

# **Redefining Representation: Women In Reality Television**

Maya Blackstone

Senior Honors Thesis

Film and Media Studies Department

Spring 2017

**Advising Committee:**

**Julie Dobrow, Ph.D. (Principal Advisor)**

**Natalya Baldyga, Ph.D.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	3
Preface.....	5
Project Statement and Significance.....	8
Literature Review.....	12
Methodology.....	57
Content Analysis.....	62
Discussion and Conclusions.....	93
Limitations and Future Directions.....	105
Self-Reflective Statement.....	108
References.....	110
Appendix A..... <i>Interviews Questions</i>	115
Appendix B..... <i>Content Analysis</i>	Attached

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

First, I want to thank the entire Film and Media Studies department at Tufts University. The department has been instrumental in guiding my course of study at Tufts and ensuring I have received a well rounded education in media studies and film analysis. Through the FMS department, I've also been given the opportunity to take classes I'm interested in and further my academic interests through lectures, internships, and other resources. The Winternship program allowed me to see how reality television was created at Glass Entertainment Group, which became the foundation of my entire thesis. When I first entered Tufts there was no Film and Media Department, but since it was created my junior year the department has defined my academic trajectory.

I would especially like to thank my first reader, Julie Dobrow for her dedication throughout this process. From its initial idea to the final edits, this project would not have been possible without professor Dobrow guiding me every step of the way. The seminar class professor Dobrow led for senior honors theses was crucial to helping me develop my passion for this project and for teaching me how to write my thesis. I also took professor Dobrow's advanced seminar on Children and Mass Media. The course was the first I had taken since high school where we had to evaluate research articles and design and execute our own studies. While the class was challenging, working with Professor Dobrow helped me understand how to analyze research and conduct a content analysis, which was crucial for my thesis research. Without Professor Dobrow's encouragement, this thesis would not have been completed.

I would like to thank Professor Natalya Baldyga for her guidance and comments on this research. I worked closely with Professor Baldyga my junior year at Tufts in drama three and four. Her assignments helped me understand how to do complex research and encouraged me

that when you do not find the research you're looking for, keep trying. Without her advice on research and writing I would not be where I am today.

This project would not have been possible without the help of the Tisch Library. I worked closely with research librarian Chao Chen throughout my process. Ms. Chen helped me locate obscure sources and track down scholarly research available on reality television. The library's media communication journals, books, and online inventory were also crucial to this project. The other librarians helped me learn how to appropriately cite my sources and how to weave scholarly research into a cohesive literature review. The library itself provided a refuge where I spent countless hours completing my thesis.

I would like to thank my friends; especially my housemates who were extremely critical to helping me complete my thesis. I cannot thank them enough for watching reality television with me for hours and most importantly letting me write about their experience watching reality television. They each went above and beyond to discuss their experiences with me. I would especially like to thank my friend Stephanie Traver for completing my coding for an episode of *The Bachelor*, so I could check my results with hers.

I could most importantly not have done this project without my parents. My mom who taught me to love watching television, especially the social aspects and my dad who taught me to look at research with a critical eye and to sit in the same spot working for hours.

**PREFACE:**

In January of 2016 I was given the opportunity through the Tufts Film and Media department to spend a week at Nancy Glass Productions now Glass Entertainment Group. The company is a reality television production studio owned by Tufts alum Nancy Glass in Philadelphia. The company produces reality shows for Discovery, HGTV, and the Travel Channel, among others, including hit shows such as “Tanked,” “Uncommon Grounds,” and “Staten Island Cakes.” Before beginning at Glass Entertainment Group I had absolutely no knowledge about how reality television is made. I watched *The Amazing Race* with my mom for years and occasionally tuned into *The Real Housewives*, yet beyond a few programs I was largely unfamiliar with the genre. I was shocked when I sat in on my first producer meeting and realized that Nancy and her team were setting up the events to take place in each episode of a show called *Big Easy Motors*. The show is about flipping antique cars and Nancy and her teamed planned everything from where the characters would find the cars, who the cars belonged to and even set up fake cars for the characters to pretend to refurbish. I was shocked. I had no idea that shows promoted to viewers, as reality and that I believed to be true were actually false. I later asked Nancy about other shows I watched on reality television and she confirmed they are all false, especially the Long Island Medium. Could I be the only one who did not realize that reality television is not actually reality? That night I called one of my friends on the phone and she also had no idea. I wondered, if reality television fooled my friend and I, two college educated film and media studies majors, what about the rest of America?

A few weeks later in Sarah Sobieraj’s Media and Society Class, we read an article by Ji Hoon Park called “The Uncomfortable Encounter Between an Urban Black and a Rural White: The Ideological Implications of Racial Conflict on MTV’s *The Real World*.” The article,

examines how editing and situations set up by producers created increased drama and ideological conflict between people of different races on *The Real World*. The article also explored how participants of different races were forcibly stereotyped by situations the show created. After reading that article on how participants felt wrongly portrayed on the show and learning about how reality television is made, my project seemed to click into place. I knew I wanted to research both how women were portrayed on reality shows and how this relates to the production norms used to create the programs. I chose to focus on women, because women are represented often in reality television, yet their representation is negative and relies on stereotypes. Additionally, I've long since been fascinated by the media's portrayal of women, especially in television shows. I knew I wanted to complete a project looking at how women are stereotyped as easy entertainment.

There is a surprisingly vast amount of literature available on both the creation of reality television and how female stereotyping is capitalized on to create narratives in the media. Reality television is often defined as a genre of television programming that documents unscripted real-life situations (Bergstrom, 2005). What I define the genre as instead is programming that features largely unknown, non-paid individuals, typically non-professional actors, in situations where they are not following a direct script. The genre focuses on drama, personal conflict and entertainment. Every program in reality television is different –there are competition, cooking, narrative, shows focused on extreme survival, dating, families, and programs focused on the lifestyles of the rich and famous. What I focus on in my thesis specifically are narrative dramas, lifestyle programs and competition shows. However, there are some features of reality television that appear universal such as confessionals used often by reality programs for cast members to express their thoughts. While documentaries, television news, sports television, talk shows and

game shows share similar “realistic” elements to reality television they are not classified as such because the entertainment expectations are different.

My research focuses on interviews, literature, and a content analysis of *The Bachelor*, an American reality show, which first aired in March of 2002. The program follows a bachelor who is expected to select a wife from typically twenty-five female romantic interests, by the end of the show. As the show progresses, the bachelor eliminates candidates and the season’s drama involves a struggle over who will be eliminated. Participants travel to romantic and exotic locations for adventures and have group dates, one on ones and the dreaded two on one date, in which one woman is eliminated. The show is hosted by Chris Harrison, who acts as an on-screen guide to the drama throughout the program. I originally decided to focus on *The Bachelor*, because the past participants were easily accessible for interviews. Additionally, I chose to complete a content analysis on *The Bachelor*, because of its overtly sexist concept. The program features many women competing against each other for a man. The show’s drama relies on the women to be mean and rude to each other and to put the man of the show above all else. Since *The Bachelor* is a contest, it relies on a man to determine the worth of many women, as he ultimately narrows down his options to the perfect choice. The show was prime for analysis, because none of the women were famous before competing on the show, but most experience relative amounts of fame after the program airs. For my content analysis I looked at season twenty of *The Bachelor*, at the time of my project the most recent season of the show. Season twenty follows Ben Higgins from Warsaw Indiana as he eventually chooses Lauren B a flight attendant from Portland Oregon.

## PROJECT STATEMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE:

One only needs to scan the 2017 television lineup to know that reality television dominates the televisual landscape. The variety of reality television programming available is extensive and one could watch multiple reality television shows every night. The dominant reality programs depict women as vapid housewives, bad mothers, shopaholics, and party girls. The shows center on women competing for men's affections or failing in their roles as wives and mothers. In their very premise these programs fit women to stereotypes found in American culture. Even the shows that give women the opportunity to break away from stereotypes, such as game shows and competition programs, rely heavily on gendered stereotypes for entertainment value. In theory every reality program offers women the opportunity to break from stereotypes present in the media and to create their own narratives. Reality television allows women to create their own characters and illustrate their sense of self without the formal structure of scripted material. Instead, analysis on programs and interviews with contestants demonstrates that the way women are ultimately portrayed features biased and dramatic stereotypes. The effects of which might damage the women portrayed in the shows as well as female viewers across America. Female contestants and viewers have reported internalizing stereotypes on television; creating insecurity in how they view themselves and making them worry about how others may view them personally and in a larger societal context.<sup>1</sup>

Stereotyping, actor coaching and dramatic editing in reality television is used as a way to emphasize drama and to keep viewers tuned in. Media literacy efforts created for female

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Samantha Passmore, contestant on Season Twenty of *The Bachelor*. Passmore is lawyer from Florida and discussed her experience feeling insecure about her portrayal and early dismissal from the show. In an interview Passmore said, "I felt insecure and un-liked by Ben, because I was eliminated and I worried that everyone else in America saw that as well," (Passmore, 2017).

participants and viewers of reality television shows are important to negate the potentially harmful effects of viewing.

The popularity of reality television is no surprise, considering the cost effective nature of producing reality television and its ability to provide “something for everyone.” Many reality television shows benefit from not having to pay celebrities, writers or big name producers. They do not require sets or costumes, and the cost of editing is cheaper than scripted television (Egbert, 2012, p. 415-419). Furthermore, reality television’s ability to repeat the same programs over and over again is another reason why producers favor it (Annette, 2005). A show can use the same formula for years, by replacing new characters season after season. Women’s roles in reality television are not surprising when one looks at how women are viewed by American society. Reality television profits from the female stereotypes already portrayed in American culture.

Whether female representation in reality television is created either artificially or naturally on screen the depictions of women on these shows is problematic. The former creators of reality television and past participants have linked editing and producer involvement to the creation of reality television (*The TVaddict*, 2010). Reality television producers pick the most dramatic footage, feed interview questions, and directly coach the behavior of participants on these programs. Producers and creators of reality television have also come forward and admitted that stories billed as “reality” are designed months before filming as part of a team effort to create the show.<sup>2</sup> Editors admit to picking and choosing the most dramatic footage and illustrating events not as they actually happened and often at the expense of those being

---

<sup>2</sup> Interview with current producer of *The Bachelor* Caitlin Stapleton. Stapleton joined the show in 2013 and admitted to creating entertainment through influence over contestants and activities created for the show.

represented.<sup>3</sup> The result is that while these shows are billed as unscripted “reality,” they are anything but. Many individuals viewing these shows may take these stereotypes on screen as the truth (Couldry, 2009, p. 86).

My research dispels common misconceptions that reality television is created entirely truthfully. Demonstrating both through literature and interviews that reality television shows are not made in the way the general audience thinks they are (Ibid, p. 88). I illustrate why viewers should not simply watch reality television blindly. Instead they should consider how the portrayal of women is created and exaggerated, often without the consent of the women being filmed. My study recognizes stereotypes and anecdotally observes the effect of stereotypes on past participants I interviewed. I focused my own analysis on season twenty of the hit program *The Bachelor* and explored female stereotypes throughout the season. In doing so, I hypothesized how editing and producer involvement may have contributed to the stereotypes seen in the show. Through studying the history of reality television I hope to suggest how little the modern reality television subset has done to improve positive representation for women. The history of reality television demonstrates that despite employing a relatively modern formula, many reality programs have done little to dispel stereotypes. When I did a content analysis of *The Bachelor*, I used the perspective I gained from interviews and personal experiences to understand the show and its stereotypes more fully. I was able to compare the scholarly literature on how production is done with my past experiences and my analysis of the show.

It goes without saying that this is a passion project, one that I could not have completed without an interest and preliminary knowledge on the creation of reality television. Little scholarly research has been done on the creation of reality television or the stereotypes present.

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Albert Wang, production assistant at Glass Entertainment Group. Wang discussed producer practices and the creation of reality television drama through editing.

This, I believe, is due to its recent rise in popularity, and the fact that little information is provided on how reality television is made. In my single week at Glass Entertainment Group my entire perspective shifted and I gained firsthand knowledge on the planning, coaching and editing that goes into making a reality show. Most scholars of reality television do not get to have the experience of seeing how production is executed. I was fortunate to interview past participants of reality programs about their experiences on the shows and reviewed the programs afterward.

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

### I. The History of Reality Television

While the first regularly scheduled television shows aired in the mid 1940s, reality television's history begins much later. The first reality television show broadcast was a twelve-hour documentary called *An American Family*, which aired in the early 1970s. Creator and producer Craig Gilbert came up with the idea to follow the Loud family of Southern California, for seven months of their lives. The show illustrated events such as married wife Pat asking her husband Bill to separate and the family's difficulty with their son Lance's lifestyle as a gay man (Grindstaff, 2012, p. 29). According to PBS, the show resonated with many, because in a time of great unrest during the Vietnam War, the show illustrated real people dealing with personal issues. The show, "attacked bourgeois institutions like marriage, capitalism, and the American dream" (Taddeo and Dvorak, 2009, p. 84). The show's positive reception set a precedent for other reality television shows to follow and introduced the genre to the American television consumer.

In 1998, media studies theorist Dominic Lasorsa delineated six main genres of reality television. 1) Documentaries 2) Entertainment news and review shows 3) News and public affairs shows 4) Police shows 5) Tabloid news shows and 6) Talk shows (Lasorsa, 1998, p. 168). However, since 1998 the reality television market and programming varieties have expanded significantly to include shows involving celebrities, competition, family, drama, dating, cooking, stories of the unknown, and survival, among others. The expansion of reality television genres and the amount of different programming estimated at over one thousand programs in 2017 illustrates the pervasiveness and popularity of reality television in 2017 and the expansion of the industry since the dawn of the twenty-first century (Couldry, 2009, p. 89).

Crucial to the creation of popular reality programs known today was the game show. While most households did not begin buying television sets until after World War II, the first game show to air commercially was *Truth or Consequences* in 1941 (Du Vernay, 2013, p. 54). Over the course of the 1950s, as television became more pervasive in culture, so did game shows. This included high stakes game shows. These shows usually provided a challenge and participants had to rely on skill or prepared knowledge. Even when viewers found out in the early 1950s that many of these shows were rigged or fabricated, ratings dropped only marginally (Egbert, 2012, p. 413). Additionally, while most game shows changed little in over seventy-five years, certain game shows expanded to be less about skill and more about luck, such as the popular show *Deal or No Deal*. Some game shows have remained timeless classics and need no adaptation, such as *Wheel of Fortune* and *Who Wants to Be A Millionaire*. Game show and reality drama hybrids have also become extremely popular (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004, p. 369). These contests include favorites such as *The Amazing Race*, and *Survivor*.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the show there is a prize to be won, yet the drama that unfolds throughout these shows is less about the ultimate prize and more to do with the interpersonal relationships of the contestants (Palmer, 2013, p. 132). The game show is crucial to reality television's history, because it introduced the concept of having real people appear on television and gave them the opportunity to win money and change their lives.

Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray single handedly changed the history of reality television when they created *The Real World* in 1992.<sup>5</sup> The producers were originally tasked with creating a new scripted soap opera style program for MTV. When that proved too

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Amazing Race* premiered in 2001, it follows pairs as they race around the world by navigating clues and compete in challenges and feats of mental and physical endurance. *Survivor* premiered in 2000 and features a group of strangers in an isolated location who must provide food, water, and shelter for one another until they are eliminated. Both shows air on CBS.

<sup>5</sup> *The Real World* is a series on MTV that pairs 7-8 adults in a new city who are filmed constantly.

expensive, they had the idea for a non-scripted soap opera, inspired by *The Loud Family* (New York Times, 2004). The show, which has been running continuously since 1992 places a group of strangers together to live in a house for several months while cameras record their relationships. The show gained both heavy criticism and praise for highlighting issues important to young people at the time such as sexuality, prejudices, politics, religion, romance, illness, and other personal issues. The show was the first reality program to film the interpersonal relationships and drama of real people in the same style as fictional programs like *Beverly Hills 90210*. Additionally, the show incorporated a confessional; group trips, and activities, ideas used often in current reality programs (Keveney, 2007).

In recent years reality television has expanded to include shows focused on extreme survival, dating, cooking, families, and programs focused on the lifestyles of the rich and famous. The popularity of *American Idol* and *Survivor* in the late 1990s and early 2000s helped expand the reality programs networks were willing to offer. Due to the success of these competition shows, Fox, CBS, and other popular networks expanded their program offerings to include other versions of contests (Jenkins, 2009, p. 352). There is now a whole category of shows just about survival, the most well known being *Naked and Afraid* and *Man Vs. Wild*. In 2007 there was even a survival show featuring just children called *Kid Nation* (Ibid, p. 355). As an expansion on competition programs, *The Bachelor* franchise paved the way for a whole series of dating programs that are now considered popular entertainment: *Bachelor*, *Bachelorette*, *Bachelor Pad*, *Bachelor in Paradise*, and *Bachelor After Paradise*. Many individuals and couples who appeared on those shows have gone on to have their own franchise shows, such as twins Haley and Emily Ferguson from season twenty of *The Bachelor* (Hyun, 2007). Countless other dating programs are available, such as *Married at First Sight*, *Dating Naked*, *The*

*Millionaire Matchmaker* and more.<sup>6</sup> Each of these programs is a variation on the same style of competition, but with a unique twist to keep viewers interested.

Reality television cooking shows have become a multi-million dollar industry. Popular cooking shows include *Top Chef*, *Iron Chef*, and *Chopped*. There are local cooking shows, restaurant review shows, children's cooking shows and more. There's even a show only about food trucks called *Food Truck Face Off*. Their popularity demonstrates that people will watch the same types of shows repeatedly. Home design shows are also popular reality programs that reuse the same formula. There are over thirty-five shows about flipping houses televised in 2017 (Hyun, 2007, p. 89).

In the mid 2000s reality television was changed forever when TLC once dubbed "The Learning Channel" popularized observational reality programs. TLC produces shows observing and illustrating the lives of extraordinary individuals. Popular shows include *19 Kids and Counting*, which depicts a family with nineteen kids, *John and Kate Plus Eight* about a family with sextuplets, *Breaking Amish* about Amish young people, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, about beauty pageants. The network also does series on strange addictions, overweight people, conjoined twins, and dwarfs. Often thought of as exploitive, these programs capitalize on people who are different. The shows appeal to viewers through mocking these individuals for being different (Hahm, 2012, p. 93-98).

Lifestyle shows following the lives of the rich and famous were first introduced with the reality program *The Simple Life*. The show first aired in 2003 at the start of the reality television boom and depicted the lives of two wealthy socialites Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie. The concept of the show was to put Paris and Nicole in situations where they would have to perform

---

<sup>6</sup> The three shows listed above are different versions of dating programs. *Married at First Sight* is a series of couples that meet and get married in the first episode, *Dating Naked* is a group atmosphere where no one wears clothes and *Millionaire Matchmaker* features wealthy and demanding men who seek love.

menial labor tasks of “simple people” and the audience would watch them fail miserably each season (Moscowitz, 2013, p. 39). The show was created in the early days of reality television and began as an attempt to create entertainment comedy without relying on the sitcom. Now reality television has expanded further with shows depicting the rich and famous in their natural lifestyles. These shows follow the lives of wealthy individuals as they go about daily activities. *The Real Housewives* franchise began in 2006 with the *Real Housewives of Orange County* and is now a staple of the genre. The franchise features wealthy women throwing parties, having luncheons, shopping, fighting with one another, and rarely spending time with their families. Women on the shows are meant to look as if they are neglecting their familial and domestic duties, filling their days instead with useless activities (Chocano, 2011). No study on women in reality television would be complete without mentioning *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, which premiered in 2007. The program depicts the Kardashian family jetting off to private islands, eating expensive meals, and shopping any time they can. It is often labeled as an anti-feminist program, because the women are portrayed as sex symbols that care only for material possessions (Chocano, 2011). This show inspired a larger franchise based off individual members of the Kardashian family. It also ushered in a new era of creating reality programs around minor celebrities.

## **II. Production Norms**

Reality television has a successful history in part, because of its cost-effective nature. Reality television for the most part does not pay for celebrity talent and the cinematography is cheaper than scripted television (Randall, 2005, p. 288). Most reality television production companies do not spend much money on sets, costumes, lights, or props. The main cost is

editing, which is sourced at a cheaper rate than scripted television (Randall, 2005, p. 291).

Reality production companies are smaller than scripted studios and the companies often work on multiple episodes of a show at once and often many shows at the same time, (Wang, personal interview 2017). However, because of intrinsic limitations, conditions for reality television are built on more familiar cultural scripts as well as on highly structured situations, (Grindstaff, 2012, p. 37). Moreover, to be successful despite cheap production values, reality television models rely on familiar stereotypes and this especially includes those of women.

The creation of a reality show begins with development. In many production companies the head of the company meets with a team to develop a concept and the company creates a promo called a sizzle reel for the pilot. Once the network chooses a program, the company meets to plan out the story behind each episode of the program (Wang). This includes creating a cast of “characters” and deciding the action that occurs in each episode. The storyline for each episode is detailed and producers on set work to create dramatic tension along the storyline. After each episode is filmed, a team edits the hours of footage into an episode. The amount of pre-mediated storyline differs depending on the reality show (ibid). However, while certain reality programs feature a very detailed storyline that producers follow on other programs dramatic tension is created on set by producers. For example, on *The Bachelor*, activities are set up for the women to participate in and producers choose certain women for interactions and participation (Stapleton). In contrast, in a reality program such as *House Hunters*, where the houses, what they look like, and the reactions of the participants are pre-mediated (Wang). After every reality program is complete, the producers work with editors to create a dramatic or engaging storyline from the available footage.

Ragan Fox a former contestant on *Big Brother* and a professor on gay studies at the University of California Long Beach, signed up for the reality television competition in 2010 as a way to study gay men on television through a firsthand perspective. In his research Fox shares his traumatic experience on *Big Brother* and his attempts to avoid being “a gay crybaby” a stereotype he had previously seen on the show. *Big Brother* contestants spend three months isolated from the outside world in a CBS soundstage designed to look like a home. Fifty-two cameras and ninety-five microphones record thirteen strangers as they battle for food, hot showers, comfortable sleeping arrangements, and weekly survival (Fox, 2103, p. 194). Unlike other reality programs, producers and editors of *Big Brother* must work in real time, before knowing what drama will unfold and this changes the way they construct narratives for viewers. Fox argues that *Big Brother* is like a theatrical play. “Big Brother is Shakespearian. The show takes place on a stage, albeit a soundstage; includes heroes and villains; features dramatic themes, like war, love, and loss; and may incite catharsis in its millions of viewers...Everyday life performance is at a heightened theatrical state on the set of Big Brother... Contestants on the Big Brother set perform characters. Like traditional TV actors, houseguests’ performances” (Fox, 2013, p.195). At the same time, contestants are not actors; they play themselves. Fox discusses the challenges he faced especially as a gay man on reality television, in comparison to his straight roommates on the show. When representation on reality television is written about the accounts are created from viewers perspectives, as I did in my own research. Rarely do scholars ever delve into the production process of creating a reality program.<sup>7</sup> *Big Brother* is created with significantly less producer and editor involvement and can be watched completely unmediated.

---

<sup>7</sup> While I found a variety of scholarly research analyzing representation in reality television, my experience has led me to believe that little research has been done from the scholarly standpoint on the creation of reality television. Additionally, there is not significant literature available from the point of view of reality television contestants.

While Fox did not go into extensive detail on how *Big Brother* was made, he did describe in raw form how participating in the show made him feel (Fox, 2013). He describes in detail how the show impacted him emotionally, giving an example of losing a challenge and “sobbing like never before,” (Fox, 2013, p. 206).

In season eleven of *The Bachelor* when Brad Womack refused to choose a mate he broke the romantic contract and ended the fantasy of the reality show. As sociologist Dana Cloud explained, “in doing so, Womack exposed the emptiness of the mythic romantic script, prompting both invested outrage and ironic detachment among viewers,” (Cloud, 2010, p. 432). The fantasy of *The Bachelor* lies in the believability that contestants can find true love under the circumstances (Cloud, 2010, p. 433). As Cloud explains the irony is that viewers can regard the program as “real” and “not-real” and therefore worth viewing and worthless at the same time. It does not matter to most viewers that few relationships from the show last, because viewers ignore the realism in order to enjoy the fantasy (Cloud, p. 417). Additionally, viewers get caught in thinking of the contestants as real people (Kilbourn, 2003, p. 14). When Brad did not choose a winner, large numbers of viewers expressed real grief and anger at Brad’s failure to choose a mate. The New York Daily News observed, “Viewers felt like they were left at the altar” (Kinon, New York Daily News, 2007). *The Bachelor* employs special episodes such as *After the Final Rose* and *Women Tell All* to further create the fantasy that the contestants are more their real selves than people acting on screen. This is because these episodes give viewers the opportunity to see the women behave outside of the construction of the competition (Cloud 2010). With any reality television program there is the expectation from viewers that events on screen are more real than scripted programs. Eventually either through reading tabloid articles, watching interviews or reading contestant books, some viewers find that reality television is

fictitious. The fact of the matter is that this deters few viewers and they still find believability in the programs (Biressi, 2003, p. 33).

Since the advent of reality television, critics have viewed these practices as voyeuristic and invasive, because the subjects are real people instead of actors. This is not a critique limited to reality television, in fact the film genre as a whole was originally seen as voyeuristic. Critics of reality television argue that watching images of real individual's personal lives is akin to spying on their intimate behaviors. This is even more problematic in reality television than scripted programming, because the people being watched on television are behaving as their real selves and not as scripted characters. Modern scholars critique that viewers ignore the producers behind the camera, creating an illusion of observing an unknowing subject (Du Vernay, 2013, p. 48).

Most importantly the camera's presence and the act of being watched inherently changes how participants on reality shows act. While reality television is "billed" as reality, the effect of the camera in many ways influences the behavior of female participants. Participants behave differently because cameras are present on set (Stapleton). The problem is that audiences view the content as reality without registering the effect of the camera.<sup>8</sup> A contestant may not show their true anger if they know that all of America is watching, or in contrast some contestants will behave with more anger to gain attention. Take for example an anecdote from Emily, one of the twins on season twenty of *The Bachelor*. In an interview after being kicked off the show, Emily discussed how there were many instances she wanted to confront her enemy – Olivia - in front of the cameras, but could not because she knew her parents would be watching (Stapleton). The

---

<sup>8</sup> Studies on viewership (see Andrejevik) have determined that most viewers of reality television are unaware of the hidden practices of creating reality programs. This is supported by anecdotal trends I saw in my friends and family as well as reports from past participants I interviewed. While the practices of false creation in reality television are well known by the industry as a whole, they go largely unobserved by viewers.

question of how the presence of the camera changes the way reality television is made is best personified in a moment in the show *Unreal*. In this instance the producer, Rachel, tells one of the contestants, Anna Martin, that another contestant has been talking badly about her. Rachel urges Anna into a rage and she goes to confront the other contestant, before noticing the cameras and backing down. While *Unreal* is a dramatized account of the making of reality television, this moment demonstrates the duality in the creation of reality and how the cameras inherent presence impacts the creation of these shows (Unreal, 2015).

### III. Female Stereotypes in Reality Programs

Negative female gender stereotypes have been present since reality television began and before that in scripted television as well (Cavendar, 1999 p. 648). These stereotypes are not limited to shows focused on highlighting women's experiences. Gender studies theorist Gray Cavander looks into *America's Most Wanted*<sup>9</sup> to demonstrate the way women victims are portrayed and the lack of women in positions of assailant. The program features true stories of crime in the United States and criminals on the loose. While early episodes were said to empower women to speak about victimization, research into specific episodes from 1988-1989 and 1995-1996 concluded that men control the master narrative and women illustrate only varying stereotypes of the victim (Cavender, p. 652). Furthermore, the stories chosen and the crimes women fell victim to were not reflective of actual crime statistics. This also relates to data on victims from the 1990s, which shows that men and women were equally likely to be victims. The program is over-dramatized to illustrate women as victims of crime. This example illustrates

---

<sup>9</sup> *America's Most Wanted* is a reality program, which aired from 1998-2012. The program took real stories, but featured actors portraying crimes along with on-camera interviews. There was a toll-free hotline number where viewers could give information and real criminals have been captured due to the show's efforts. Most consider this a reality program, because of its depiction of true crime stories.

how reality television is fabricated to produce interesting narratives, at the expense of real representation of women.

An examination of the specific ways women are illustrated falsely in reality television is important. Du Verney argues that reality television portrays women either as good girls, sluts, or gold diggers. In more recent years, as reality television has grown in popularity and continued cheap modes of production, the narratives have relied increasingly on female stereotypes (Du Verney, p. 8). Many of the most popular reality programs today involve stories of women competing for love; jobs or home life and the way these women are portrayed depend on stereotypes such as “good girls, sluts or gold diggers,” (Palmer, 2013, p. 139). A look into shows such as *Toddlers and Tiaras* and *Jon and Kate Plus 8*<sup>10</sup> demonstrate that even shows featuring young children rely on harmful stereotypes about women and young girls. In *Toddlers and Tiaras* young girls dance in a sexualized manner and are made to look like older women. In *John and Kate Plus 8* the young girls often throw temper tantrums about material possessions. Children have little choice in whether or not to participate in reality television and the way they are represented is completely controlled by the producers and their parents (Palmer, 2013, p. 126).

Young women are particularly susceptible to stereotypes. In an interview with cast members of *Laguna Beach*<sup>11</sup> characters admitted that the show’s producers orchestrated not only the shoots, but that the lives of the teenagers were drastically manipulated in order to fabricate a

---

<sup>10</sup> *Toddlers and Tiaras* aired from 2008-2013 and then re-aired in 2016 on TLC. The show follows the personal lives of families and contestants in child beauty pageants, primarily in the south. The show has also led to various spin-off programs, based on specific contestants. *Jon and Kate Plus 8* first aired on TLC in 2007 and followed the lives of Jon and Kate Gosselin from Hershey Pennsylvania as they parent sextuplets and two older twin girls. The show was originally picked up after fans reacted favorably to a one-hour special on the family.

<sup>11</sup> *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* aired from 2004-2006. The show focused on the personal lives of students attending Laguna Beach High School. The show was criticized for being too narrative and scripted.

compelling and dramatic narrative (Shmueli, 2006, p. 306). Katherine Neifeld, a contestant on the show, said in an interview, “I almost felt like it was unfair for [MTV] to come into our lives at such a young age and sort of mess with things ... I felt like they should have been a little bit more careful with us” (Shmueli, 2006, p. 316). Young women, especially in shows such as *Laguna Beach*, are set up to look as if they are normal people chosen at random from society. According to sociologist, Benjamin Shmueli this creates expectations from viewers that they are meant to behave in the same way they see these young women behave on television and that the glamorous lifestyles seen on television are possible for everyone (Shmueli, 2006, p. 321). Further, that the glamorous lives presented on the show are achievable for everyday people. In addition, young girls and women are often over-sexualized on reality television such as the girls in *Toddlers and Tiaras* and *Dance Moms* on TLC.<sup>12</sup> The young girls featured on the show are beauty pageant contestants who are illustrated wearing extensive amounts of makeup, wigs, and sexualized clothing. The result is the image of little girls on television who look and dance like hyper-sexualized older women (Shmueli, 2006, p. 322).

The most in-depth look at female stereotypes in reality television comes from sociologist Laura Grindstaff’s study on the show *Sorority Life*. In 2006 Grindstaff spent weeks following a sorority as they were filmed for the MTV show *Sorority Life*. The show follows a sorority at the university of California and a group of women as they pledge; it mixes observational footage of the women with private interviews. While many girls on the show feared stereotypes they opted to participate in the show for the opportunity to prove female stereotypes in reality television wrong. They instead wanted to highlight the important community service work the sorority did. The sorority was also Jewish and many girls feared perpetuating stereotypes of wealthy

---

<sup>12</sup> *Dance Moms* first premiered in 2011 on Lifetime and follows the early training and careers of children in dance and show business under instructor Abby Lee Miller.

American Jews and wanted to prove these stereotypes wrong, as well (Grindstaff, 2012, p. 28). Instead, MTV “tricked” the girls and focused on only six pledges and more specifically the pledging process. Grindstaff interviewed the women on their experience on the show, the role of the producers and the effects of watching an edited version of their reality. The girls were in a difficult situation, Grindstaff explained because it changed who opted to pledge and if they rejected a pledge it was portrayed negatively on the show (Grindstaff, p. 30). Grindstaff also frequently interviewed a Mexican American woman named Jessica who wanted to go on the show so that Latinas could have increased visibility on national television. However, audiences found her “careful and subdued” nature on the show to be boring and she was often not given limited screen time. The reason behind Jessica’s behavior was that she did not want to draw attention to herself and risk negatively portraying other Latina women. As Grindstaff, explains, “at the risk of furthering stereotypes Jessica took a step back and in doing so she was criticized as being ‘boring’” (Grindstaff, 2012, p. 28). Dominic Lasorsa claims through his analysis on television violence that reality television has more of an effect on culture, because it is billed as reality (Lasorsa, 1998, p. 171). Furthermore, Grindstaff argues from interviews and analysis with participants and viewers of *Sorority Life* that female stereotypes present in reality television are even more detrimental than the same stereotypes in popular culture. This is because audiences view them as real stereotypes exemplified and not fabricated depictions on television (Grindstaff, 2012, p. 28).

#### **IV. Understanding Race and Gender in Reality Television**

More has been written about racial misrepresentation in reality television than any other topic about this genre. In addition, many facets of the media manipulation of African-American

women can be speculated to extend to an understanding of the ways women in media are negatively depicted. African-Americans' rather late entry into the reality television game was a reflection on the networks' desire to expand in order to increase profits (Jefferson-James, 2015, p. 38). According to Robin Boylorn the most notable stereotypes for African-American women include "the angry black women," "the sassy black woman" and "the ghetto black woman," (Boylorn, 2008, p. 414). Sociologist Sheena Harris, "the dominant culture uses various superstructures, including the environment and the economy, narratives and most importantly media outlets, to maintain its cultural preeminence in a society," (Harris, 2015, p. 19). The result is that stereotypes of African Americans are repeated in reality television.

Stereotypes are furthered through repetition in the media over time as well as carefully placed stereotypes (Couldry, 2009, pp. 84-85). In the *Surreal Life* with African American rapper Flavor Flav<sup>13</sup> viewers responded positively to his buffoonish antics and he received his own spin-off, *Strange Love*,<sup>14</sup> as a result. However, the show portrayed Flavor Flav in a terrible light, as an idiot, a philanderer, and an aggressive person (Ibid, p. 86). As Rachel Dubrofsky noted, the stereotypes he perpetuated extended to African American men as a whole (Dubrofsky, 2008, p. 379). In the 2012 season 5 premiere of the *Real Housewives of Atlanta (RHOA)*, reality television star Phaedra Parks declared, "In our culture behinds have always been desired" when referring to black women throughout American history (Jefferson-James, 2015, p. 37). Harris discusses Parks and the negative way she portrays African American women as obsessing over their image. Harris argues that the "image of black women within reality television is a continuation of exploitation in historical identification, and it complicates the narrative of black

---

<sup>13</sup> *The Surreal Life* is a program on VH1 that takes past their prime celebrities and documents them all living together.

<sup>14</sup> *Strange Love* is a reality program that features the romance Brigitte Nielsen and Flavor Flav. The couple constantly fought and eventually broke up by the end of the show.

womanhood especially in a self-professed “post-racial” society” (Harris, 2015, p. 21). Female viewers and contestants in reality television already have to confront existing stereotypes on women in the media, but for African American women intersectionality means tackling even more existing stereotypes, associated with their race. The result is that stereotypes of African American women hinder participant progress in creating their own narratives separate from race or gender (Harris, 2015).<sup>15</sup>

In Ji Hoon Park’s essay titled “The Uncomfortable Encounter Between an Urban Black and a Rural White: The Ideological Implications of Racial Conflict on MTV’s *The Real World*,” he examines racial encounters on reality television through looking at viewership and behind the scenes information. From its very first season onward, *The Real World* highlighted racial tensions by putting contestants of different backgrounds together to cause drama. In many seasons this meant pairing a racially sensitive black person from an urban area with a bigoted white person usually from a small town or rural area in the south (Park, 2009, p. 158). The decision to depict racial conflict on reality television has progressive potential, especially because the individuals on screen are able to make their own decisions not predetermined by racial stereotyping. Depicting racial issues on television also opens dialogue and makes some viewers aware of existing problems in society. (ibid, 168). Yet progress is limited, because a show like *The Real World* demonstrates that conflict can be solved through interpersonal reconciliation rather than challenging racism as a system.

For instance, on the ninth season of *The Real World*, Melissa, a half black and half Filipino woman from Florida, was offended by Julie, a white Mormon from Wisconsin, who

---

<sup>15</sup> “Intersectionality” is a term coined by American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to describe overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

stated that it was the first time for her to interact with “colored” people, and that she was raised to cross the street when she saw a black person (Park, 2009, p. 159). Park argues that in contemporary America, people feel hesitant to openly share their racial perspectives with people outside of their race and that doing so forcibly and on television is a step toward progress (Park, p. 160). The situation also opens up discourse about what racial conflicts and stereotypes exist and create a place for discussion. Reality television also portrays ordinary people’s racial intolerance and bias while capitalizing on racial stereotypes (Park, p. 161). The television show *Black.- White.* is a reality series on the FX Networks in which a white family and a black family switch their races through cutting edge special effects makeup. In this case, the reality genre brought racial difference and prejudice to the forefront of the audience’s attention, and because the show is “real” it gave them a safety net to deal with controversial subjects without reservation (Gilbert, 2006).

This is not to suggest that in challenging racial stereotypes, reality television does not also capitalize on dramatic traits associated with race such as the angry black woman. Since conflict and drama are important components of many reality shows, casting people with opposite personalities or backgrounds has been a common practice for reality shows (Squires, 2014, p. 267). For example, producers on *The Real World* made the decision to cast rural whites and urban blacks frequently because the combination proved an effective way to create drama. As Park argues, people of color on reality TV are also given the opportunity to speak for themselves and possibly disrupt the audiences’ preconceived notions of race, instead of acting in scripted stereotyped roles (Park, 2009, p. 163).

In theory reality television gives women the opportunity to create their own narrative, and for African American women this could mean creating a representation that does not follow

stereotypes. However, reality television has proven to be dictated by producers and editors rather than individual participants (Stapleton, Wang). Harris explains that black women have been exploited and recurrently placed at the bottom of the social totem pole in American society (Harris, 2015). If reality television offered a full range of black female representation, “real” representations of black life would stand in sharp contrast to the already existing stereotypes of black women in the media. This year for the first time *The Bachelorette* will be an African American woman, Rachel Lindsay (Chicago Tribune, 2017). During her appearance on *The Bachelor*, Lindsay was poised, well spoken, smart, nice, and she rarely engaged in drama. The result was that she was not often shown in episodes and came as a surprise as a frontrunner, right before being cut from the show. Lindsay’s position demonstrates that ABC is making an effort to illustrate more African American women on television. However, in order to be well liked, Lindsay had to step back from the action and as a result was rarely on screen. In contrast, viewers labeled Marshana Ritchie, an African American contestant from the 12<sup>th</sup> season of *The Bachelor*, as “the crazy black woman,” (According to Ritchie). Ritchie said she “had no chance of ever being chosen, but they kept me around, because I made a huge fuss out of everything and I always looked like I was having a good time. Definitely didn’t help the cause of black women though and I sort of regret it... I also definitely knew they were only keeping me around cause I was supposed to be the crazy black one” Ritchie said in a phone interview in February 2017. Ritchie also received prejudice from producers. In a different interview she said, “(From) the girls, I received so much prejudice... (The women) were going around the room asking, ‘whose parents are still together? Do you have siblings?’ And they got to me, and one of the girls was like, ‘Do you know who your dad is?’ I was aghast” (Ritchie). Women’s responsibility to represent themselves appropriately yet at the same time stand out in reality television is

demanding, but for women who are African American the responsibility to represent themselves accurately is amplified.

Robyn Dixon, an African American woman featured on *The Real Housewives of Potomac*, described the experience of being a black woman on reality television, in an interview in January. Dixon said, “Being black is very important to me personally. Generally, I’m not happy with the representation of African American women on reality television or television in general. They are more focused on fighting and putting each other down. Going on the show, I wanted people to see women of color in a different light. But representing all black women is a hard torch to carry,” (Dixon). Women of color on reality television are stereotyped in the same way other female contestants are, yet they are tasked with the added challenge of also defying negative stereotypes of women of color in the media.

#### **V. Class Inequalities and Social Mobility for Women in Reality Television**

Participants of *The Bachelor* have noted spending upwards of thousands of dollars on clothes. The ability to go on *The Bachelor* caters to women from upper class backgrounds who have the ability to leave their jobs temporarily and make no income and those who are not relied upon as caretakers or wage earners (Moscowitz, 2013, p. 8). Women from lower class backgrounds appear less frequently on *The Bachelor*, because not only can they not afford the time commitment, but they also cannot afford to compete with the same clothes, makeup and products that other women use to win (ibid). The result is that many individuals in Bachelor Nation are wealthy and privileged usually due to their family’s income and not their own.<sup>16</sup> For example, when Jojo Fletcher went on season twenty of *The Bachelor* she was twenty-three and

---

<sup>16</sup> In season twenty of *The Bachelor* a report by Forbes showed that 60% of Bachelor contestants were worth of \$300,000 a shocking statistic as many of their careers are not likely to earn them that capital before age twenty-five. Jobs include waitress, chicken enthusiast, bartender, and aesthetician.

already worth four million dollars (Pomarico, Nicole). Then there are also women who go on *The Bachelor* as an investment. If a woman wins the show or is a strong contestant they can turn their success into profit, through promotional deals on social media, appearances, books, clothing lines, and modeling contracts. Amanda Stanton went on *The Bachelor* as an investment after her divorce left her in need of more financial autonomy (Lear, Samantha).

A great deal of the appeal for families to appear on TLC shows is the remuneration they get from the network. Jon and Kate Gosselin were nearing bankruptcy after their sextuplets were born and TLC gave them money for their show and made them famous enough that they could have book deals and paid appearances (Finn, 2016). In the course of the show they moved from a modest suburban home to a huge mansion compound with its own swimming pool, horse farm and plenty of acreage (ibid). TLC has also paid for the family's personal expenses and even for their vacations the last ten years and fans donate everything from gifts and gadgets to food.

Social scientist Leigh Moscovitz's research examines the ways in which normative conceptions of class and gender produce an archetypal, trans-historical villain, called "the rich bitch." He specifically examines how Bravo's *The Real Housewives of New York City* creates rich women as objects of upper class wealth. According to Moscovitz, "the show has an audience who enjoy judging and admiring the extravagance of female scapegoats harshly in tough economic times... The lure of the show comes with criticizing the upper class lifestyle and the participants' status-driven and extravagant existence" (Moscovitz, p.13). Moscovitz argues that *The Real Housewives of New York City* uses irony to produce a drama about rich women too crass to be classy, too superficial to be nurturing, and too self-obsessed to be caring, (Moscovitz, p. 14). In these instances, any judgment viewers make about the characters' excessive purchases or materialistic values draws upon the audience's sense of class-consciousness and their own

experience with materialistic wealth (ibid). Between the characters' summer homes in the Hamptons, side projects for fun such as cupcake shops and recording studios, banter about the size of strangers' private planes, extravagant parties and most importantly the staff that works for them, their lives seem outrageous and at the same time futile. As the *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine reported, "the poster girls for conspicuous consumption are scoring record ratings while Americans are losing their jobs in record numbers" (Guthrie 2009, p. 4). However, what makes these shows enjoyable to watch for viewers is the promise of glimpsing a peek at the lifestyles of the rich. Fans of RHW-NYC are empowered as judges and invited to conclude that those with the most deserve the least. The rich not only become accessible and accountable for their behavior, they become less than the audience (Chocano, 2011).

Women are the ones who face the most scorn for their wealth and not men. While the men on *The Real Housewives* franchise also spend exorbitant money on houses, sports games, cars, vacations, clothes, and paraphernalia, they are rarely illustrated on television or criticized (Moscowitz, 2013, p. 9). Despite the fact that many men on the shows do not appear to have a regular source of income. Viewers on blogs and Internet fan websites criticize the women for needlessly spending money and putting their hobbies and friends before traditional motherhood role (Chocana, 2017). Yet at the same time, their husbands are not criticized at all. Fox Reality channel hosted a short-lived program called *Househusbands of Hollywood*,<sup>17</sup> yet even when men were the focal point of the show and seen participating in the same modes of extravagant wealth, it was their wives who were more frequently criticized (Isaac, 2012). As Pierre Bourdieu might have argued, the show critiques the notion that the rich are naturally predisposed to personal refinement and social distinction. Bravo dubs its audience "affluencers," a catchy name for its

---

<sup>17</sup> *Househusbands of Hollywood* was a show on Fox Reality Channel that aired in 2009 and followed the lives of five househusbands and their families. These are men who stay at home while their wives earn a living.

young, chic, stylish, and upward-aspiring demographic, a quarter of whom make over \$100,000 a year (Dominus, 2008, p. 21). The show's mockery and prosecution of tremendously wealthy women may also let the less affluent Bravo audience off the hook.

Class disparities are seen at the opposite end of the spectrum as well, with the rich and middle class making fun of the poor. MTV's *Buckwild* follows a group of teens from rural Appalachia as they participate in activities such as mud sliding, riding an RV, shopping for cheap clothing and hanging out in their small rural town. The mainstream media criticized the women on the show and called them "white trash," "uneducated," and disapproved of their participation in traditionally masculine outdoor activities (Jacob, 2013).<sup>18</sup> The appeal of this show came from middle class and upper class viewers who watched in order to criticize the participants of the show and feel above and better than the rural population (ibid). The same appeal is also what drove Honey Boo Boo and her mom to fame on the popular television show *Toddlers and Tiaras* and later their own spinoff program *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*.<sup>19</sup> Audiences criticized the family for being "trashy" yet simultaneously enjoyed watching Honey Boo Boo and her mom eat junk food, dance inappropriately and say "stupid stuff" (Deggans, 2014). Critics fiercely criticized Honey Boo Boo's sister's teen pregnancy and the whole family's lack of education, yet they seriously failed to consider the societal causes behind the family's lifestyle. A reviewer from *Forbes* said, they "portray Alana's [Honey Boo-Boo's] family as a horde of lice-picking, lard-eating, nose-thumbing hooligans south of the Mason–

---

<sup>18</sup> This article is largely indicative of viewer feelings about the show *Buckwild*. Additionally, while not available to source, Facebook groups and Reddit threads discuss disapproval of the show and use words such as those listed above.

<sup>19</sup> *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is a spinoff series from *Toddlers and Tiaras*. The show follows the life of Honey Boo Boo a precocious child who won the hearts of viewers in the beauty pageant circuit. Alana "Honey Boo Boo" and her family live in McIntyre Georgia. The show received extremely negative views from television critics often calling the show "trashy" and "exploitive." The show ended abruptly after reports surfaced that Mama June, Alana's mother was dating a man convicted of child molestation.

Dixon line” (Isaac, 2016). The *Guardian Magazine* said, “none of the women or girls who participate in the show seems to hate themselves for their poverty, their weight, their less-than-urbane lifestyle, or the ways in which they diverge from the socially-acceptable beauty standard” (Carpentier, 2012). What these critics and other viewers fail to note is the societal implications behind the family’s socio-economic status. Mama June is a single mother and due to the family’s financial situation and location, they have less access to education both culturally and through the school system. Additionally, both criticisms focus on the appearance of the participants and their activities, in regards to unfair gender expectations that all women cannot participate in activities once thought of as only for men. Television provides “a comfortable home” for the middle class, over-represents and idolizes the upper class, and both under-represents and stigmatizes the working class and poor (Media Education Foundation, 2005).

This also would not be a study on women in reality television without mentioning *The Jersey Shore*, which aired between 2009 and 2012. The series follows the lives of eight housemates spending their summer on the Jersey Shore and then later Miami and Italy during the winter. The show created a large controversy, because of the use of stereotyped words for Italian Americans due to the fact that some cast members were not Italian (Franklin, 2010). The creators of the show wanted to make a version of *The Real World* that would feel more like an authentic documentary. In the end, both shows depict a carefully chosen group with big personalities and drama. The characters are all thrown in to live with each other and create controversy for viewers’ pleasure. New Yorker writer Nancy Franklin says, “our ability to take any pleasure, or even interest, in shows like this—in which participants are depicted as energetic but essentially aimless, oblivious of their own deficits, and delusional about their attractiveness and their importance in the world—hinges not on our ability to identify with them but on our ability to

distinguish ourselves from them. Unless the show manages to make us feel as though we were anthropologists secretly observing a new tribe through a break in the trees, it hasn't done its job" (Franklin, 2010). In this case, the participants of *The Jersey Shore* exist in a class all by themselves. They're neither rich nor poor. What makes the characters fascinating are not their wealth status it's the cultural capital they bring and their ability to appeal to viewers by bringing us into a world we've never seen before.

## VI. Motherhood in Reality Television

The days of the *Real Housewives* women are comprised of gala events, high-profile charity auctions, see-and-be-seen functions, and luncheons. Where does motherhood fit in? In direct contrast, the Duggar family featured in the *Many Kids in Counting*<sup>20</sup> series is all about motherhood as matriarch Michelle Duggar is mother to nineteen children. Most plot points in the show revolve around child rearing and older siblings learning to take care of younger children (Annette, 2005, p. 8). Yet, mothers on reality television shows cannot seem to win. Michelle Duggar and her daughters, some who now have children of their own, are criticized for having too many children that they lose track of. A video recently surfaced of Michelle Duggar giving a birthday speech for her daughter Jordyn. Duggar's praise of Jordyn was unspecific and the little girl looked like she was about to cry. Internet users criticized Duggar and accused her of not even knowing her own daughter (Treva, 2016). In the *Real Housewives of New York*, the women are accused on social media and Internet blogs of being superficial in their nurturing and yet for caring about their children obsessively (Chocano, 2011). As Leigh Moscovitz describes, the

---

<sup>20</sup> *Many Kids in Counting*, which originally began, as *17 Kids in Counting* is a program on TLC that first aired in 2008 and follows the lives of the Duggar family, a conservative Baptist family living in Arkansas. At this point the Duggars have nineteen children all conceived by matriarch Michelle Duggar and numerous grandchildren. The program depicts their conservative lifestyle, dating rituals and household activities.

persona for women, “the rich bitch,” is used for women who sacrifice motherhood, empathy, and altruism. In an analysis of women in reality television, Leigh Moscovitz noted that women in *The Real Housewives* series were often shown neglecting their duties as mothers. He noted that in ironic scenes dubbed “winks” by the show’s producers, RHW New York City women were more concerned with cultural expectations about class and gender behaviors than taking care of their children. Moscovitz says that, “the lure of class status produces inconsiderate mothers. In the world of RHW-NYC, money destroys, rather than enables, self-awareness, friendships, and, most importantly, competent mothering” (Moscovitz, 2013, p. 12). In season one, episode seven of the *Real Housewives of New York*, participant Romona Singer, a New York socialite, and her then twelve-year old daughter Avery Singer sat down for an interview. Producers asked Avery to critique her mother’s behavior. Avery referred to her mother’s clothing and behavior around men as “eww” “gross” and “unladylike” (RHWNY: S1, E7, 38:14). These descriptions were edited over other footage of Avery being cared for by her nanny juxtaposed against scenes of her mother partying with her friends.

Women on these reality programs are often critiqued as not paying attention to their home lives or their children. In a standard scene, a housewife dresses for a night out at charity events or drinks with friends, and the children are left behind. The shots of the children show them as sullen and abandoned (Moscovitz, 2005, p. 19). When the mothers on reality television shows are seen interacting with their children it is often done in a way that is extremely image focused. For example, in the *Real Housewives of New Jersey* season one, Teresa Giudice is seen interacting with older daughter Gia as she takes Gia into Manhattan to try out for modeling and acting gigs. In most of these scenes Giudice is seen coaching Gia on image and how to act, but her coaching is overtly rude and negative. There is also a lot of mother blaming on these shows.

Social scientist Meredith Michaels (Michaels, 2004) argues that there are extensive ways in which media culture constructs our common-sense notions of how mothers ought to behave, celebrating the “best” mothers and punishing the “worst” mothers. In *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* example, Giudice’s young children are often seen crying and throwing tantrums. Giudice seems to be distracted by the cameras as they usually ask her important question as she’s trying to quell the children’s upset (Palmer, 2013, p. 128). While Giudice is shown not tending to her children properly, if she did not answer their questions she could be framed as being uncooperative or too stressed out (Palmer, 2013, p. 129). Women on reality television who are “mothers” are often criticized over the concept of “me-time.” Every time a woman takes time for herself on television she is criticized for being overly selfish and sequences of me time are often contrasted with children being cared for by nannies. The forced choice these women face is not between parenting and work (production), but between mothering and consumptive socializing (consumption): “me-time,” (Palmer, 2013, pp. 131-135).

The role of the nanny is also important. Viewers of these shows, criticize women for having jobs and delegating tasks of motherhood to the nannies yet at the same time other women are criticized for not working at all. In the *Real Housewives* series, the housewives’ children are not nurtured by their mothers but by an expensive array of au pairs, live-in nannies, wellness centers, and high-end pre-schools (Palmer, 2013, p. 128). This is especially interesting in contrast to negative working class depictions on television where children are seen being taken care of by siblings while the parents earn a living. In these contrasting situations both nannies and other family members do the heavy lifting in the household not only in the care of the children and the home, but also in nurturing the family members (ibid).

Similar to Teresa Giudice's coaching of Gia's image, mothers are often preoccupied on reality television with their children's appearance. For example, Jill Zarin on the *Real Housewives of New York* sends her daughter Ally on a "detox." Through editing however it becomes very evident that "detox" is code for "weight loss," despite Zarin's failed attempts to mask the trip about curing Ally's "arthritis." Zarin is thrilled when Ally returns a week later eleven pounds thinner, a drastic weight loss for a young teen (Moscowitz, 2013, p. 23). In a scene intended to make audiences squirm uncomfortably, Jill pokes at her daughter's mid-section while she screams in delight at the prospect of weight loss, "Oh my god! Where'd my daughter go?" (RHWNYS, S1, E6, 41:00). In another case, on the *Real Housewives of New Jersey* Dina Manzo's teenage daughter Lexi wears glasses and no makeup. Large plot points center around Lexi feeling uncomfortable about her appearance and her mother trying to help her. These scenes are endearing, but they point out larger issues that Lexi struggles with body image and feelings that in order to be her "mother's daughter" she must look a certain way (Palmer, 2013, p.131). Adolescent girls struggle with image and confidence issues throughout the media, in reality television this is seen as a direct response to their relationships with their mothers.

Motherhood is especially interesting to look at in terms of reality competition shows, such as *Dance Moms* and *Toddlers and Tiaras*. The mothers in *Toddlers and Tiaras* present over-sexualized versions of their children. The girls on the show wear makeup, sexualized outfits and are made to look like mini adults. In return, the mothers coaching their daughters and forcing them to practice their dances and look a certain way in order to win are deemed inappropriate and bad mothers (Palmer, 2013, p. 135). On *John and Kate Plus Eight*, Kate Gossling is also made to look like a bad mother and even more so a bad wife. Gossling has eight children and in contrast to Michelle Duggar is not portrayed as a patient, kind, or nurturing mother. In seasons

one through four before her divorce, Gossling is often seen yelling at her husband, children, staff at restaurants and stores, and if we're lucky, the producers behind the camera. Clever editing combined with Gossling's naturally short temper makes her seem like a monster. But wouldn't any mother who is trying to single parent eight children? Gossling's role in the show makes mothers in general look bad and reflects poorly on women as a whole (Finn, 2016), because they are seen as ill tempered and irrational, as Kate demonstrates in her behavior.

Then there are the shows about family life that highlight the absence of mother figures all together. The show *NYC Prep* first premiered in 2009 and followed six teenagers in Manhattan. The program was based off the wildly popular show *Gossip Girl*, which first aired in the fall of 2007. *NYC Prep* depicts the teens attending parties, fashion shows, charity events, dinner parties, and shopping sprees, just as the characters on *Gossip Girl*. The show while about family life does not illustrate motherhood or family life in general (Smith, 2009). There is only one episode in the entire season that a parent is seen at all, when PC takes his friends to see his mother who stands in the kitchen and tells their maid to make the teens a snack. As Brian Lowry from *Variety Magazine* noted, "parents are about as present as those in the Charlie Brown cartoons" (Lowry, 2009). In this case reality television shows that family life exists in the absence of mothers.

## **VII. Female Body Image in Reality Television**

Female body image is also a crucial facet of reality television. In many ways body image takes on higher importance in reality television, because the women are on screen as themselves, so criticisms of their image are not based on characters they are playing, but their personal characteristics. Many reality television programs focus on weight loss for example, *The Biggest Loser*, *Extreme Weight Loss*, *Dance Your Ass off*, *Celebrity Fit Club*, *Thintervention* and *Fat*

*March*.<sup>21</sup> While these programs may have silly titles, the treatment of overweight individuals on screen is serious. On these shows overweight people are mocked both by the trainers and the thinner people on screen for their size (Domoff, 2012, p. 994). In *The Biggest Loser* everything about the contestants are criticized and monitored from how much they sleep to every single thing they eat. Contestants are seen exercising and trying to lose weight all day, an unrealistic goal for anyone, and when they fail to lose weight they are ridiculed and shamed (Domoff, 2012, p. 998). Since the show is televised when contestants unavoidably mess up, they are mocked in front of all of America. Female participants are also taunted and called “disgusting” and “horrible” by body shaming viewers all over the Internet. The women are taught that their lives are not worth living unless they lose weight and that men will never appreciate them for their size (Egbert and Belcher, 2012, p. 411). While it is often healthier for obese individuals to lose weight the national shaming that accompanies weight loss on reality television is unhealthy. Additionally a study from *The Obesity Research Journal* actually showed that viewers of *The Biggest Loser* had significantly higher levels of dislike of overweight individuals and more strongly believed that weight is controllable, especially in women (Domoff, 2012, p. 996). These results indicate that anti-fat attitudes increase after brief exposure to weight-loss reality television. *The Biggest Loser* perpetuates the unrealistic view that significant weight loss is possible through adequate willpower and hard work and is not the result of uncontrollable genetic and environmental factors. The show teaches viewers to idealize fitness and promotes the idea that life is not worth living overweight (Domoff, 2012, p. 997).

---

<sup>21</sup> The above are part of a series of competition weight loss programs, primarily airing on TLC and NBC. These programs illustrate overweight individuals competing in weight loss challenges as well as engaging in interpersonal drama. At the end of the show there is often a monetary prize and contestants are eliminated each week if they fail to meet their goals.

Snookie from *The Jersey Shore* was subjected to fierce criticism for her weight all throughout the show's run (Franklin, 2005), and there have been no overweight participants on the last three seasons of *The Bachelor*. Women especially in reality television are criticized for their body images more so than their male co-stars (Domoff, 2012). This reflects existing trends on female body image in the media, but the trend is exacerbated in reality television, because the women are real people. Weight loss shows especially highlight body image and weight negativity, because they ask participants to directly address their appearance and they call for improvement.

### **VIII. Female Confrontation in Reality Television**

In June of 2009 Teresa Giudice on the *Real Housewives of New Jersey* screamed “prostitution whore! Engaged nineteen times” at her fellow contestant Danielle Staub and flipped a table over at a fancy restaurant (RHW-NJ, S1, E6, 57). Danielle screamed to the friends and family standing around her, “Teresa is like a friggin caged animal at the zoo, she thinks tables need to be thrown at me” (RHW-NJ, S1, E6, 57). Crucial to understanding the representation of women in reality television is confrontation and fights between female participants. “Catfights” between contestants have become commonplace in reality television programs, in shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Real Housewives Series*, but they can be seen in competition shows and cooking shows, among others (Rosa, 2015). Producers rely on aggressive behavior between contestants; the more ridiculous a fight is the more replays, tweets and gifs it generates (Stapleton). Fighting between women on reality television is often about petty or superficial issues, gossip and general interpersonal issues (Stapleton). Confrontation makes women seem aggressive, spiteful, and antagonistic. It also sends the message to viewers that women value

confrontation over lasting connections between one another (DuVernay, 2009, p. 31). This is especially true of shows such as *The Bachelor* where women fight predominantly over their competition to please one man. Confrontation between women in reality television may be entertaining, but it sends the message to viewers that drama and entertainment have higher value than strong female friendships and collaboration and support between women (Egbert and Belcher, 2012, p. 421).

Stephanie Goldberg argues that since the women on screen are real and not actors, watching confrontation on television has the same appeal as standing around the playground watching the fight after school once did (Goldberg, 2012). Yet at the same time while these women are supposedly representative of the larger population, producers purposefully cast women that will be controversial (Stapleton). They also place women together specifically because they know they will not get along. Viewers also love to take sides in controversy and having a fight with one character against the other, where the background on each is known, generates more excitement (Passmore). The executive producer of *Basketball Wives* Shaunie O'Neal commented that "bickering, drink throwing, and fighting shows strong independent and vocal women, but the drama has a negative connotation which is that women cannot get along and support each other and should not be taken seriously" (Bergstrom, 2005). A study from Brigham Young University in 2010 also demonstrates that most reality programs contain verbal aggression but less physical violence and that non-physical violence has come to be expected in every show (Hadfield, 2016).

## IX. Consumers of Reality Television and Popularity

Reality television is studied not only in terms of effect, but also in the context of consumer practices and viewership in a modern cultural context (Randall, 2005, p. 288). Viewers of reality television are in part influenced by ratings, but also what other viewers are watching. Reality television is undeniably popular. For example, in 2016 ratings for *The Bachelor* brought in 7.3 million viewers for ABC with more estimated through online viewing (Chozick, 2013). Viewers make fan groups for the show and brackets to predict who will win.<sup>22</sup> Entertainment.com even has a point system, where contestants get points for kisses, dramatic exits, and crying. The same can be said for other popular reality programs such as *Survivor* and *American Idol*. There are close to five hundred reality television programs available and millions of American viewers (Couldry, 2009, p. 93). Reality television not only has a secure position in the category of television consumption, but is extremely successful at appealing to viewers. I believe that part of reality television's appeal lies in its interactive nature and the way viewers connect to real contestants on screen.

Reality television viewers illustrate that the consumption of authenticity in a cultural context is increasingly characterized by replication (Randall, 2005, p. 291). Reality television thrives on replicating the same successful formats with different contestants. There is also an overall understanding of how viewers ignore obviously fictional aspects of media in exchange for believability. This is because the act of watching media creates an overall positive experience through consumption and this repeated experience produces effects of positive reinforcement (Couldry, 2009, p. 87). While consumers can readily distinguish between the authentic and the factitious and they value authenticity, they still appreciate entertainment value over everything else (Randall, 2005, p. 280). This need to experience media as reality asks the viewer to go

---

<sup>22</sup> This information is available in Facebook groups as well as through [www.thebachelorbracket.com](http://www.thebachelorbracket.com)

against cultural notions of what is real. As Nick Couldry argues, myth is vastly more exciting than synthetic life and reality television is real-life drama (Couldry 2009, p. 88). Viewers knew the first televised wrestling matches were fake, yet they continued to watch, because they were entertaining.

Certain scholars argue that the respondents are well aware of reality TV's practice of producer involvement and intentional portrayal of extreme characters (Park, 2009, p. 167). They argue that television industries commercialize secrets behind reality TV -as reflected in programs such as the Reality Secrets Revealed series on VH1 and numerous consumer books on reality shows (Couldry, 2009, p. 97). However, these programs do not fully provide audiences with real knowledge of the genre and imply that the conventions are only present in a few shows, not the norm. These "realityTV-savvy" audiences tend to maintain a critical lens toward a reality show's depiction of racial conflict. Yet at the same time there is a side that does not care and they ignore producer involvement, choosing instead to watch programs with believability (Park, 2009, p. 158).

*American Idol* illustrates a specific example of consumer popularity despite critics' predictions that it would not be successful. Additionally, *American Idol*'s history proves that viewers knew the media they were consuming was false, but they watched on. The power of *American Idol* came from the interactive experience it garnered and the community it built, specifically the idea that viewers could somehow play a part in its creation (Ibid, p. 348). Critics originally argued that no one would like the show, because it called for audience votes and viewers of television would rather be passive (Jenkins, p. 349). However, this was not the case and the show took off, particularly because viewers enjoyed voting on the show. Interactivity comes from the notion that viewers are watching real people, just like them on television and that

they have a stake in the show's outcome through their votes. Viewers later found out *American Idol* was extremely fabricated, even in comparison to other reality programs. While viewers were under the pretense that their "votes" would be counted toward the winner in true democratic fashion this was shown not to be true. Yet, despite pervasive knowledge that the show was false, viewers continued watching (Ibid).

The appeal of reality television lies in the ratings that viewers give the show, the diversity in programming and the larger network appeal. Sociologist Steven Reiss assessed the appeal of reality television by asking 239 adults to rate themselves on sixteen basic motives for watching, using a standardized instrument. The results of Reiss' study suggested that the people who watched reality television had an above-average trait of motivation and wanted to feel "self-important," (Reiss, 2004, p. 370). To a lesser extent, Reiss found that individuals watching reality television felt vindicated, free of morality, secure, and romantic, as compared with large normative samples watching "regular" programming. Reiss found that individuals more concerned with their status were likely to view reality television and report pleasure and enjoyment (Reiss, 2004, p. 374). He also found that individuals were motivated to watch reality television and connected to characters based on shared traits and characteristics (ibid). When it comes to women in reality television, perhaps female audiences relate to the female participants despite stereotypes, because they associate themselves with the characteristics on screen (Reiss, 2004, p. 373).

Perhaps reality television compels viewers to feel they are more important and have higher status than the ordinary people portrayed on reality television shows. Or perhaps, ordinary people watch reality television and fantasize that they, too, could gain elevated celebrity status by appearing on television (Reiss, 2004, p. 375). Furthermore, as Steven Reiss reasons people

who avoid conflict, anger, and competition may avoid viewing reality television shows because these shows often portray competition and interpersonal conflict (Reiss, 2004, p. 375). Lastly, Reiss found that people who dislike rules react negatively to the many rules that must be followed by the participants of reality television shows. As Steven Reiss explains, the results of this study are consistent with those reported by Nabi et al. (Reiss, 2004, p. 376), regarding the psychological appeal of reality-based television. These findings showed that curiosity, including the need for cognition was not a significant motive for watching reality television. Additionally, the results of this study showed no correlation between curiosity and viewing of reality television.

Media theorists and social scientists have complained about the impact of social media on young people. They claim that social media presents a highly curated version of someone else's picturesque life and makes others feel lesser in comparison. The effect of watching curated social media has also been shown to be detrimental to women's opinions of themselves and their view of their own image (Isaac, 2012). If reality television is watching a curated version of a strangers' life why are viewers then motivated to tune in week after week? Additionally, is the effect different than from social media, because the individuals on the other side of the screen are strangers? One possibility is that viewers feel they are more important (have higher status) than the ordinary people portrayed on reality television shows (Isaac, 2012). Ordinary people can also watch the shows, see people like themselves, and fantasize that they could gain celebrity status by being on television. Further, people who avoid conflict, anger, and competition may avoid viewing reality television shows because these shows often portray competition and interpersonal conflict (Harris, 2015, p. 29). Some have questioned the lack of intellect of reality television viewers, and the physical laziness of people who like to watch television (Harris,

2015, p. 30). In conclusion, these results supported Steven Reiss' concept that cultural events such as reality television shows arouse combinations of feelings or joys.

## **X. Provoking Audience Reactions**

Reality television is entertainment. As such women are chosen for reality shows not because they provide an accurate representation of reality, but because they will provide the most entertainment and the best audience reactions. While not a completely accurate representation of the making of reality television, the show *Unreal* personifies the creation of reality television from the autobiographical experience of past *The Bachelor* producer Sarah Gertrude Shapiro. In this show, the creator Quinn chooses women based on characteristics and controls reality to make certain plot lines and to increase drama (Piwowarski, 2016). As Leigh Moscovitz notes "reality television is structured as acts of unmasking in which a hidden truth about a person is revealed in a surprising, even shocking, way" (Moscovitz, 2013, p. 9). Moscovitz says reality television provokes the audience's scorn, through dramatic instances and set-up encounters (ibid). As Moscovitz describes using a case study of the women in reality television, "the cast members speak a language of women's empowerment; nevertheless, in their relationships with other women, their consumerist lifestyles, and their obsession with personal appearance, the characters become post-feminist cautionary tales rather than feminists" (Moscovitz, 2013, p. 13). Unfortunately, viewers and scholars alike may never get a true understanding of who the female participants on screen are, instead we are left with their representations: a cautionary tale of how stereotypes are weaved together to create drama.

Often in the creation of reality television the camera will exist to illustrate paradoxes. For example, on *The Real Housewives Orange County* season one a woman named Kelly discusses

how she, unlike the other women, makes her own money but publishing stories about the other women. Through this she separates herself from the other wealthy women who do not earn a living and instead spend their time on personal grooming, shopping and attending high end parties and fashion shows (RHW-OC, S1, E1-4). However, the camera mocks Kelly's claims about herself through illustrating her attending parties, but instead of holding a pen, paper or a notepad, which one would assume a writer would need, Kelly is shown hugging her friends, sipping champagne and gossiping, just like all of the other wealthy women (RHW-OC, S1, E5). As Moscovitz notes, on the *Real Housewives* shows, producers mock contestants through using their own voiceover to mock inconsistencies in their behavior (Moscovitz, 2013, p. 15). They also use narration of women talking about their strengths in conjunction with embarrassing video footage to present an image to audiences that these women should not be respected.

#### **XI. Fame After Reality Television Participation and the Creation of the Celebrity**

After participating on a reality television show, women face different levels of fame. With the increase of social media, fan watching, fan clubs, Facebook groups, pages, among others women who appeared on reality television more recently experience greater levels of fame than women who appeared in the early 2000s (Jefferson-James, 2015, p. 46). For example, women who recently appeared on *The Bachelor* are more known than women from previous seasons. In addition, when reality television premiered in an era before Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Youtube, and easy taping, if viewers missed an episode of *The Bachelor* there was no way for them to replay the episodes (Passmore). Now participants of the Bachelor are forever immortalized on the screen and viewers and fans of the show can replay those moments over and over again. Additionally, before the rise of social media, participants could not cultivate a

presence outside the show. Now however, the women on reality television can create Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and blog presences outside of their actual screen time (Imwalle). The women can cultivate these presences during the run time when they are on the show and their visibility need not end if they are voted off, or in general if they are no longer reality television stars. Sociologist Sue Collins notes in her 2008 essay, "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Dispensable Celebrity," that "reality TV invites new considerations for theorizing celebrity as a cultural commodity whose economic value is based on potential exchange" (Collins, 2008, p. 93) She argues that television constructs a celebrity value out of ordinary people performing what is supposed to be "real." As Collins notes, "celebrity value, as a mechanism to gather audiences, undergoes a new form of dispensable synergy that shelters the larger system of celebrity valorization from the dual problems of scarcity and clutter," (Collins, 2008, p. 101).

Collins goes into detail about the genre of the reality-celebrity in the world franchise and the subgenre of reality television participants. Many of these participants have now become semiprofessional entertainers and talent (Collins, 2008, p. 102). Collins argues that television's construction of fame is often associated with the way the medium blurs the boundaries between its talent's on- and off-camera performances (Collins, 2008, p. 101). While the intimacy found in reality television's "first-person" narratives can be seen to further obscure the line separating participant from viewer (Dovey 2000), it is becoming apparent that we need to consider how being a reality-celebrity might potentially alter the dimensions of this boundary. The interesting aspect of becoming a celebrity on reality television is that the women are playing themselves. While most celebrities in television and film can separate their real personalities from their fame because of the characters they portray, these women are celebrities because of their own

personalities rather than prescribed characterization. As Hugh Curnett notes in his analysis on *The Real World*, “with this in mind, I approach MTV’s reality-celebrity from the standpoint of how its participants occupy a position within television’s institutional structure that invests them with a value that is unique to their role within the media industry. To put it another way, I think it is important to treat reality television’s penchant for the “ordinary” as an instance in which television purposefully does not structure itself to meet the same objectives as other kinds of media,” (Curnett, 2009, p. 17. This point touches on one of the primary tensions surrounding reality-celebrity: more so than with other forms of television stardom, the fame garnered from being on reality television is rooted in an observational aesthetic that seeks to highlight the fact that its participants are not professional actors

A larger issue in reality television occurs when reality television talent tries to enter the “celebrity” industry to capitalize on their fifteen minutes of fame. Most reality participants give up their day job and any semblance of normal life to appear on reality television.<sup>23</sup> For some women this means a more permanent offer, such as Robyn Dixon from *the Real Housewives of Potomac* who signed a one-year contract with Bravo entertainment when she quit her day job at a boutique (Dixon). For other women though, the amount of celebrity and time on camera is completely uncertain. Many women quit their jobs to go on *The Bachelor*, uncertain if they will last just one night or stay the full eight-week course, moving on to become a finalist. They give up their day job believing they are destined for show business. Most of these reality television veterans find that in the “sixteenth minute,” they are not absorbed into the celebrity system; rather, their celebrity currency runs out and they are channeled back into obscurity (Collins, 2008, p. 102). Yet, this D-level reality television celebrity has very real benefits for cultural

---

<sup>23</sup> This information is taken anecdotally from past participants interviewed. See Danielle Imwalle, Samantha Passmore and Chelsea Wanstrath. Producer of *The Bachelor* Caitlin Stapleton also confirms this information.

producers, broadcasters, advertisers, and a host of related cottage industries borne out of reality TV's system of production (ibid, p. 104). While some go on to bigger and better celebrity valorization, such as original *Survivor* contestant Colleen Haskell, who managed to land a part in Rob Schneider's film *The Animal* and an appearance on *That '70s Show* or Rob Mariano and Amber Brkich who first met on the *Survivor* then went on to *The Amazing Race* together and later got their own spinoff show (ibid, p. 108). The making of celebrity, as with most cultural products, is configured around what has worked before.

As Sue Collins notes, "ostensibly, reality shows featuring ordinary, real people demonstrate that the genesis of celebrity as a top-down production of the cultural industries is being challenged by the audience's attention to itself" (ibid, p. 105). Celebrity will always be a commodity that some can capitalize on, either those who become celebrities or others in the industry. For example, after leaving *The Bachelor*, candidates hope to sign book deals and get paid to endorse products. Many women on *The Bachelor* move on to endorse products through Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, among others. Women can make money on these sites through promotional deals (Passmore). More recently, celebrity production is thought about in broader terms such as a "promotional culture." Reality television participants especially now have more autonomy in how they create their persona through their social media usage (ibid). Alternatively women who make it on *The Bachelor* only a few weeks hope to be asked to return to *Bachelor in Paradise* a show that takes members of past *Bachelor* franchises and throws them together in a tropical location. The motivation for some to appear on *Bachelor in Paradise* is even stronger, because they are guaranteed to get more screen time with less competition (ibid).

It is also important in this context to separate the idea of celebrity from fame. As Collins notes "celebrity is the outcome of complex interplay among processes of production, mediation,

and reception. Foremost, it is dependent on strategies of capitalist production that try to predict the capriciousness of audiences' preferences and tastes" (Collins, 2008, p. 88). Richard Dyer whose work has been predominately concerned with the production of film stars and the "star image," points out the complex market function of stars. They are a category of property in the form of brand name and image that can be used to raise capital for a film; they are part of how films get sold to audiences who expect certain meanings from the star's presence in the film. Dyer argues that the person who becomes a celebrity has only been made so because of other people, he mentions hairdressers, coaches, dieticians, make-up artists, among others (Dryer, 2003). In the case of reality television, these women begin as regular people, but they become celebrities through the show, if only for a short time. "Before they were on the show they had like real jobs and they have degrees in education and now they're getting into degrees in modeling, hosting, and acting... mostly hosting because they don't need real school," (Curnett, 2009, p. 31). Susie Meister, a former reality star on *Road Rules*,<sup>24</sup> said, "If somebody is paying me to do something then I don't feel exploited as much as if I'm just on my own time, with my own family, in my own boring life and people want to talk about it. That bothers me more," (Meister, 2014). Meister's experience exemplifies how reality television's inclusion of "real people" has the potential to address a broader need to participate with the media at any level.

The idea of attaining celebrity status for ordinary people can be used by producers to cultivate an economic advantage. This is because the participants are willing to work for much less than other famous talent and it creates a constant influx of new talent to choose from as others are always interested (Curnett, 2009). While celebrity may be the real prize, producers'

---

<sup>24</sup> *Road Rules* is an MTV program and sister show of *The Real World*. The show follows five to six strangers stripped of money and forced to live in an RV. The strangers travel from location to location and are awarded clues along the way.

objectives are less about cultivating a star system than to use the promise of celebrity as continuous low-cost bait to gather contestants and ultimately to sell audiences to advertisers. In essence, the promise of celebrity is one of the motivating factors for audience participation, but everything is motivated by the ability to garner advertisers (Jenkins, 2009, p. 354). In general, all of the formats tap into the “fetishism” of celebrity by suspending the traditional gate-keeping mechanisms of Hollywood’s hierarchical structure such as auditions, beauty standards, and marketable talents (Jenkins, 2009, p. 357). Every year reality television shows get hundred of thousands of applicants, a growing number who hope to be chosen for reality programs so they can achieve the coveted celebrity status and in return make money off promotions and selling themselves as a celebrity (Curnett, 2009, p. 22).

Additionally, there are issues in how individuals are skyrocketed into celebrity status and the lack of coping strategies they are given along the way. For example, when an actor is launched into celebrity status, it usually comes after years of training and small roles (Passmore). Whereas when an individual is chosen for *The Bachelor* they may end up an instant celebrity with no experience or warning. On *The Bachelor* trained psychologists help producers gauge the individual’s coping strategies and characteristics that make for interesting drama (Roscoe, 2001, p. 64). The shows’ producers then “cast” the applicants into predictable “types,” and as the series repeats, the new players learn to perform the roles that get media attention. The result is that reality television stars are individuals with little experience who have been cast to be “crazy” “angry” and “a sad sob story,” among others and these individuals are even less likely to be able to cope with instant fame (Roscoe, 2001, p. 88).

Locations also act as promotions during reality television. Viewers can vacation with a cast member from *Road Rules* while on spring break in the Bahamas or visit sets on *The Real*

*World*. The *Real World* franchise shoots its programs on location, using the places the cast visits as the sets (e.g., clubs, bars, shops, parks, beaches, and streets). As a consequence, these backdrops play an important role in the seamless integration of recurring reality talent within storylines dominated by partying and other leisure activities (Keveney, 2007). Thus, young vacationers want to be able to say, that “they partied with the *Real World*-ers” and in this case that “partying” is comparable to being on the set of the show itself (Curnett, 2009, p. 29). Using the *Real World* as a setting creates a *mise-en-scene* based on real life and gives reality television a relatable edge over scripted entertainment.

As reality TV continues to develop its casting practices, the function of its participants as both viewers and on-camera talent necessitates a continued reconsideration of the conceptual parameters informing television stardom (Curnett, 2009, p. 33). The celebrity created in the wake of reality TV represents a new “class of on-camera talent specific to television” (ibid). This, of course, varies between formats as well as between the different types of participants who are cast to meet the plot requirements of particular narratives. For example, the past participants of *The Bachelor* make up a group known as *Bachelor Nation*.<sup>25</sup> They all know each other and many have been or are romantically involved with multiple people from different seasons and shows.

## **XII. Case Study: The Bachelor**

The Bachelor is a competition show: the man is the prize, not real romance. *The Bachelor* franchise has expanded into other programs, *The Bachelorette* where many men compete for a woman and the show *Bachelor in Paradise*, which is a compilation of the most exciting past contestants who all “hang out” on an island getaway, competition included. Thousands of

---

<sup>25</sup> Bachelor Nation is the name given to fans of the show by host Chris Harrison. If one watches a full episode of any show on *The Bachelor* franchise they will hear fans referred to as well as contestants. The name is also present on Internet and fan blogs and social media.

women each year send in video applications to the show's producers talking about their lives and who they are: hoping to get chosen. In order to compete in the show, each woman has stop her life for an eight-week period to live and compete at the mansion located near Los Angeles. The women are also not allowed to tell their employers where they are going which means that many do not have stable jobs when they return (Passmore). During the show, women are not allowed any communication with the outside world, including television, phones, newspapers or magazines; they are not even supposed to read books on set. The result is that many women have sensory deprivation and long for the outside world and all they can do is focus on the bachelor. The cameras follow women everywhere during the show, so they are never alone. Additionally, the producers begin serving alcohol to the women when they wake up and they have nothing else to do besides drink (Wanstrath).

I interviewed a producer of *The Bachelor*, Caitlin Stapleton, over the phone. Producers on *The Bachelor*, oversees all casting, video production, creation of the program, and all activities on set. While Stapleton only had a few minutes to chat, the process of filming was similar to what is described above by participants. "When I first started," Stapleton said, "I really wasn't familiar with the show, it had always sounded pretty stupid to me. But I got the job and knew I'd be working for ABC in some capacity and that has always been my dream," (Stapleton, 2017).

When ask about her experience as a producer Caitlin had to answer under her contract with ABC.

"There's honestly not a lot I can say to you under my contract, except it is a lot like what you see on *Unreal*. It's not as manipulative and we haven't killed people, obviously, but sometimes I do feel really bad... we push the women to say a lot that maybe they don't mean, but they say it anyway... I never lie to the girls, but some producers do, they'll tell them 'oh so and so said this about you,' but I never do that... I try to be nice and to help them through the process, there's always a few girls that you bond with and we have our inside jokes and stuff and it's sad to see them go. I always see bits of myself in the women, and I wonder what I would be like in their position. I definitely see as a producer

that women are driven to all sorts of actions, just because of the environment that we set up... I feel the worst when it comes to editing, which as an associate I'm not really involved in, but we [the show] really take everything and make it more dramatic, I mean we have hours of footage and we can make them look as bad as we want to and we have done that in the past... The bottom line is this isn't a career I want to be in forever and we don't make them come on the show, that is their choice." ( Stapleton, 2017).

The manipulation used to create *The Bachelor* is important to understanding issues in female representation as a whole. The participants of the show have said in interviews that they come away feeling manipulated and misrepresented. Yet, they have no control over how viewers see them (Imwalle, Passmore, Wanstrath, Ritchie, Mkrtychyan). Additionally, the show purposefully chooses women to fulfill stereotypical characters, "the villain," "the good girl," "the older woman," among others. The result is that while Bachelor Nation has created a lucrative franchise it comes at the cost of women's representation in our culture (Stapleton).

In the history of *The Bachelor* questions have been brought up about the show's authenticity. From its original conception, viewers wondered if it would really be possible for a couple to fall in love in such a short amount of time (Weiner, 2017). Most viewers ignored the questionable editing and clear set up throughout the show until 2009. In February of 2009 during an exclusive, *The Bachelor* season thirteen contestant Megan Parris commented that the producers edited the footage to create a fictional storyline. She said in the interview "I don't think [the producers] showed any real conversation I had with anyone... the viewers fail to realize that editing is what makes the show... It's just piecing together things to make a story," (Dehnart, 2009). In March of that same year Megan Parris also argued that producers bullied contestants into saying things to the camera that they did not want to say. She said "there's nothing real about it," and argued that even the confessionals were scripted. "They basically will call you names, berate you, curse at you until they get you to say what they want you to say,"

(DeLeon, 2009). Megan was unavailable for interview, but after 2009 went on try to share her story, most labeled her as a disgruntled contestant upset with her own representation on the show. Then in 2010, creator Mike Fleiss appeared on 20/20 and admitted that he develops contestants into characters, catered to what the audience wants. He came under fire for admitting that the show has less to do with reality than making good television. Once again fans ignored his commentary in favor of the show's believability, (TV Addict, 2010). Yet, what fans cannot seem to ignore is *The Bachelor's* lack of success rate. Only three of twenty couples on *The Bachelor* are currently together and only one couple is married Sean Lowe and Catherine Guidici Fans have for a long time felt saddened at the lack of success rate for couples on the show (Davidson, 2016) (Denninger, 2016). In 2015, former *The Bachelor* producer Sarah Gertrude Shapiro created the show *Unreal*, a fictionalized version of the making of *The Bachelor*. The show illustrates how producers, editors and the show's conventions create a toxic and harmful atmosphere for the contestants and the show's creators (Piwowarski, 2016).

**METHODOLOGY:**

As I began thinking about my topic in the summer of 2016, the first issue that came to mind was how someone, with my undergraduate resources, could tackle a topic of this magnitude. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to interview past female participants of reality television shows. However, I had no idea how to get in contact with these women, some of whom are celebrities. When I decided to focus specifically on a case study on *The Bachelor*, I was able to devise a system where I went through the Wikipedia page of each season of the show. On the page it lists every female contestant, their first and last names, occupation and location. I then used Facebook to easily track the women down and sent them a standardized message explaining that I was doing research for this project and would appreciate their perspectives. While I had a low response rate of about fifteen percent, I managed to message over one hundred women and I got some great information from my interviews. I also appreciated this opportunity, because in most literature about reality television the participants are not interviewed and the articles contain very removed scholarly critic on the programs. I find this problematic; because I feel the best way to analyze a specific population such as women in reality television is to get their perspectives firsthand. Further, my strength lies in journalism and I knew that I could use my past experiences to draft strong interview questions and to lead an interview that would be comfortable for the participant and informative for me. I think ultimately I struck the perfect interview balance, because of my past experience. I was also surprised at how forthcoming past participants were and their willingness to pour their hearts out over the phone. However, if I were to change anything it would have been to make my interviews more standardized, which unfortunately journalism does not lend itself as well to. Additionally, while I mostly interviewed past participants of reality programs I was lucky enough to interview two

individuals working in reality television production. My first interview was with Albert Wang who is a production assistant at Glass Entertainment Group,<sup>26</sup> who was able to give me important information on the general practice of creating reality television. The second interview I conducted was with Caitlin Stapleton who is currently a producer on *The Bachelor*. While, Caitlin could not give me as much information as I hoped I was incredibly lucky to be able to interview her and the connection I had to her through a friend at Tufts was pure circumstance.

### **HYPOTHESIS:**

My original hypothesis was as follows: The concept of reality television in theory gives the opportunity for any women to present themselves as they choose. However, production norms and editing alter how women both behave and are presented on television. The result of this takes an emotional toll on the participants and the viewers of the program. However, I can only prove the effects of participation and viewership anecdotally through the interviews I conducted, the literature available, and my own observations of the program. Through my content analysis I hope to suggest how the work of producers, editors, and the behavior of participants manifests itself on the show. I also wish to illustrate how the ways women are represented on *The Bachelor* reflect already existing stereotypes of women in today's culture.

***The Interviews I conducted are listed below and transcriptions of each interview are available in the interview section:***

Tierra LaCausi –*The Bachelor*  
 Marshana Ritchie –*The Bachelor*  
 Robyn Dixon –*The Real Housewives*  
 Chelsea Wanstrath –*The Bachelor*  
 Danielle Imwalle –*The Bachelor*  
 Caitlin Stapleton –*The Bachelor*

---

<sup>26</sup> Albert Wang is a production assistant at Glass Entertainment Group. He began in June of 2016 after graduating from Tufts University with a BA in psychology. Wang describes his duties as “assisting in all aspects of production,” including video shoots, transcription, research, development and casting.

Albert Wang –Production  
Jesse Csincsak –Bachelor  
Samantha Passmore –*The Bachelor*  
Shushanna Mkrtychyan –*The Bachelor*

I knew from the start of my project that I wanted to develop and create a study of my own where I could analyze reality television first hand and look specifically at traits that I think effect women. I decided to focus my energy on *The Bachelor*, because that is where the largest volume of my interviews came from. In addition, I felt that *The Bachelor* more than any other reality television show impacted women. This is because the women on *The Bachelor* are by in large a younger demographic, have no fame before going on the show, and have little control in the way they are depicted. In the fall I took a class on children in the media with Professor Dobrow. In this class, I created my own content analysis and study focused on the depiction of children in fast food commercials. I used my study and content analysis as a practice for what I later created to analyze women in reality television.

For my content analysis I chose to study season twenty of *The Bachelor*, which at the time of my analysis was the most complete season. The variables I studied are listed below and defined as follows. Additionally, after creating my variables and doing my own content analysis of the first episode, I had a close friend and Tufts senior majoring in psychology analyze the episode with the same variables to confirm results. My friend received similar results to me and so I could confirm that my variables were generalizable. Additionally, per her request I rearranged the order of some of these variables into the final order you see below. The changes made it easier to look for these variables while watching the program and created a more cohesive order.

**Dramatic Tension:**

With this variable I noted the overarching dramatic elements of the episode. This could include for example an argument between two contestants or a dramatic two on one date. I tried to be as specific as possible in capturing the storyline that each dramatic situation included.

**Negative Interactions with Other Participants:**

This variable includes any time participants were in a situation with others that could be considered negative. I defined negative as a non-desirable situation or outcome, including a situation that is hurtful, bad, unwelcoming or unpleasant.

**Gossip About Participants:**

In order to be as specific as possible I noted every time a contestant mentioned another contestant or said anything about them, whether or not it was an outright negative comment. I also noted if at any time this gossip was discussed with Ben, the bachelor. Note, gossip only included interactions that were not face to face between contestants.

**Patronizing Language:**

This includes language used by a contestant about or to another woman. In this case “patronizing” can be classified using tone of voice and adjectives. I looked especially for negative language and language that implied superiority of one contestant over another.

**Language to or About Ben:**

For this category I noted any time one of the contestants spoke about Ben and noted adjectives used when the women spoke to Ben. I counted the number of times women talked about Ben and what the common phrasing was as well as patterns of who was speaking about him.

**Ben’s Use of Language:**

In this case I noted when Ben spoke about the women and the common words and phrases he used. I was able to take information both when he spoke about their appearances and personalities.

**Language about Appearance:**

This category included Ben’s language about the women’s appearances as well as anytime a woman mentioned her own appearance. I took down full sentence quotes for each and highlighted language.

**Activities Women Participated in Outside the Mansion:**

I recorded all of the times in the episode that women were show participating in activities or events outside of the mansion. I also noted if these activities occurred in group dates or one on one.

**Character Attitude and Changes:**

This was my most vague category. Unfortunately until the final five or six women, the participants are not given enough screen time to determine their personalities. I more used this category to note what the attitudes of the women were at the beginning of the episodes in

comparison to the end. This became more helpful for example during the final three women, when each was given a significant amount of time.

**Number of Times to Confessional:**

I recorded the number of times each woman went to confessional. This included if a shot of confessional was shown later in the episode, but the woman was wearing the same clothes as before, I counted it as a separate trip. Confessional specifically refers to when the women were interviewed in a separate “confessional” room away from the action of the episode and asked questions about their experiences.

**Mutually Supportive Situations:**

In this section I included any time where the women were seen supporting each other, giving each other advice, or spending time with each other. I defined supportive as providing encouragement or emotional help.

**General Notes:**

This included notes I had on each specific episode as well as notes on the show as a whole and the action going on. Some of these notes are very general, but it allowed me to get out my thoughts without forgetting. For example, one note I took was about the psychical qualities Ben looked for in women. Additionally, having a general notes section allowed me to include information as I was studying each episode so I wouldn't forget.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS

Through a content analysis of the most recent season of *The Bachelor*, I hope to illustrate the negative ways in which women are presented on screen. This is through categories of observation on the show, looking at activities and behavior, language use, changes in personality, and interactions throughout the season. In my content analysis I postulate aspects of representation that can be attributed to production norms. Since I am not a producer on set of the show, my claims are hypothetical. I relied on previous knowledge of production norms from contestants, producers, and academic information on how the show is created. I believe that producer involvement manifests through scene set up and commentary about contestants as well as the conventions of the show. Women are presented through editing in ways that increase dramatic tension, yet often do not represent them in a way they wish, which can be speculated on from observation of the show.

### **About This Season:**

Season twenty of *The Bachelor* follows twenty-six year old Ben Higgins, a software salesman from Warsaw Indiana. The season saw twenty-eight contestants, including a set of twins, Bachelor veterans Amber and Becca, a woman who listed chicken enthusiast as her job, a cowgirl, and a war veteran. Drama unfolded as Ben made his decision on which woman to propose to, ultimately making bachelor history by telling two women he loved them. Below is a list of characters in this season in order of when they were eliminated, with the winner Lauren Bushnell at the top. Note: characters are mentioned by their first names in the content analysis as this is the only way they are identified throughout the season.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Lauren Bushnell (Lauren B)	25	Flight Attendant
Joelle "JoJo" Fletcher	24	Real Estate Developer
Caila Quinn	24	Software Sales Representative
Amanda Stanton	25	Esthetician
Becca Tilley	26	Chiropractic Assistant
Emily Ferguson	23	Waitress
Lauren Himle	25	Kindergarten Teacher
Olivia Caridi	23	Former News Anchor
Leah Block	25	Event Planner
Jennifer Saviano	25	Small Business Owner
Jubilee Sharpe	24	War Veteran
Amber James	30	Bartender
Rachel Tchen	23	Unemployed
Haley Ferguson	23	Waitress
Jami Letain	23	Bartender
Shushanna Mkrtychyan	27	Mathematician
Lace Morris	25	Real Estate Agent
Jacqueline "Jackie" Dion	23	Gerontologist

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Amanda "Mandi" Kremer	28	Dentist
Samantha Passmore	26	Attorney
Lauren "LB" Barr	23	Fashion Buyer
Laura Esselman	24	Account Executive
Isabel "Izzy" Goodkind	24	Graphic Designer
Maegan Miller	30	Cowgirl
Jessica Moser	23	Accountant
Breanne Rice	30	Nutritional Therapist
Lauren Russell	26	Math Teacher
Tiara Soleim	27	Chicken Enthusiast

27

### **Dramatic Tension**

Throughout season twenty of *The Bachelor*, dramatic tension revolved around who would be eliminated from the show each week. Fear over elimination drove the women's behavior around Ben and their relationships with one another. At the start of the season the camera interviewed women before they went on the show. While the process was made to look randomized, the women shown were the girls who lasted the longest and had the most dramatic storylines. This is likely a product of editing, since the show was edited after it was filmed and producers knew by then who would win and who was the most dramatic. From the beginning,

---

<sup>27</sup> This information is comprised of details on the ABC website as well as a table from Entertainment Magazine.

producers set certain individuals up to be featured more prominently on the show, paving the way for more intimate relationships between participants and viewers, and for more drama.

Dramatic tension throughout *The Bachelor* was centered on lies and gossip that participants told. In the second episode, Lace tells other women that Ben called them “shady.” This is a lie. The cameras are a record of events and did not show this sequence. Perhaps, Lace’s lie came from her own fear that she would be eliminated. Lace quits the show at the end of that episode and cited not feeling comfortable in her position in the house as a reason for leaving. Lace’s lie could also be an effect of producer involvement. *Bachelor* producer Caitlin Stapleton noted that producers often spread untrue information to participants to “stir up excitement.” Lace could have been told misleading information by producers and attributed it to Ben.

Dramatic instances on *The Bachelor* focused on insecurity as well, especially the women’s own insecurity about their relationship with Ben, a product of the show’s competitive nature. Pressure was also placed on contestants to make every moment with Ben meaningful so that he would not eliminate them. For example, Amanda cries because she has a really meaningful conversation with Ben, but he chooses to give a rose to Olivia instead. Women also frequently got upset and caused drama if they felt that their time with Ben was cut short. When Leah feels afraid she might get cut from the show, she lies to Ben and says that “Lauren B acts differently to the other women than she does around you.” Ben confronts Lauren B and it eventually comes out that Leah was lying. All of the other women gang up against Leah as she awkwardly tries to deny her lie, while in the episode cameras cut to her lying to Ben. Leah is cut at the end of the week. She may have lied because she was nervous about her own position. It goes without saying that Leah and Lauren look and act extremely similar, so they were in direct competition. The entire sequence is also intensified through editing, which cuts back to Leah

lying to Ben. Since producers knew Leah was going home at the end of the week, they also could have edited the sequence that way to create a more dramatic exit. In any case, the situation is dramatic and likely blown out of proportion.

Dramatic tension and incidences also tend to center on specific people, labeled by *The Bachelor* community online as “bachelor villains.”<sup>28</sup> Starting in the very first episode, none of the women in the house get along with Lace and they view her as their enemy. Jojo, especially, finds Lace problematic and talks to the other women about how “crazy” Lace is. Insecure about her own time with Ben, Jojo complains that Lace is trying to steal Ben and is being unfair about his time with the other women. Throughout *The Bachelor*, when dramatic issues surface about contestants stealing Ben’s time, Ben is never blamed for mismanaging his own time, only the other women. *The Bachelor* villains are ridiculed throughout the show and all of the other women gang up against them. After Lace leaves the show, for instance, all of the women move on to hate Olivia. The women complain that Olivia gets more attention from Ben and that she monopolizes his time in unfair ways. Often, one girl will complain that another woman is getting more attention, then a vocal contestant will confront that girl and the situation will be both awkward and overly dramatic. For example, Emily confronts Olivia and tells her that she is taking up too much of Ben’s time and “other girls aren’t getting a chance to talk to him.” By using other contestants as justification, Emily makes it seem like it is Olivia against the rest of the house. Instead of apologizing or working out the situation, Olivia says that she’s “never gotten along with other women.” Jubilee and Lace, other villains on the show, also use this as an excuse. In saying that they’ve never gotten along with women, the villains are able to shift the

---

<sup>28</sup> “Bachelor Villains” is a term discussed in fan books and by contestants. It also appears as common terminology on Internet chat rooms and Facebook.

blame of their actions away from themselves, arguing instead that their mistakes are not their fault.

The major theme with overall dramatic tension in the show is that it primarily disappears toward the end of the season. After episode seven, most of the drama ends. This is because there are few contestants left. The drama the show centers on is who Ben will propose to and how he can love two different women. This is intense and exciting, but there are no confrontations, fights, or explosions, as are seen with the female participants. Dramatic tension throughout the season, especially with women fighting with each other over Ben, promotes stereotypes of women as dramatic, mean, and uncaring: stereotypes already surrounding women in media.

### **Negative Interactions With Other Participants**

From the very beginning of the show, participants have negative interactions with one another, before they even know each other's names. I classified negative interactions as any time participants were in a situation with each other that could be considered non-desirable and unpleasant. Often, negative interactions between participants came from irrational observations about individuals. For example, everyone in the house dislikes Amber because she has been on a past season of *The Bachelor*. From the beginning of the season, few women related to Jennifer because she gets very drunk on the first night in the mansion, yet is rarely featured again after that. Perhaps editors and producers wanted to make her story into more than it was.

The villains on the show were the women who had the most negative interactions with other contestants. As a theme, the villains were not afraid to give others their opinions and often this is what caused drama. Mandi Kremer, a dentist from Portland, Oregon, was on the show for only one night, but Lace called her a “bitch” to her face and told a group of other women “she

was terrible.” This is because Mandi took up too much of Ben’s time and Lace felt jealous. Throughout the first few episodes as well, all of the girls felt disrespected after interacting with Olivia. Emily Ferguson, the twin, establishes herself as an advocate for the other women against Olivia. Every time Emily gets time alone with Ben, instead of getting to know him, she comments on what other participants are doing wrong. For example, Emily tells Ben, "Olivia has fake tears she's a liar and she doesn't deserve the Rose.” Many of the girls would simply sit around and talk; while the cameras picked up their anger, it was not directed at anyone in person. The villains on the show were the exception to the rule and they had the most face-to-face attack encounters.

The most common complaints between participants center on how much time individuals are getting with Ben. Many of these complaints focus on other girls being jealous of the amount of time one girl got with Ben. The trend in each episode was that the girl complaining the most about her time being short was ultimately the one who was cut each episode. Other issues centered on one girl telling a group that she does not understand what Ben sees in a girl getting more time. Emily complains to a group of other women in the seventh episode that she does not understand what Ben “sees in fake Olivia.” The most common negative interaction throughout the season was one girl complaining to the others that individuals in the house were not “marriage material.” The women also use “marriage material” as validation for one girl over the others, like when Leah told Ben that she was the only girl “ready to be marriage material.” The negative interactions among the women can be classified as “catty” and “mean.” These moments, centered on the women’s ability to prove their worth to Ben, are born out of competition and insecurity. In interviews with past participants, it is apparent that producers often set up dramatic situations to promote aggression and anger between women. Caitlin

Stapleton noted that situations are set up to create drama and tension between participants often through giving out of false information. In setting up and creating negative interactions on the show, producers and editors create more examples of women as villains who are not afraid to hurt others.

As the episodes continue on, dramatic tension decreases and women start to focus more on their relationships with Ben, rather than Ben's relationship with other people. In later episodes, none of the women even interact with each other, let alone in a negative light. When Lauren and Jojo were told that Caila has been eliminated, for example, they did not appear phased at all by the news.

### **Gossip About Participants**

Throughout the season, there are many moments of gossip between participants. I noted any time one contestant said something about another contestant, but more specifically gossip trends can be reported as participants talking negatively about each other. On *The Bachelor*, gossip is a main source of entertainment. From information on how the show is created, we know that participants are largely confined to a single mansion, with no outside entertainment allowed. No television, movies, cellphones, magazines, apps, or games. What participants do to keep themselves occupied is gossip. Throughout the show, gossip is used to make participants feel lesser, to change Ben's opinion about women, or to call others out on their behavior. A common trend is that the most amount of gossip will come after a girl is rewarded with something that others are jealous of. For example, if a participant is given a rose or wins a challenge, there will be gossip about how she's weird, crazy, or undeserving.

Additionally, gossip is common if a woman steps out of line in her interaction with Ben, or if she does something that offends. This comes from jealousy and is often extremely trivial. The girls talk about how it isn't fair that Lace cuts Jubilee off in order to talk to Ben. In another instance, Jojo says that Emily is crazy because Emily cut Jojo and Ben off when they were talking, even though Emily already had time with Ben. Occasionally the gossip that happens is actually rude. Specifically, Olivia gossips that Amanda is a teen mom and the other girls get upset. This statement is actually offensive, whereas most of the others are trivial. Gossip among participants is generally about what contestants are doing wrong, but instead of actually bringing up issues the women just talk about each other behind their backs. This is certainly an existing stereotype in media, especially amongst young women. If the contestants talked to each other about issues in non-confrontational ways, there would not be any drama. Since gossip is a form of entertainment, it is quite possible that producers encourage the behavior and editors focus on it.

Starting in episode eight, I recorded no gossip happening at all. This surprised me, because I expected the other women to feel more animosity toward the remaining contestants. Perhaps, the lack of gossip in the remaining episodes illustrates the function of gossip as an entertainment tool for the contestants or as a way for producers to create more entertainment. Since the end of the season is naturally suspenseful as Ben chooses a winner, there is less need for gossip to fill time. In episodes 1-6 the other women would be mentioned by name, but beginning in episode seven, when there are less contestants, participants did not mention names, but would use phrasing such as "that girl." This became increasingly interesting in the final episodes when only Lauren, Caila and Jojo were left. Lauren would say, "there's another woman,

he might be in love with.” By not referring to the other girls by name, the contestants could make their position with Ben seem more legitimate

### **Patronizing Language**

When I analyzed patronizing language I looked at language that implied superiority of one contestant over another. I came up with this category because in my initial viewing of *The Bachelor*, I noticed that the predominant way the women spoke to each other was through cattiness. Additionally, I saw that certain individuals acted as if they were better than the others. For example, in the very first episode, Jojo gossips to the other women that Lace really needs all of the extra time she can get with Ben, because of her personality. Jojo even tells Lace, “no it’s good you had time with Ben, he needs to get to know you.” Implying through her sarcastic tone that Lace is not on the same level as the other women and that Ben should get to know her, only so he has a better appreciation for everyone else. Unfortunately, a great deal of the way I analyzed patronizing language was by examining tone quality and the way women spoke to one another through body language. This analysis is extremely difficult to generalize and describe; so many of the instances I noted as patronizing came from my perspective.

A trend throughout the show was that women would open up to each other about their insecurities, but the other woman they were talking to would respond in a patronizing way. This would leave the initial participant feelings worse than before and not encourage any mutually supportive situations. The result was that these conversations largely ceased after the first few episodes. For example, in the first episode Laura confides in Lace that she does not feel as pretty as the other women. Lace tells her, “it’s okay, you have big boobs.” While this could initially be seen as a compliment, Lace pinches fat on Laura’s arm, subtly implying that the reason she has

large breasts is because she is not as skinny as the other women. In this case, Lace patronizes Laura through her language and accompanying gestures.

Initially, my hypothesis was that the greatest amount of patronizing language would come from *The Bachelor* villains. I expected them to intimidate the other contestants with language and in return I thought the other contestants would not fight back. While Olivia did say a lot of patronizing and rude comments to the other contestants, almost all of the women were patronizing toward each other in at least one point throughout the season. The most common form of patronizing language discussed age. Older contestants looked down at younger contestants and accused them of being unready to marry Ben. For example, Amber, one of the older contestants at 28 years old, calls the younger girls “babies.” Contestants who were the same age also looked down on each other. Even though Olivia and Emily are the same age, Olivia tells cameras repeatedly that Emily is not old enough to be on the show. Olivia also calls Emily “immature” and tells viewers that she “needs a babysitter.” Caila also calls Emily immature, saying “I see Emily as a bright eyed-puppy dog and there’s an emotional maturity needed for marriage.” While originally I thought patronizing language would only come from the show’s villains, Caila, the “angel” of the season, also acted in a patronizing way. Caila’s decision to demean Emily came in a confessional where she discussed her own insecurities about being voted off the show. This alludes to the fact that, like other trends reported throughout the season, contestants are represented in less than ideal ways when they feel insecure.

Situations on the show were also set up purposefully to humiliate contestants, and the result was increased patronizing language. In the second episode, participants compete in a geography contest at Ben’s high school in which they have to place the state of Indiana on a map of the United States. None of the contestant teams complete this task correctly. Lauren H, a

kindergarten teacher, patronizes the losing contestants and says “wow I bet my kindergartners could do better than that.” The participants’ lack of knowledge on simple United State’s Geography was shameful. It also embarrassed them on national television and at the same time set up contestants who did not fail to be in a position of power. Intellect is a way that women on the show set themselves apart from other contestants and hold themselves in higher esteem.

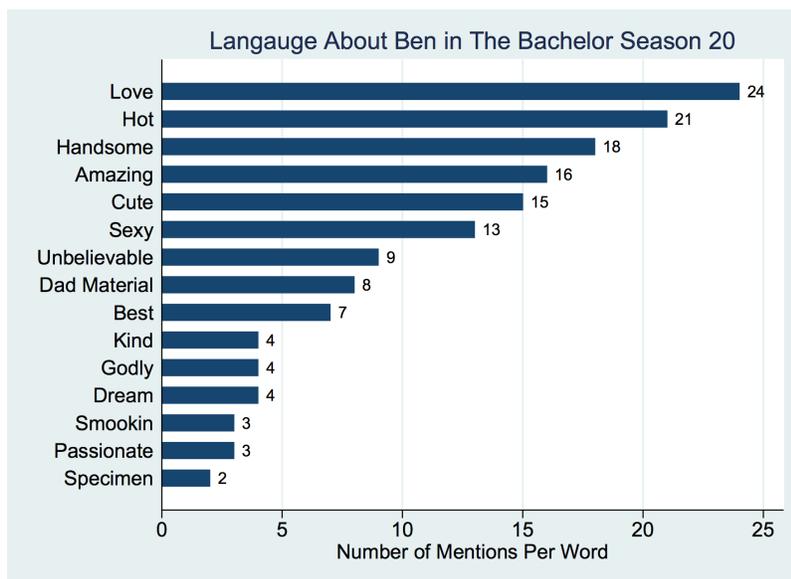
Olivia tries to prove to Ben that she’s smarter than the other women in the house. She tells him in front of the other women, “I’m different from the other girls. I brought books to read, I like to talk about politics and history and there’s no one here on that level.” Olivia may have brought books to the mansion, but that does not mean no one else there is intelligent. Through that comment, Olivia degrades the other women in the house and also contributes to the stereotype that the women on the show are idiots who care only for vapid activity. Producers are to blame here for creating situations that are purposefully aimed to humiliate contestants, adding to an environment built on shaming and ridiculing. If women are often thought of as stupid and trivial-minded in society, than the actions of producers on *The Bachelor* simply encourages these antiquated and untrue notions.

Looks are valued highly on the show, at the same time that they are used as a weapon against contestants. When Amanda looks really good for her solo date with Ben, and the other women cannot deny it, Becca rudely says, “well she should look good, she doesn’t have anything else.” In this case looks are appreciated, but Becca’s demeaning comment demonstrates that looks alone are not enough. Contestants also criticize each other for dressing in what they deem as inappropriate. Emily claims that Olivia implied that her romper made her look like a “slut.” Shaming one another through clothing choice contributes to already existing stereotypes of

women in the media. Because reality television is billed as “reality,” the way the women behave with one another contributes even more to existing stereotypes.

Natural tone of voice is also important to understanding how participants demean each other. Olivia uses the greatest amount of patronizing language throughout the season. This could be attributed to her particular tone of voice and it could also mean that she holds herself in higher esteem than the rest of the contestants. At the same time, the patronizing language on the show could also be a product of editing. A sentence taken out of context can be seen as patronizing even if it was intended in a nicer way. Additionally, it is important to remember that most patronizing language was said in confessional and was likely prompted by producers. Condescending language was strongest in the first few episodes of the season and then ceased by the eighth episode, similar to other trends in malicious behavior.

### Language to or About Ben



The women fall into patterns of talking about Ben in terms of his physical qualities.

Phrases I noted were “hottest man in America,” “specimen,” “he looks cute in his shorts,”

“Damn Ben is smookin.” The most common words used were “hot, amazing, cute, handsome, muscular, attractive, and gorgeous.” By discussing Ben’s attributes mostly in terms of his physical appearance, it seems like the only aspects they value are Ben’s looks. This contributes to stereotypes in America that women are vapid. Contestants also refer to Ben as “perfect, godlike, and greatest man.” Jojo says, “If you had a list he checks off everything, twice,” and Emily says, “I was put on this earth to love Ben.” Women are often incredulous that Ben chose them; for example Emily says, “I can’t believe Ben would take time to get to know me.” By putting Ben on a pedestal, they inflate his ego. They also make it seem as if Ben is so great that they do not deserve to have him. Through their language, Ben appears greater than he is and as if no one is worthy of him. This contributes to a culture in society where women are seen as lesser and unequal to men. It also implies that the only way women can be valued is if men find them worthy. Stereotypes of women in society and popular media teach women that they are unequal to men and must fight to be worthy of their attention.

When contestants are asked to leave the show, they also never blame Ben. They say only that they were undeserving of Ben’s love in the first place or that he did not take a chance to get to know them. This is inherently different from breakups in real relationships, where one partner will identify the other’s flaws once the relationship is through. The show’s women also reflect the exact qualities they’re looking for onto Ben. Amanda wants a father figure for her children, and subsequently only talks about how Ben would make a good father. Jojo wants a strong man she can be friends with, and always describes Ben as “her best friend” even though they’ve only known each other for six weeks.

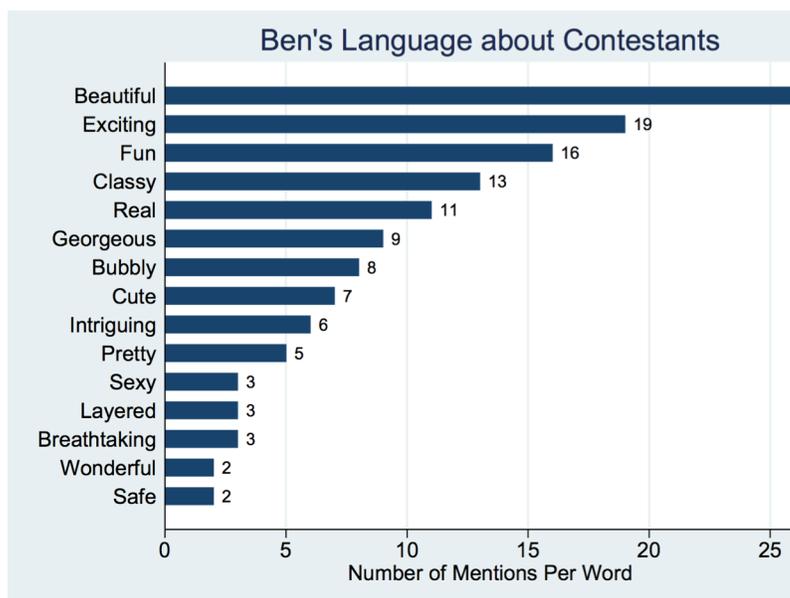
When the women talk directly to Ben their conversations seem generally forced and superficial, yet always positive. For example, Ben will ask the women what they are thinking and

for the most part they gush about what a wonderful time they're having with him. They also generally talk to him about superficial aspects of the date, such as how nice it is outside or what a great location it is. It's possible that these conversations are the only ones edited in, but in a show that is trying to engage with viewers, the assumption is that if there were something more interesting to include, viewers would see it.

The language that contestants use about Ben also sets them up for failure on national television. Caila says, "Ben is my person, he's the only one for me;" when it turns out that Caila is not the one for Ben, Caila is embarrassed on national television. When participants are cut, they often cite not having enough time for Ben to get to know them, but they never blame Ben's lack of effort for this issue. And contrary to my original hypothesis, as the season continues contestants still refer to Ben's physical qualities rather than who he is as a person. Even when they're eliminated, participants never say anything bad about Ben.

### Ben's Use of Language

My original hypothesis on Ben's use of language was that because he is dating so many women, he would talk generally about each woman in the first few episodes of the season and then get into specifics when he got to know them. What I found is that Ben



talks very generally about the women throughout the entire season. From the first episode, Ben

describes each woman by her outer appearance and uses the same general terms. Most often he says, “beautiful,” “pretty,” “gorgeous” and “classy,” when describing the women. Ben also falls into patterns of language that he uses throughout the season. He always refers to Caila as “bubbly,” Lauren as “classy,” and Jojo as “gorgeous.” It comes as no surprise that the women Ben has consistent language to describe are the ones who make it the furthest in the competition for his heart. Later on, Ben refers only to Lauren as his girlfriend, perhaps a sign that he later chooses her. Ben also describes both Caila and Amanda in the same exact way: he says they are each “beautiful and smart ladies.” These are both extremely general terms to describe someone you are dating and allude to Ben’s lack of intimate knowledge about these women. Ben also backtracks on language he once used as endearment as an excuse to sever ties with the women. At the beginning, for example, Ben sees Caila’s bubblyness as a draw, but then by the final episodes he criticizes her for being too bubbly and not real enough. Later on, when Ben is making his decision, he bases a lot more of his language about the women on whether they would make a good wife. In episode twelve and thirteen Ben says that Lauren is “somebody that looks like a wife.”

Ben is very respectful of the other women and never says anything outright bad about them. If a situation is overwhelming, Ben will say “wow that was crazy.” By being general, Ben avoids confrontation and resists offending any of the contestants or audience members. The result is an extremely bland bachelor in a sea of drama. Ben uses battle language before dates, like “it’s going to be 10 on 2” or “I’m going in unarmed to this one,” as if he is not actually excited to be on the dates. It also makes it seem like the women are forcing themselves on Ben and he has to push them off. Ben also seems to separate himself from his feelings through language so that situations appear out of his control. When deciding between Lauren and Jojo,

Ben says, “I didn't know my feelings would be as strong for the two women.” Ben’s use of language when he says “I didn’t know” makes it seem as if his feelings are separate from his actions and out of his control; this removes any blame that Ben might have of hurting these women.

Overall, Ben is extremely polite and respectful to the women. He always asks if they're enjoying their time, and what he can do to help alleviate their anxiety. If Ben doesn't understand or like a woman, he also avoids the topic. For example, he says, “Jubilee has a lot of layers and that’s really interesting.” The result is that while Ben comes off as compassionate and kind, the women around him look even more ridiculous, which adds to negative stereotypes of women as overly dramatic and difficult to deal with. Ben also pretends that it is also not his fault that he is in love with two women, even though everyone, including his family, is disgusted. He tries to play a victim of circumstance through blaming the “crazy situation” instead of his own actions. Perhaps Ben’s language and actions are edited to make him appear as if he is respectful of women, so that his behavior can be illustrated as superior over the language and behavior from the women on the show. If this were true, this would purposefully make the women on the show look subordinate and promote the image of the perfect bachelor worth the competition. Additionally, societal norms tell women they should be untrusting of the other women; perhaps Ben’s behavior implicitly suggests that viewers should root for him above all else and not be disappointed no matter whom he chooses.

### **Language about Appearance**

On the show, women’s description of appearance is harmful to the overall view of women in society. The women talk with each other about their appearance and use language

about appearance more than Ben does. The strongest language about appearance in the first episode is when Laura is wearing the same dress as Lauren B and asks if her dress makes her look fat. At another point, the women talk about how they are gaining weight sitting around drinking wine at the mansion. When Ben talks about the women's appearance he uses vague terms like "they're very beautiful" or "they're what I imagined this person should look like," but he doesn't talk about specific aspects of their physical appearance. Additionally, when the women talk about Ben they mention his appearance and often use crude language. Having Ben never talk about specific looks sets him up as a perfect gentleman.

Many of the women feel insecure about their own looks, especially in comparison to the other women. The kindergarten teacher from Michigan, Lauren H's biggest plot line comes when she is woken up at 4am and seen in zit cream and a retainer. When Lauren is cut from the show, she cries, "I quit my job to come here and I just don't know what to do because all the other girls are so much hotter than me." Before this, Lauren was always seen as happy and outgoing. Perhaps this moment is a product of editing, taken out of context to give a reason why Lauren H was eliminated. In general, only a few women compare themselves directly to others using names as specifics. Instead, most remain general, with comments such as "wow I'm not as tan as some of the other girls." When Ben talks to his mom about the remaining six women, he describes them only by what they look like.

While Ben refers to the women in subdued physical terms, the women do not refer to him that way, making the group as a whole seem less tasteful than him. Specifically, the women refer to Ben as "hot" and they talk about "how good he looks in his shorts" or "what a sexual being" he is. They also tell him specifics, such as how his hair looks good when it's pulled back. We know from interviews with contestants that producers urge them to share specifics on the

bachelor's physical appearance. As Danielle Imwalle noted, "producers would ask us, does he look good in that shirt and you were supposed to say, yeah he looked good in that shirt or they wouldn't leave you alone." The result is that women on the show end up seeming vapid and superficial, because they talk about why they like the bachelor only in terms of physical appearance. This contributes to stereotypes in society that women care only for looks.

### **Activities Women Participated In Outside the Mansion**

The purpose of this section is to look at whether or not activities outside of the mansion corresponded to more drama. It also examines whether or not activities outside of the mansion were used to stimulate more excitement among the women. From interviews with contestants it is clear that inside the mansion the women are devoid of sensory stimulation. They do not have access to books, movies, and television, among others. Consequently, when they're taken on trips to do activities outside the mansion, the women are even more excited and pleased, and more animated and excited women makes for better television. Because of the show's resources, the women get to take amazing trips and activities. They travel to Las Vegas, Mexico City, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Indiana, Chicago, Downtown Los Angeles; they go to the Bahamas to swim with pigs. When the women do get to go on trips and excursions they also always thank Ben as if he planned the trip for them and not the producers of the show. Additionally, activities the women participate in are often only possible because of the show's connections: Jojo and Ben get a private evening at Wrigley Field, for example, and three different women ride in a helicopter.

## Character Attitude and Changes

From my experience interviewing these women I truly think that every single woman changes in the course of being on *The Bachelor*. There's no way that one goes through that experience without realizing something about themselves and changing. Because the show is only so many hours long, as viewers we don't see these character changes. Additionally, it is difficult to know whether personal changes are a result of editing. Lace appears as a villain on the show until she leaves for personal reasons. When she returns for the "women tell all," portion of the show, Lace says she had a lot of personal growth from her time away on the show. Yet when she returns to "Bachelor in Paradise" she is still the same Lace.

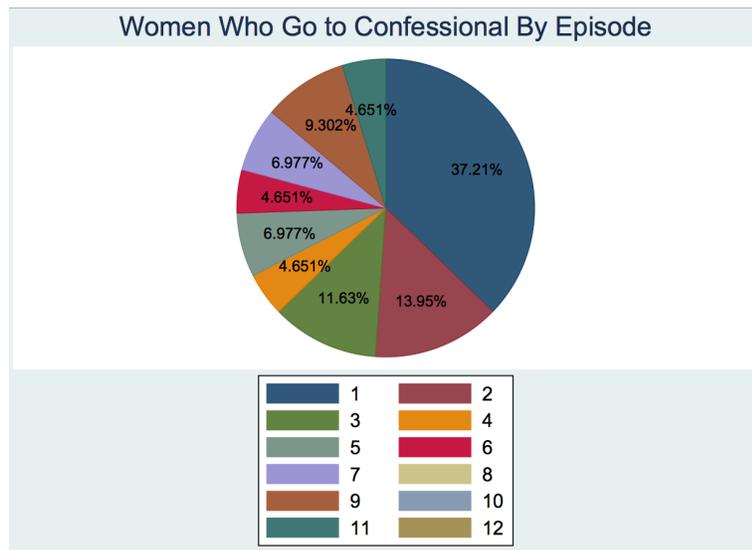
Sometimes character changes happen when we see characters for first time. Leah goes from being pretty quiet and unknown until her incident with Lauren B. Perhaps this negative character change was a result of editing, because she was finally in a dramatic moment. In contrast, some women seem to grow as they spend more time on the show, which could also just be a product of audiences getting to know them. Amanda has more personality when we see her in context with her kids, but this could always be the way she is, we just do not see her in context. After episode nine, Amanda starts to see Ben as a potential father figure and she really opens up with him. As a general pattern women blend into the crowd and then as they advance further in the competition, their personalities are more transparent. Whether or not this is an impact of editing or simply the way the show works is unclear.

A pattern on *The Bachelor* has also developed where after each woman is cut, she is forced to reflect on her experience in the limo on the way home. Danielle Imwalle describes in her interview the experience of not wanting to say anything, but being forced to before she could go home. This is where many character changes occur: a pattern develops where women say they

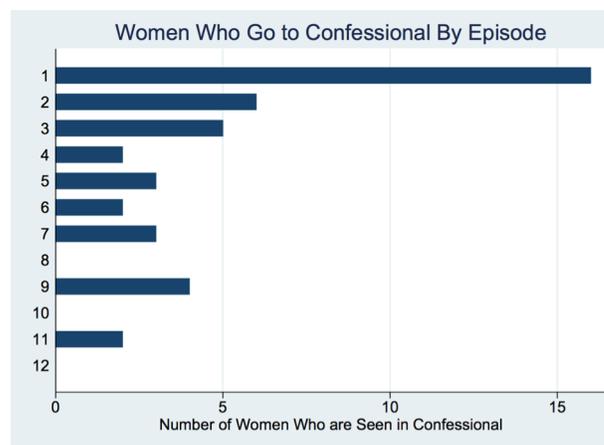
now feel “unlovable,” whereas before each woman felt hopeful that she could find love. Perhaps these women do not actually feel unlovable, but there’s a great deal happening in the moment that compels them to respond in this way. It’s hard to come up with anything else to say when producers are asking you directly after you’ve been eliminated, “do you feel unlovable?”

One last aspect is that as women got closer to winning the competition they all mention that, “I can’t imagine my life without Ben.” This may be true, but it also represents a shift in character. The women go from being their own independent candidates to not seeing their lives without Ben. This sense of reliance on one man to be happy is built into the show. Women want Ben, but they also want to win. The result is that this increases negative stereotypes in society about women’s reliance on men for happiness and gratification. When women do eventually lose the competition, they come back in “After the Final Rose” and reflect that in reality they moved on and their overall sense of worth was not reliant on Ben. As Chelsea Wanstrath said about season eight, “it was the easiest breakup I’ve ever dealt with.” Character attitudes and changes make these women seem more real to viewers. Unfortunately, this also embeds their behavior further into stereotypes. If we did not see them as real people with attitudes and changes, we would not believe their stereotypical behavior as real behavior in society.

## Number of Times To Confessional



From the very beginning of my research, I thought that looking at the number of times contestants went to confessional would be a really interesting way to study character attitudes and editing. The confessional creates a situation where viewers tell cameras and producers what they're thinking. The confessional functions as a way for viewers to understand what participants are really thinking and as an opportunity for producers to directly ask participants questions that they want to hear and know will cause the most drama. Confessional also helps audiences know more about the editing process. Viewers can tell when confessional footage from weeks past is reused because the contestants will be wearing the same clothing in the footage. Unfortunately my analysis on how confessional is edited and produced was limited due to my resources, so my analysis of the confessional is hypothetical.



Throughout my viewing experience, I noticed that confessional was used as an opportunity for the camera crew to mock the women. For example, Corinne Olympios, the star of season 21 of *The Bachelor*, was often mocked in confessional for talking about sexual acts and at one point was even filmed in confessional picking her nose. Confessional was also used to help contestants open up. Through confessional producers can also control the contestants, because they have to respond to questions. Chelsea Wanstrath explained in her interview that she learned to look the other way during confessional so that the footage was unusable. Still, throughout the season confessional was used to mock contestants. For example, a woman would be seen in confessional talking about how she's good at sports and while she was talking voiceover would be used to show that same woman failing at a sporting activity. Editing and confessional was a way the camera illustrated truth on the show and caught contestants in lies. Leah tells confessional that she did not lie about Lauren B to Ben, yet at the same time the confessional footage of Leah saying this is edited back and forth between her telling Ben the exact statement she's trying to cover up.

Confessional was also used as a way the women shared their feelings. The girls are stuck at a house with no connection to the outside world and none of their friends with them. Their only way to vent frustration and emotion is to the cameras. The result is that women end up saying catty and mean things to the camera that get edited into the show. What they say may be confidential in the moment, only to be shared months later with the rest of America. Complaints at confessional were at other times simply manifestations of other issues the women were having on the show. Many women went to confessional to complain about not having time with Ben. The only difference is that in confessional they weren't afraid to talk about how their lack of time with Ben made them feel insecure. In confessional, girls often gushed about how they felt

about Ben, which was used as voiceover in other episodes. After episode nine, there's no formal confessional. Confessional is done outside in a less formal way for the remaining characters. Maybe this is because previously confessional was used as a way to fill time, and in the remaining episodes the story is dramatic enough without confessional. Producers use confessional as a direct way they can set up situations, and they likely manipulate what contestants say through the way they ask questions. Editors also manipulate voice over from confessional to prove issues about characters in other parts of the show.

### **Mutually Supportive Situations**

Bottom line: there weren't very many and this is exactly what I expected. I also noted a difference between verbally supportive situations and physically supportive situations. In the first few episodes, I often noted supportive situations shown through a hug or a smile. This was more common than verbally supportive situations, which were rarely shown. After the first few episodes, there were few verbally supportive situations. Perhaps this is because there was more animosity between contestants as competition for Ben became fiercer. The other possibility is that supportive situations were largely cut from the show unless they provided high drama. From interviews with contestants it is clear that cameras film close to twenty-four hours a day, but only an hour and a half episode is created from that footage every week. Supportive situations could occur between contestants that are intimate, but not exciting. What sells to viewers is not girls being nice to one another, but instead them being ruthless and mean.

As I suspected, the women were more supportive and nicer to one another when they felt comfortable about their position with Ben. When they started to feel worried, they only acted in their own interests, at least in what was illustrated on screen. From the beginning Lacey says "I

came here for Ben and nothing else matters.” Contestants were also more supportive when they teamed up against a single villain. The most supportive situation I observed in the show was when Jojo and Emily rallied around Lauren B after her incident with Leah. Throughout the season I only saw one woman ask for help, and that was when Amanda asked the others to help her get ready for a date with Ben and they said “no.” Only when contestants were at the point of breaking did the others reach out with basic human compassion: Jubilee has a complete meltdown before being eliminated, and Lauren H helps her through it. After Becca returns from a date distraught, Jojo listens to her feelings. In these situations, however, the upset women knew they would be eliminated and so the other contestants had an easier time being compassionate, because they no longer viewed the women as competition. Overall, the lack of supportive situations and compassion seen among contestants contributes to stereotypes that women are malicious and unsupportive of one another. It also rewards this bad behavior, because the woman left at the end, seen as unsupportive of others all along, is the one who gets the “perfect” guy.

### **Women Tell All**

Each season there is a special episode before the finale called “Women Tell All.” This episode is filmed live and then airs months later when the season premieres as a whole. In this episode, *The Bachelor* host Chris Harrison invites all of the contestants back to sit around and rehash the drama of the season. Ben is present at the end of this episode and the women have the opportunity to ask him questions about the drama that unfolded. As the women discuss past incidences, clips are shown confirming or denying drama. Often, this is the first time contestants are bearing witness to the footage. This episode was prime for my research, because it is specifically aimed at covering the drama of the season and showing how women treat each other

and react to issues. The episode often makes the women look terrible: it portrays them as mean, viscous, catty, and conforms to media stereotypes that women are petty and spiteful for still caring about the same drama weeks later.

As part of the show, Chris Harrison sits down with the villains, Lace, Jubilee and Olivia, to ask them about their experience. Each one comes off as genuine, sympathetic, and remorseful, very different from the impression they created during the rest of the season. After Chris Harrison interviews them, the women are attacked and berated by the other contestants who accuse them of lying and manipulating audiences into thinking they have changed. The other women bring up trivial issues from weeks ago. The situation is uncomfortable; no one likes being attacked and I couldn't help but feel sorry for the villains. Their apologies and behavior in "Women Tell All" made it seem like they were victims of circumstance and manipulated by editing, producers, and the situation to behave in those ways. Olivia says remorsefully, "if there was a guide to doing this show and making 28 other women happy I would have read it, but there isn't and I was out of my element and I apologize for my behavior." The other explanation is that the women simply pretended to reform so viewers could be more sympathetic to their cause. It seemed like all the women wanted to be involved in the drama, even contestants who were eliminated the first night and likely had little interaction with the villains.

There were no supportive situations on this episode of the show. A few of the girls smiled and laughed with each other when they were making fun of someone else. This follows the overall theme of supportive situations throughout the season. My original hypothesis was that the women were unsupportive to one another because they were competing. As it turns out, women were unsupportive to each other even when they had nothing to lose. Following my initial prediction, the women who made it the furthest in the show played very background roles in the

drama. During the “women tell all” episode, there were almost no instances of drama that involved Lauren or Jojo, apart from the situation with Leah that Lauren was the victim of. This also reflects the trend of women I interviewed. Possibly, the women who are not involved in drama seem more worthy to Ben and this is why he selects them; or, the lack of drama they cause could be a reflection of how secure they feel in their own position on the show.

The “Women Tell All” episode creates an unusual situation. In no other context would a man ever be expected to confront twenty-six of his ex girlfriends all at once. When Ben sits down with Caila to rehash the details of their relationship only weeks after it ended, he is professional and distant, formal and reserved. The emotion in Caila’s voice is there, but the formality of Ben’s demeanor calls attention to the fact that this is a television show. Ben is quite possibly acting, and there’s no way to know if this relationship was ever truly real. The majority of relationships on *The Bachelor* end up disintegrating after the show is over once the situation that caused two people to fall in love is gone. With no cameras, competition, or audience, two strangers are left to create a completely new relationship. Two years later, Ben and Lauren have yet to get married. The “women tell all” episode reminded me that this show is set up and that it is impossible to tell the real from the fake.

“The Women Tell All” episode gives viewers the opportunity to hear about the girls’ experiences unfiltered and unedited. Because of their contracts, however, they can’t talk about what is actually wrong with the program. Instead, they blame interpersonal issues and not the show itself for the way they behaved. This puts more of the blame and stereotypes on the women, and excuses the format of the show.

## General notes

Throughout my process creating and completing a content analysis for season twenty of *The Bachelor*, I wrote down general notes about the experience. The start of this project marked my first time watching *The Bachelor*, so this paragraph also comprises my initial thoughts on the show itself. The more I watch the show, the less I understand Ben's appeal. He seems like a nice man and is very attractive, but he's twenty-eight years old and has never been in a meaningful relationship before. Additionally, while Ben expects the women to open up about their past relationships and deepest secrets, he never does the same. Ben also takes the women back to his high school where he says he had the happiest memories of his life. It is important to note that all of the women and Ben especially have ulterior motives for wanting to go on the show. Success on *The Bachelor* can change lives. The bachelor can go on to appear on other shows like *Dancing With the Stars*, women who make it far can get promotional deals on social media, attention for modeling and acting, the possibilities are actually endless. When Ben goes on the show he does not have a job, and Vanessa, who recently won season twenty-one of the show, was a failed actress before signing on. Throughout my experience watching, I was really interested in the psychology behind who *The Bachelor* is and why real people put themselves in this situation, since they must know beforehand what the show is all about.

Throughout watching *The Bachelor*, I also noticed that women are not rewarded and are even penalized for being different. In the first few episodes, there's a Russian woman named Shushannah who is a mathematician. Shushannah is rarely shown and when she is, her understanding of American culture is mocked. In one scene, the girls say it smells like cabbage in the house; the cameras cut to Shushannah denying that she ate the cabbage, and then again to

Shushannah in confessional talking about how much she misses eating cabbage, implying that Shushannah is the reason that the house smells and that cabbage is a very strange thing to eat.

The girls also refer to Ben as their collective boyfriend. The hometown dates illustrate how ridiculous the whole situation is, when the girl's parents do not believe that she's in love with Ben, and comment on how he is in other serious relationships. The girls also come to family for advice and none of their mothers, older sisters, or friends can give them any, since the situation is so unfamiliar. Caila's dad even refers to Ben as having "microwave fame."

When there are fewer women, the entire show becomes less of a game and instead a weird situation where three girls are intimately dating one man. In the real world, a guy will loosely date a number of women, but the situation is stranger as each relationship becomes more intimate. In the actual season we only see the final few go on a solo dates, yet past participants say in interviews that they actually do spend more time with *The Bachelor* than is initially shown. Additionally, Lauren Bushnell who eventually wins *The Bachelor* seems to stay behind the scenes of the entire season. She is not involved in any of the house drama, rarely a dramatic force in episodes, and is often just not seen on screen unless she is talking to Ben. This suggests that perhaps the winner of *The Bachelor* is either edited in a better light or perhaps wins *The Bachelor* because they get along well with others. My last thought centers on why America likes this show and if it would be as popular if the contestants weren't as attractive. Is America vain enough that this is a real cause for entertainment?

### **Content Analysis Conclusion**

When I first set out to create a content analysis studying female stereotypes on *The Bachelor*, I hoped I would be able to get a better understanding of how editing and producer

involvement directly contributes to negative portrayals on the show. Unfortunately, without sitting in an editing studio with a producer going over the footage or being on set with the contestants, I have no real way to know how much of the representation of women is due to editing and what is due to women's actual behavior on the show. Additionally, my process creating and conducting the content analysis led me to question whether the results I found would be different with a different bachelor on a different season, or even with a different person coding. In a larger study with more resources, I would urge coding for multiple seasons of *The Bachelor* to gather more results.

One general piece of commentary that I did not have a section for but wanted to discuss was the rose ceremony, which happens at the end of every episode. At the beginning of each rose ceremony the women were smiling and confident, yet as more people were chosen the camera showed the crestfallen faces of those who knew they would be eliminated. The rose ceremony has absolutely no purpose in the show other than to cause drama and generate viewer suspense. The rose ceremony provides a definitive ranking of each woman for the week and heightens the competitive, game-like nature of the show. I wish I had also included a section on physical intimacy with Ben. Throughout the show, I anecdotally noticed that kisses with Ben were used as a meter for success in the competition, yet at the same time physical intimacy was not established until later with Jojo, who was the second runner up. Due to my resources, I did not have a complex way to analyze the data or inter-coder reliability.

Producers manipulate contestants by creating situations, lying to them to induce drama, and feeding them lines in confessional. Editors alter footage to create scenes, and they use voiceovers and editing to ridicule contestants. The result is an entertaining program that keeps viewers engaged. The women's behavior on the show also contributes to negative existing

stereotypes about women in society. Women on the show are seen mocking each other, lying, gossiping, patronizing each other, fighting over petty issues, angering one another on purpose, name calling, mocking each other's appearances, and more. This happens in private situations, confessionals, and activities outside the mansion. The behavior largely stops after most contestants are eliminated, but it's not replaced with supportive situations. Despite all this, the women are still friends at points and gain strong relationships afterward, which we only see in magazines and social media. This may allude to the fact that producers and editors create more drama than individuals. Contestants' language about Ben proves they hold him in high esteem, in turn his language is unspecific and generally degrading since it focuses only on outer appearance. Much of the women's behavior is linked to existing stereotypes in society. Women as petty, man-pleasing, mean, and bitchy. At the same time, producers can only contribute to this behavior, and in the end they cannot make a woman yell at another. Ultimately, there's no way to know the truth.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

America first experienced reality television in the 1970s with a look into the lives of the Loud family in Southern California; however, reality television looks very different than it did nearly fifty years ago. Reality television offers over hundreds of different programs for viewers to choose from including competition shows, life stories, exposition, and reality dramas. Reality television thrives on repeating formats and inserting different character perspectives and drama. It also thrives on the culture of viewership that surrounds each program. Much of the appeal of reality television also lies in the fact that viewers relate to real people on screen. They are enticed by the idea of celebrity and the notion that they could one day be on screen too. Apart from its popularity, examining the history of reality television demonstrates that it thrives due to cheap production norms. Specifically, reality television does not pay for actors or sets, and the shows use relatively cheaper production tools.

Throughout media history, women have been portrayed through stereotypes. These stereotypes include women as absent mothers, devious housewives, or as promiscuous and often submissive to men. While reality television has been around for fifty years, shows created within the last five years represent women predominantly through stereotypes. Stereotypes in reality television impact women no matter their age, ethnicity, or social class, and the stereotypes differ dramatically. For example, the wealthy women in “The Real Housewives” genre are illustrated as terrible mothers who shop too often and have no regard for domestic activity. In contrast, poor women in shows such as “Honey Boo Boo” and “Buckwild” are labeled as unladylike, uncultured, and classless. In contrast, *The Bachelor*, which targets younger women, portrays women in fights with one another over the bachelor. The show also encourages sensual behavior and women with the most sex appeal, yet at the same time women call each other out for being

promiscuous. This perhaps illustrates a combination of jealousy and also the way women police each other's sexuality. Crucial to the concept of reality television is the opportunity it provides for women to portray themselves in a way they choose. This is because in theory, reality programming does not follow a script and women can create a narrative as they see fit. This becomes problematic, however, when producers set up events, cause conflict between women through gossip, and create situations to cause drama. Additionally, information from individuals in the industry demonstrates that through editing, situations can be altered to change how women are portrayed. For example, Caitlin Stapleton, a producer of *The Bachelor*, noted that while on set she often gave information to participants about what others were saying that was false. She also admitted that producers create situations with individuals they know will cause drama in order to keep viewers interested. Albert Wang, a production assistant at Glass Entertainment group, said that producers sit down with editors and tell them what sound bites to use and which scenes to cut. Editors will take one sound bite from an interaction and pair it with a sound bite from a different moment to make it look like the same scene. This does not go unnoticed by participants. For example, in their interviews Danielle Imwalle and Robyn Dixon noted moments on set and watching their shows afterward where they detected these practices. Additionally, much of what my research shows is that if women try to avoid being manipulated by producers and editing, usually through participating minimally in on-screen activities, they are never seen and completely forgotten.

Reality programs also use stereotypes to create drama and keep viewers entertained. Since reality television re-uses the same format for most programs, the genre relies on stereotypes and dramatic instances to create drama and keep viewers engaged. The creation of reality television relies on producers and editors to create drama through the practices of editing

and general producer involvement. While the creation of reality television is highly manipulated, most viewers remain unaware of these practices. I first became aware of this phenomenon through the anecdotal practice of watching *The Bachelor* with my friends and discussing the research I had found on how reality television is made. My friends, college- educated women, were shocked to hear about the manipulation of reality that takes place behind the scenes of the program we watched week after week. These reactions are also supported in the literature on viewer trends in reality television. For example, Steven Reiss' 2004 study "Why People Watch Reality TV" relays the lack of knowledge on the fictitious elements in reality television that most viewers admit to. The result is the immediate need for increased media literacy, so that viewers can understand the practices in how reality television is created.

Throughout my research, anecdotal evidence pointed to the impact stereotypes in reality television have on women's mental health and specifically their view of their own self-worth. My findings also reflect greater trends in how female viewers react to biased media and how they view themselves as a result. Psychologist Stanley Milgram once reflected on the similarity between good experiments and good drama, both of which, he asserts, "embody verities." Further, psychologist Ed Wingenbach says that if "social scientists have neither the funds nor authority for such social experiments, fortunately, CBS does" (Couldry, Nick). Determining whether reality television is a genre of popular entertainment or a social experiment lies in the impact on the participant. The impact of reality television on the participant is studied very little, mostly due to access to past participants; however, when I interviewed female participants, all of them wanted to discuss the impact being on the show had on their mental health. Additionally, in the short history of *The Bachelor*, three participants have committed suicide after participating: Gia Allemande, Julien Hug, and most recently, Alexa McAllister. I am not a psychologist and

thus not equipped to conduct psychological research on women's health after the show. I can, however, report traumatic mental experiences that participants reported in the interviews I conducted. In the future, trained psychologists could conduct studies on the psychological effects of participating in a reality program.

Through my interviews with past participants, specifically those who participated in a show on "The Bachelor Franchise," I have studied some of the effects of participating in a reality television program. While I was limited in my resources to interview these participants, in future studies I would recommend trained psychologists interview a large number of female participants. This is because the effect on women's mental health is a recognized phenomenon.

Season four Bachelorette winner Jesse Csincsak spoke out to *Life and Style Magazine* last year after the suicide of past *Bachelor* participant Alexa McAllister. Csincsak argued that McAllister's appearance on *The Bachelor* is what ultimately led to her suicide. Bachelor Nation members Andi Dorfman, Sean Lowe, Catherine Giudici, Arie Luyendyk Jr, Chris Bukowski, and Kathryn Sherlock have all acknowledged to *Life & Style* that there was a psychiatrist or psychologist on set during filming. They also noted that the procedure was to spend time with the professional both before they were cast and if they were told to leave the show. "They have you write down your fears and if you say you are afraid of heights, they make sure they put you on the top of a skyscraper — that's what makes good TV... Their key is manipulation, and their knowledge of all your fears is power," said Jessie in an interview with *Life & Style*. Experiences on *The Bachelor* have been negative for other participants; Chris Bukowski, who appeared on several *Bachelor* shows, became addicted to anxiety medication to deal with his own post-series stress, and many women who appear on *The Bachelor* report being reliant on alcohol to get through the day because they are so used to drinking on set. "It is not

about finding love, it is about embarrassing the hell out of each and every contestant for ratings and money. It ruins people's lives. I'm afraid this won't be the last suicide," said Csinscak to *Life and Style*.

Unlike other reality show participants, contestants of *The Bachelor* franchise are not famous before going on the show, and while they experience fame afterward, it is proportionally less than celebrities on scripted programs. Additionally, unlike other participants, individuals in *The Bachelor* franchise are generally expected to return to their regular lives after the show is over. Most of the participants who experience criticism after the show are women, which is an important distinction. With the advent of social media, it has become harder for participants to deal with their relative fame after the show. Bachelor season 12 runner-up Chelsea Wanstrath talked specifically about her experience returning to normal life after participating in *The Bachelor* in 2008. She said,

"After a while I got hired back into my industry, but I was really judged and wasn't taken seriously. It was really hard for me to have credibility. For a lot of these women they don't have jobs or they're hairstylists or waitresses and stuff and for them it helps them to be notorious, but for me, it was hard because I was part of a real industry in the sciences where I needed to be respected. I also drank too much after the show, because I was so used to doing nothing all-day and drinking. At the time of the show, I was dating someone else, but he was watching the show and it was too weird for him."

For participant Tierra LiCausi, one of the biggest *Bachelor* villains from season seventeen in 2013, the public shame and humiliation were the worst part of the return to normal life. In a phone interview LiCausi explained, "I couldn't even walk outside my apartment without being recognized. It always felt like people were staring at me and laughing at me. No one actually knew me, but they thought of me as a bitch, because of a few scenes on television that were edited out of context and produced a lot. I'm not really like that, plus I had had a lot to drink." When asked about the effect of social media and the popularity of the show, LiCausi explained,

“everyone was finding these video snippets of me and posting them and I was circulating around the Internet; a lot of people tweeted and posted about me.” LiCausi’s appearance as a villain on *The Bachelor* came after the advent of social media and a rise in popularity for the show. The result was that unlike Wanstrath, LiCausi became notorious as a result of social media.

The impact of the show on participants can also be harmful to the way participants view themselves and their own worth, as seen anecdotally in the interviews I conducted. LiCausi said, “because everyone, literally everyone saw me as an idiot and a crazy girl and a villain, I started wondering if that’s what I was. It’s hard to ignore something about yourself that America sees... It’s been really hard to get over that.” In addition, participant Sarah Herron from season seventeen, who wasn’t even heavily mocked, said, “it’s really hard to figure yourself out after the show, you’re so removed. Watching the show is really tough too, think of how critical you are when you look at a picture of yourself and now imagine that ten times over when you watch yourself on a television show that all of America is watching. It’s hard not to be extremely critical of everything you do and how you look. Plus you’re already critical of why you didn’t win and that is really hard.”

The emotional impact of participating in reality television can also more severe for women who are judged harshly based on their physical appearance. Former Bachelorette Andi Dorfman, who was unavailable for interview, was criticized severely in online forums for her non-stereotypical looks and her weight (Enstars). While the majority of bachelorettes are skinny and blonde, Dorfman was full bodied, with darker features and hair. Additionally, Dorfman was criticized online for looking “too Jewish.” Many other participants on *The Bachelor* also receive criticism for their looks. In season 20, Bachelor Ben Higgins was scolded for choosing Lauren over Jojo, because fans found Jojo more attractive. In the world of reality television where

cameras show only certain aspects of participants, looks are valued far above personality.

I anecdotally interviewed my friends on the impact of watching *The Bachelor*. The group of girls I watch the show with are five seniors studying at Tufts. My friend Stephanie Traver, a senior majoring in sociology and psychology at Tufts, spoke to me about her experience as a viewer, "I've been watching *The Bachelor* for a number of years, it started off as a giant joke for me, but I've grown to secretly love watching it." When asked how the show affects her own self-worth, Traver noted, "While I would never actually want to be on the show myself, it does impact how I look at myself. I wonder if I'd be pretty enough to even make it and how I would behave. I wonder if I would be mean to other people." Another friend, Amanda Danielson, a senior majoring in psychology, noted, "I think the show sort of affects me, because I hate the way some of the participants treat each other and how they talk about the guy and I wonder why society expects women to behave like that and if it's how most women behave and we just don't know those types of people..." Senior Lucy Cronin-Golomb also noted that "it just makes me feel bad that women are viewed this way and it makes me worried for how I'll be viewed as a woman once I graduate." I can only report anecdotally on how my friends reacted to watching the show; however, their feelings on the program as well as my own feelings of negativity demonstrate that college educated liberal women are impacted by the show. This impact alone is not enough to discourage viewership.

The most interesting information I learned from my literature review was on the different stereotypes of women in reality television. This, compounded with information learned on how reality television is created and edited, supports my original hypothesis--specifically, that drama is created in reality television through a negative portrayal of women, and that producers and editors encourage and create this narrative to engage viewers. Another interesting aspect of

reality television I did not initially intend to research but found trends in is the appeal of reality programs and the creation of the celebrity. This appeal relates both to why people want to participate in programs in the first place and why viewers tune in week after week. The best resource I had was Laura Grindstaff's "Reality TV and the Production of 'Ordinary Celebrity: Notes from the Field'" published in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. Grindstaff studied the impact of reality television when a show for MTV called *Sorority Life* began filming at Berkeley. Grindstaff's study epitomizes how reality television should be analyzed, because she interviews participants as they are filming the show and after the show airs. She also combines information on the sociological impact of reality television. Grindstaff got lucky in her access to these students because of her connection to the university and the network's choice to film at Berkeley. *The Bachelor* has established itself as a mainstay in television, but when we assess reality television we cannot do so without also looking at how editing and producer involvement factor into its creation. *The Bachelor* has been labeled as reality, yet research proves that the show is far from it. Producer involvement and editing make the situations on the show and the activities unreal. Through interviews with individuals in the industry, there is evidence that scenes are pre-written and set up by producers.

My content analysis demonstrates the end result of how stereotypes, producer involvement, and editing created drama and tension throughout *The Bachelor*. In my content analysis I looked at dramatic tension, negative interactions with other participants, gossip about participants, patronizing language, language to or about Ben, language about activities women participated outside the mansion, number of times to confessional, character attitude and changes, mutually supportive situations, and attitudes on appearance. *The Bachelor* is important because the show has a recurring cast of young women competing for male attention. Through

examining these categories over the course of twelve episodes, I was able to categorize stereotypes and compare research on editing and producer involvement in the context of the show. For example, studying the process of “going to confessional” added a new perspective to the research I had already done on how editing could be used to create drama. Through my content analysis I was able to study the creation of reality television more closely with the final product that viewers see. Additionally, the categories in my content analysis reflect larger issues in how women are portrayed in reality television.

When watching episodes of *The Bachelor* for my content analysis, I also noticed common narrative themes in each episode. For example five-act structure: including conflict, rising action, climax in drama and eventually a resolution at the end of each episode. I speculate that this is a result of editing as well as producers knowledge on exactly how to create every episode and what footage needs to be gathered. I did not have the resources to accurately analyze each episode in terms of narrative or compare it to existing structures or literature. However, the trend is important to note and also further demonstrates the role of editing and producer involvement in creating reality television that mirror existing narratives in literature, film, television, and theatre.

Throughout this process I wondered who was watching reality programs. In 2017, we are in a “golden age” of television with so many shows available 24/7 on streaming sites. Watching a show “because it’s on” is a thing of the past. Additionally, the last five years have seen more art television than ever before with fancy sets, costumes, design elements, and most importantly trained, professional actors. The question is, with only so many hours in the day to view television, why do viewers choose reality programs? Crucial to the draw of reality television is the idea that reality stars are just like us, and anyone viewing could one day appear on a show. Additionally, reality television is promoted as “reality” and viewers are drawn to the real lives

they see on screen. There's also the community aspect of viewership and the following that certain shows create. There's a whole community of Bachelor Nation viewers. Host Chris Harrison even interviews fans and illustrates the highlights the strong fan community. From my own experience watching *The Bachelor* with my friends, I have come to realize that most of the pleasure comes from the communal act of watching the program together. Communal viewership for my friends and I involved eating and chatting while we watched the show and the ritual of watching became more about community than content. As for why the rest of America watches, my research could not determine.

What does my research mean for the future of reality television and its viewers? Women have always been portrayed poorly in the media, through many of the stereotypes mentioned above. We live in a world where women's salaries are lower than their male counterparts, where women are degraded and catcalled in everyday life, and where a woman still cannot be elected president. In the television industry, few women have made their own mark. Sure, there are television superstars like Lena Dunham, Shonda Rhimes, and Mindy Kaling, but it is not enough. The predominant fact is that there are a lot of show runners and actors on television and most of them are male. Women are portrayed poorly in the media, often through stereotypes, but there is also just a simple lack of strong female characters on television.

Women's representation may of course change as women take on greater roles in the media. If there are more women creating television perhaps they won't rely so much on stereotypes. Yet in a lot of ways this doesn't hold true for shows such as *The Bachelor*. Despite having predominantly female producers, women are still portrayed inaccurately and through stereotypes on the show. Even female producers working in television are driven to paint other women poorly, because they want to give viewers the dramatic themes they desire. This is best

demonstrated in the fictionalized program *Unreal*. Producer Rachel feels bad for some of the ways she manipulates the female contestants, yet at the same time she's driven by ratings and the need to save the show and her own job. While more female creators might improve the negative portrayal of women, nothing will change unless the view of women in society changes. When women are seen as equal to men and not just as sexual objects, wives, and mothers, then perhaps viewers will stop finding female stereotypes entertaining. Unfortunately, I do not predict this systematic change as coming anytime soon, especially given our current president, a former reality television star himself. With the rise of streaming sites and the dawn of the golden age of television, it is surprising that reality programming still captivates audiences over other programs. There's no way to predict the future of reality television, yet if its history is any indication, the same formulas will continue to be successful. In order to stay relevant, I hope reality television will better understand the composition of its audience. I hypothesize that eventually reality television will succumb to competition from art television and will have to rebrand itself in some way. Perhaps when it rebrands, reality programs will change the way women are depicted. What this means is beyond the scope of this thesis, but draws into question the creation of reality television and the meaning of viewership.

My original research question dealt with how women are portrayed in reality television and if producer involvement and editing were used to create drama. When I started my research process I was also curious to see if producers were actively involved in setting up content and in what ways content was edited to create more drama. Most importantly, I was interested in how participants felt about their experiences and whether viewers noticed the highly edited nature of the program offerings. While I did not conduct a trained analysis of viewership, my anecdotal experience discussing the show with my friends demonstrated that even highly educated viewers

of film and media do not recognize that they're viewing a manipulated version of real life. Participants do feel manipulated after the show is over, and the effect of this manipulation can have a permanent impact on their lives. Additionally, the history of reality television demonstrates that this manipulation heightens drama and is good for viewer engagement. This is especially important because reality programs are formulaic and need to be altered to hold viewers' attention. The results also prove that the stereotypes seen most commonly in the literature review are reflective of current societal practices. This fits into the larger scope of media culture in society today. Women are unequal in society, and as such their presence is used as entertainment. Reality shows aren't creating new stereotypes in their representation of women, they're simply capitalizing on views of women which already exist. What this means for television is that people enjoy entertainment value no matter the cost. Viewers even enjoy entertainment when the production value is lower than other program alternatives.

When I first began my research, my hypothesis was that production norms alter women's representation in reality television. This has an impact both on the past participants of the programs as well as viewers. I also speculated, based on my own personal experience watching reality programs, that few recognize the misleading nature of reality television. Through my research on scholarly literature and my interviews with past participants and individuals in the industry, I've realized that this phenomenon is not so clear-cut. Certainly, production norms and editing change how women are portrayed on screen, but producers cannot force behavior. The way women are portrayed in reality television is also dependent on the view of women in society and the behavior that society rewards.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

If possible I would have written an entire textbook on women's representation in reality television. There is still a multitude of scholarly literature available that I did not even touch on in my already lengthy literature review. For every reality show on television it seems there is another gender stereotype to write about. Unfortunately, due to monetary, time and connection restrictions, I was also limited in the past participants of *The Bachelor* I could interview. The contestants from the last three years are busy with their own television shows, modeling contracts and promotional deals. They want to talk to magazines and on air shows, not students. While I was able to interview a few past participants from early seasons of *The Bachelor*, if possible I would have interviewed popular contestants from recent seasons. I believe that recent participants are more in the public eye and because the show's popularity has increased, their experience is different from participants in the 2000's. A researcher with more connections could also center a study on comparing participants from the early 2000's with recent participants. This would allow a comparison on how women's experiences differ and if there have been changes in the creation of the show and portrayal of women.

While I completed a content analysis for season twenty of *The Bachelor*, my analysis was made up of only my observations of the show. If I had more resources I would have had a team analyzing the episodes of season twenty for a comparison, since there is a highly likely chance I missed observations throughout the season. While my content analysis certainly alluded to themes and helped me understand representation throughout the show, I wish I had a more complex way to analyze my data. It would have been especially useful to have a computer program as well as transcripts of each episode to analyze language more complexly. I would also encourage future studies to analyze multiple seasons of *The Bachelor* for comparison on themes,

especially since female representation could differ significantly based on who the bachelor is as well as differences between the seasons as the show and its popularity amongst viewers has changed. Throughout my content analysis I also noticed a common narrative structure among episodes. It would be interesting for a future study to examine the narrative structure of episodes of *The Bachelor* to see if there is a similarity between the storyline in episodes and other dramatic works. This could also be another way to show how producers and editing are used to create a story.

The common trend amongst my interview subjects was to discuss the toll that being on a reality television show had on their mental health. The anecdotal experiences of a few participants cannot prove larger trends on the psychological impact of reality television, however, the experiences of these women point to a greater systemic issue in the impact of reality television. A future study conducted by psychologists could survey female participants as well as viewers of reality television. This is important for addressing the grievances I heard from participants as well as statistics on suicides linked to *The Bachelor*. There has also been little research done on men's experiences on reality television, yet my experience interviewing Jesse Csincsak demonstrates that men are also impacted by the experience of appearing on reality television. Future studies could also focus on how media literacy can be used as a tool for viewers to understand women's representation in reality television. Through understanding how editing and producer involvement create representation, viewers can view stereotypes and drama in the show through a new lens. Lastly, while I examined viewership of reality television programs anecdotally, a future study could look at who watches reality television and what appeals to them about the programs. I am particularly interested in female viewers, how they watch reality programs that utilize female stereotypes for drama and the impact it has on them.

Future studies could interview subsets of women around the United States and look at how culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age and location effect how women view female stereotypes in reality television programs. Future studies need to illustrate the creation of various tropes in reality television and examine how they're perpetuated on contestants and effect subsequent viewers.

**SELF-REFLECTIVE STATEMENT:**

Without question, this senior project has been by far the most rewarding yet also challenging academic pursuit I've taken on. Sustained motivation and time management were certainly aspects I struggled with. I tend to overwhelm myself with extra curricular activities and between a cappella, theatre, and sketch comedy as well as my other classes, often there were only so many hours in a day to work on my thesis. However, because of the scope and size of this project I had to resist my habitual urge to put everything off for the last minute, I could not write a paper of this magnitude in one night. I also struggled to find a balance between research and editing. If it were up to me, my thesis would be one hundred more pages, because there is just so much research I was not able to cover. In order to make the research that I did complete presentable I had to spend my time writing and editing. Completing this project did cause anxiety, but I learned valuable lessons on how I time manage and plan. Now I know I can truly write anything and this research encourages me to pursue graduate level work in media and representation. Additionally, when I first began my research I felt that as an undergraduate there was no way I could complete real meaningful research. I only realized my research is important, when I saw that it was one of the only sources on reality television that combined interviews and scholarly research within the last ten years.

I'm going to miss this research topic tremendously. At no other time in my life have I felt so passionately about scholarly research. Within the last ten months since I began researching this topic, I've told strangers about it i.e. a woman on the New York subway, librarians at all of the Boston libraries, a group on a plane on the way from Boston to Florida over spring break, this topic was always on my mind. I have bored my friends with the topic, my family, and even the middle school girl I babysit for understands the inner workings of reality television.

This project has meant so much more to me than just its research and writing components. It has meant time management, personal discovery, interviews with participants and a greater understanding of representation in the media. I have often felt that my research is important and can contribute to conversations on women's representation on screen and in society. I feel that the research, interview and writing skills I've gained from opportunity, will shape my future research interests and opened up new possibilities in what I can accomplish.

## REFERENCES

- Andrejevic, Mark (2004). *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. New York: Roman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Annette, H.: *Reality TV: audience and popular factual Television*, p. 2. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London, New York (2005)
- Baermann, Michelle Brophy. "True Love On TV: A Gendered Analysis of Reality-Romance Television." University of Iowa, 2005. Web.
- Bergstrom, Andrea M. "From Fantasy Dates to Elimination Ceremonies: A Content Analysis of Gender, Sex, and Romance on Reality Television." *University of Massachusetts Amherst* (2005): n. pag. *Broadcast and Video Studies Commons*. Web.
- Biressi, Anita and Heather Nunn (2003) *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Bowdoin, Treva. "Duggar Family News: Michelle's Birthday Video For Jordyn Duggar Makes Fans Sad." *The Inquisitr*. The Inquisitr, 20 Dec. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Boylorn, Robin. "As Seen on TV: An Autoethnographic Reflection on Race and Reality Television," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, pp 413-433. 2008
- Carpentier, Megan. "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo's Surprising Home-truth | Megan Carpentier." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 13 Aug. 2012. Web. 04 May 2017.
- Cavender, Gray et al. "The Construction of Gender in Reality Crime TV." *Gender and Society*, vol. 13, no. 5, 1999, pp. 643–663.
- Chidester, Treasa. "What the# \$% & Is Happening on Television-Indecency in Broadcasting." *CommLaw Spectus* 13 (2004): 135.
- Chocano, Carina. "'Housewives,' Rebranded." *RIFF*. The New York Times Magazine, 19 Nov. 2011. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Chozick, Amy, and Bill Carter. "After Rough Patch, 'The Bachelor' Wins Back Viewers." *Review*. The New York Times, 10 Mar. 2013. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Collins, Sue (2008) "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Dispensable Celebrity." *Television and New Media*, 9(2): 87-110.
- Could, Dana. "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television: Investment and Detachment In *The Bachelor*" *Critical Studies in Media Communications*, pp 413-437 (2010).

- Couldry, Nick. "Teaching Us to Fake It: The Ritualized Norms of Television's 'Reality' Games." *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, Edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, NYU Press, 2009, pp. 82–99.
- Curnett, Hugh. "A Fan Crashing the Party: Exploring Reality-Celebrity in MTV's Real World Franchise." *Journal of Television & New Media*, 2009.
- Darling, C. and KF Balkin. *Reality TV Encourages Racial Stereotyping*. New York: Greenhaven, 2004. Print.
- Darling, C and. KF Balkin. *Reality TV is a Dangerous Art Form*. New York: Greenhaven. 2004. Print.
- Davidson, Melissa. "So How Many Of The Bachelor Couples Are Actually Still Together?" *Culture*. Rise News, 07 Sept. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Deggans, Eric. "TLC's 'Honey Boo Boo' Cancellation Shows Dangers Of Exploitative TV." *Television*. NPR, 24 Oct. 2014. Web. 04 May 2017.
- Dehnart, Andy. "Megan Parris Says Bachelor Producers "berate," "curse At" Contestants." *The Bachelor 13*. Reality Blurred, 29 Mar. 2009. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- DeLeon, Kris. "Megan Parris Still Furious About Her Portrayal on 'The Bachelor'." *BuddyTV – TV News, Spoilers, Photos, TV Personality Quizzes, Trivia*. N.p., 27 Mar. 2009. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Denninger, Lindsay. "'Bachelor' Couple Ben & Lauren Attempt Couples Therapy But They Need To Take It Seriously." *Bustle*. Bustle, 15 Nov. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017
- Dreyer, David R. "Learning from Popular Culture: The 'Politics' of Competitive Reality Television Programs." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2011, pp. 409–413.
- Dobin, Marenah. "Why 'Bachelor In Paradise' Is An Even Better Show Than 'The Bachelor/ette'." *Bustle*. Bustle, 24 Aug. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Domoff, S. E., Hinman, N. G., Koball, A. M., Storfer-Isser, A., Carhart, V. L., Baik, K. D. and Carels, R. A. The Effects of Reality Television on Weight Bias: An Examination of *The Biggest Loser*. *Obesity*, 20: 993–998, (2012).
- Dubrofsky, Rachel and Hardy, Antoine. "Performing Race in *Flavor of Love* and *The Bachelor*," *Mass Communications and Society*, pp. 373-392. 2008
- Du Vernay, Denise, and Margaret Weis. "Feminism, Sexism, and the Small Screen:

Television's Complicated Relationship with Women.”

Egbert, Nichole and Belcher, James D. “Reality Bites: An Investigation of the Genre of Reality Television and Its Relationship to Viewers’ Body Image. *Mass Communication and Society*, vol 15, no. 3, 2012, pp. 407-431.

Finn, Natalie. "Kate Gosselin's Rocky Road Since Jon Was Bounced From the Equation." *E! Online*. E! News, 21 Nov. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.

Fox, Ragan. “You are Not Allowed to Talk about Production: Narratization on (and off) the Set of CBS’s Big Brother.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol 30, no 3, 2013, pp 189-208.

Franklin, Nancy. "Jersey Jetsam: MTV Goes to the Beach." *On Television*. The New Yorker, 18 Jan. 2010. Web. 26 Apr. 2017. Hill, Annette (2005). *Reality TV: Audiences and Factual Television*. London/ New York: Routledge.

Gilbert, Matthew. "'Black. White.' Is More than a Reality Gimmick." *Boston.com*. The Boston Globe, 08 Mar. 2006. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Goldberg, Stephanie. "Mean Girls: Fighting on Reality TV." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 27 Jan. 2012. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Grindstaff, Laura. “Reality TV and the Production of 'Ordinary Celebrity': Notes from the Field.” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 56, 2012, pp. 22–40.

Hadfield, Joe. "Meaner than Fiction: Reality TV High on Aggression, Study Shows." *News*. Brigham Young University, 26 May 2016. Web. 05 May 2017.

Hahm H. (2012) The Golden Age of Reality TV: Its Focus on the Competition for “Survivor”. In: Kim T., Ramos C., Abawajy J., Kang BH., Ślęzak D., Adeli H. (eds), vol 341. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg

Harris, Sheena. “Black Women: From Public Arena to Reality TV.” *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV*, Edited by Jervette R. Ward, Rutgers University Press, 2015, pp. 16–30.

Hyun, H.: A Study on the TV Reality Program’s Visual Format and Narrative Structure: Its an Analysis of TV Program’s with ‘Scandals’. *Journal of The Korea Academia-Industrial Cooperation Society* 8(6), 1648 (2007)

Isaac, Cheryl. "What Reality TV Is Doing To Women." *World With A View*. Forbes Magazine, 16 May 2012. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

Jacob, Lace. "'Buckwild': MTV Officially Cancels the Troubled Reality Series." *The Daily Beast*. The Daily Beast Company, 30 Jan. 2013. Web. 04 May 2017.

- Jefferson-James, Latoya. "Selective Reuptake: Perpetuating Misleading Cultural Identities in the Reality Television World." *Real Sister: Stereotypes, Respectability, and Black Women in Reality TV*, Edited by Jervette Ward. Rutgers University Press, 2015, pp. 31–52.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Buying into American Idol: How We Are Being Sold on Reality Television." *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, Edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, NYU Press, 2009, pp. 343–362.
- Keveney, Bill. "MTV's 'Real World' launched a revolution." *USA Today* 9 (2007).
- Kilborn, Richard (2003) *Staging the Real: Factual TV Programming in the Age of Big Brother*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Lasorsa, Dominic et al. "Television Visual Violence in Reality Programs: Differences across Genres." *Television Violence and Public Policy*, Edited by James T. Hamilton, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1998, pp. 163–178,
- Lear, Samantha. "Details on Bachelor 2016 Star Amanda Stanton's Ex Husband Nick Buonfiglio." *The Bachelor*. Wet Paint, 01 Feb. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Magaldi, Kristin. "Becca's Virginity Isn't Important & 'Bachelor' Nation Should Probably Stop Focusing On It So Much." *The Bachelor*. Romper, 25 Jan. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Meister, Susie. "Confessions of a Serial Reality TV Star." *Television*. Salon, 7 May 2014. Web. 05 May 2017.
- Nilles, Billy. "The Timeline of a Real Housewife: Teresa Giudice." *E! Online*. E! News, 18 July 2016. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.
- Park, Ji H. "The Uncomfortable Encounter Between an Urban Black and a Rural White: The Ideological Implications of Racial Conflict on MTV's The Real World." *Journal of Communication* (2009): 152-71. Web. 17 Apr. 2017.
- Palmer, Lucia. "Sluts, Brats, and Sextuplets: The Dangers of Reality Television for Children and Teen Participants." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2013, pp. 123–143.
- Piwowarski, Allison. "How 'UnREAL' Changed 'The Bachelor' Viewing Experience Forever." *Bustle*. Bustle, 11 Jan. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Press, Associated. "Mary-Ellis Bunim, 57, a Producer and Pioneer in Reality TV." *Business Day*. The New York Times, 02 Feb. 2004. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Press, Associated. "Rachel Lindsay Named ABC's First Black

- 'Bachelorette'." *Chicagotribune.com*. N.p., 14 Feb. 2017. Web. 04 May 2017.
- Pomarico, Nicole. "JoJo's Net Worth Before 'The Bachelorette' Proves She Was Already Super Successful." *Bustle*. Bustle, 30 May 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Shmueli, Benjamin. "Children in Reality TV: Comparative and International Perspectives." *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law* 289th ser. 25 (n.d.): 289-358. Web.
- Smith, Olivia. "How Unreal Is 'NYC Prep'? Brooklyn Teens Have Their Say." *Television Reviews*. New York Daily News, 15 July 2009. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.
- Steven Reiss & James Wiltz (2004) Why People Watch Reality TV, *Media Psychology*, 6:4, 363-378.
- "Sterotyped: Women in Reality TV." *The Artifice*. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Squires, Catherine. "The Conundrum of Race and Reality Television. A Companion to Reality Television," pp 264-282. 2014.
- Sullivan, Marisa. "Amanda Stanton's Ex-Husband Weighs In on Custody Battle." *Us Weekly*. Us Weekly, 16 Sept. 2016. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Rosa, Christopher. "The Craziest Fights in Reality TV History." *News*. VH1, 04 Aug. 2015. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.
- Rose, Randall L. et al. "Paradox and the Consumption of Authenticity through Reality Television." *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2005, pp. 284–296.
- The 'Rich Bitch': Class and Gender on the Real Housewives of New York City by Lee, Michael J; Moscovitz, Leigh *Feminist Media Studies*, 2013, Volume 13, Issue 1
- TheTVaddict. "Wildly Disturbing Quotes from THE BACHELOR Creator/executive Producer Mike Fleiss." *The TV Addict*. N.p., 18 Mar. 2010. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Weiner, Jennifer. "Breaking Up With 'The Bachelor'." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 10 Mar. 2017. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.

**APPENDIX A:  
Interview Questions**

- 1) How and why did you decide to apply for the Bachelor (or other reality show)?
- 2) How did your friends and family react to your choice to participate in the show?
- 3) Did you go in hoping to gain a lifelong companion or for the experience of being on television? What was the hardest part of leaving your life, job, and friends for the show?
- 4) Did you know from the beginning that you would make it further on the show than other participants? Did producers give you special treatment, I.E go to your house and film you before the show started?
- 5) Can you describe your experience being on the show, what was the experience like day to day? Were cameras always present? What went on behind the cameras?
- 6) What was it like to bring the camera crew to your family home? Was their portrayal of your family members and family life accurate?
- 7) How did the camera's presence affect your behavior or the behavior of other women from your memory?
- 8) (For Bachelor Women) How did you try to stand out with so many girls to compete with? What do you think helped you gain a competitive edge if any?
- 9) Did producers ever feed you a line, make you do something, or tell you or anyone else exactly what to say? Did producers ever set up moments or scenes for the camera? Do you remember anything seeming too invasive?
- 10) From your recollection what was the role of the producers in shaping the show?
- 11) In your experience were moments edited out of context or were there changes you saw watching the show that were different from your recollection of what actually happened? Any particular moments that seemed to be over dramatized? Do you wish anything wasn't shown on television?
- 12) The show itself is trying to achieve a permanent result through an extremely unnatural environment. In your experience did you or other women do certain things because of the camera that you/they wouldn't have done in a natural non-competitive dating environment?
- 13) What was your experience living with the other women in the house? Did you make any friends?

- 14) What was the hardest part of leaving the show, when you weren't given a rose? What was the transition back to regular life like?
- 15) Did you get any press after the show? Was it positive or negative?
- 16) Were there any negative effects from the show on your life? Specifically in your career or the way others perceived you afterwards? What were the positive benefits of being on the show and how do you look at the experience 10 years later?
- 17) Do you still watch the show? If so do think the experience of girls on the bachelor is different now in 2017? Especially with the advent of so much social media and fan watching groups? As well as the overall increase in popularity of the show. For example, any season before thirteen isn't even available to watch any more.
- 18) Were you a regular viewer of The Bachelor before going on the show? If so how did your expectations of the show clash with reality?
- 19) Do you still watch the bachelor? Has your experience changed how you view the program? What from your perspective should people consider when they watch the show, specifically in the portrayal of women?
- 20) What is the lasting impact of The Bachelor and how do you think it portrays women in reality television and effects the role of women in the media on subsequent other reality television shows.