to replicate my study with each season of *The Bachelor*. This would not only help me to discover if the same themes are consistent throughout the series, but will also help me to determine when certain tropes, such as the villain and the “drunk girl” became integral to the show’s plot. Fans come to expect certain contestants to fulfill certain roles on the show. These characters typically serve as representations of women who are unfit for marriage. In order to best analyze these characters, it would be helpful to know when and how they originated in the series. I would also like to consider more technical aspects of filming such as camera angles and time on screen. These are other symbols that producers use to construct their images and thus should be looked at in order to strengthen this study.

Moving forward, I would also suggest to analyze the show’s spin-offs, particularly *The Bachelorette*. The star of this program is always one of the finalists from *The Bachelor*, which is one of the reasons the show must portray more than one woman as ideal. Whomever becomes the bachelorette needs to also be presented as a woman who would be so desirable that 25 men would compete for her. This program features one woman who dates 25 men until she picks one who has the opportunity to propose to her at the end of the season. There are many aspects to this show that could strengthen the argument I have made in this thesis. For example, though the bachelorette gets to choose who the final contestant is, he is still ultimately given the choice of whether to propose. This gives the final contestant more agency than the bachelorette, even

though she is the star of the show. Another aspect to consider is that whoever becomes the bachelorette has to first be on *The Bachelor*. Further research could analyze footage of the bachelorette during her time on *The Bachelor* in order to see if the show promotes a certain representation of a woman as being a better fit for the seemingly powerful role of being the bachelorette. Another area of study that the spin-offs in particular could help with would be to analyze the images of ideal masculinity that are portrayed on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* where there are 25 men competing for one woman.

Other future studies could investigate the genre as a whole and what *The Bachelor* tells us about reality television. By Season 20, fans are more familiar with the inner workings of the show. Thanks to social media and podcasts from former contestants, viewers who are really invested in the program know that some of the scenarios are more contrived than others. In that way, the viewers might not care that the “reality” portrayed on the show does not match their own. In fact, it may not even matter. Viewers may simply enjoy knowing that this representation exists and value having this “ideal” love in their life, even if it does not match up with their own life. Additionally, viewers expect the exaggerated character on the show. Some contestants might even purposefully be playing a certain exaggerated role on the show. Whether she is purposefully filling the role of the overly emotional woman, the party woman, or the woman who is just there to have a good time, she is still gaining media attention which could very well benefit her outside of the show. It is unclear just how much agency the contestants have in how they are portrayed. Do women sign on to the show knowing they will be portrayed as an unideal woman who cannot hold her liquor? Do women get to choose what their occupation is listed as? Future research could attempt to answer these questions.

The Bachelor is regularly satirized on comedy television. For example, late night host Jimmy Kimmel regularly has a feature on his show called “Baby Bachelor” where babies compete for one another’s affection. Future research could focus on the satirized versions of *The Bachelor* to see what representations of women humorists cling to and emphasize to viewers. The frequency with which the show is satirized coupled with the idea that the audience of the satirized versions might encompass a completely different demographic than the audience of the original show make this worthy of future research.

Another suggestion I have for future research would be to utilize these same methods on other reality television shows. Further, future research to compare the representations of women on the show in conjunction with what the women’s careers are could provide more insight. For example, are women with stereotypically feminine careers such as teachers and nurses portrayed the same way as women who have stereotypically masculine careers? Future research could also attempt to determine if a woman’s career is more or less pertinent to her femininity than other characteristics she possesses. Future studies could determine if there is a hierarchy to feminine traits and if that hierarchy is consistent across diverse audiences. For example, is ladylike behavior more central to the concept of ideal femininity than, say, a caregiving nature?

One limitation to my study was that I only considered my own perception of what was happening on screen. While I conducted a rhetorical program analysis, future research could integrate a qualitative audience analysis through interviews and surveys to determine how the target audience of *The Bachelor* interprets the representations of women in the show. If a future study found that other women viewed the messages in the show in the same way as I do, my findings would have more weight.

Conclusion

In the second episode of *The Bachelor* that ever aired, Alex ponders aloud, “which one of these women has the most potential for me... as a wife...” (Fleiss, 2002b). Though Alex did not wind up proposing to the woman he chose at the end of the series, his words set the tone for the entire reality series. To this day, America watches with bated breath as the bachelor decides which woman is worthy enough to spend the rest of his life with. The popularity of *The Bachelor* coupled with its audience members comprising almost entirely women aged 18-49 makes the messages it sends about femininity and women critical to study.

Throughout this thesis, I sought to discover what messages *The Bachelor* sends about ideal femininity and to determine if those messages were consistent between Season One and Season 20. Chapter One introduced the topic of my thesis. Chapter Two focused on previous scholarship on liberal feminism, reality television, and representation of women in media. Chapter Three explained my method of criticism and how I applied liberal feminist theory to this study. Chapter Four contained an in-depth analysis of Season One and Season 20 of *The Bachelor*. In my analysis, I found that both seasons of the show portrayed ideal women as chaste but eventually relenting to the bachelor’s sexual advances, demure, and stereotypically feminine. In opposition, the show framed villainous women as overtly sexual, over-confident, and garish. I also found that while Season One praised the women for their intelligence and impressive careers, Season 20 made jokes of the women’s careers and villainized the woman who claimed to enjoy intelligent conversation and academic activities such as reading. Ultimately, I found that the show consistently juxtaposed different representations of women against each other to present the ideal woman to viewers. Finally, in this chapter I discussed the implications of my findings and gave suggestions for future research.

My analysis exposed the harmful messages *The Bachelor* communicates about women. These messages matter for women, particularly the young women who watch the show and aspire to be like the women on it. Everyone wants to be wanted. It is simply human nature. *The Bachelor* provides a detailed roadmap for young women on how to get a man to want you. However, the behaviors and attributes of these representations are not always feasible for viewers. Whether a viewer is a young, married, business owner with a large bank account and a beautiful family like my first boss, Hannah, or a college student with limited resources and an overloaded schedule, women who watch *The Bachelor* are receiving messages about how to be the perfect woman that probably do not match her reality. Thus, these messages must be studied in order to shed additional light on the plight of the modern woman, whether she be watching *The Bachelor* or starring in it.

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