“YES, I WILL ACCEPT THIS ROSE”:

REPRESENTATION, CONSUMPTION, AND IDENTITY

IN ABC’S *THE BACHELOR*

by

AMANDA STEWART HALL

(Under the Direction of Maria Carolina Acosta-Alzuru)

ABSTRACT

This study speaks to the relative power of the text and the audience in the construction of meaning. Specifically, it is argued through the use of in-depth interviews and observations and further reinforced through textual analysis that *The Bachelor* serves as an impetus for a struggle over meaning (S. Hall, 1996; Williams, 1976). On one hand, this text reinforces a traditional, patriarchal portrayal of women in domestic roles: women must “beat” the other female competitors and “win the man” for their lives to be complete. On the other hand, *The Bachelor* could serve as a site of resistance against such representations by giving audience members the ability to be oppositional readers (S. Hall, 1973a) of the text.

This dissertation investigates the ideological role of the mass media. The mass media shape how we view the world around us by providing us with dominant representations of ideas. I believe shows like *The Bachelor*, while making a media spectacle of dating and relationships, reinforce viewers' desires for romance and successful relationships, both on the television screens and in their own lives.

INDEX WORDS: *The Bachelor*, cultural studies, feminist media studies, patriarchy, reception, consumption, representation, identity

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Without you, my success in graduate school would not have been possible. To my parents, Mary Ann and Woody, my sister, Stacy, and all of the rest of my family, I thank you for the love and support you have given me throughout the years. I also wish to extend my appreciation and love to James Gallagher. James, thank you for being there for me and helping me through the tough times.

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INTRODUCTION

Reality television programming is now a pervasive part of our television-viewing culture. By the end of 2002, all major networks had developed reality shows and more than thirty were already in development (Andrejevic, 2003). Reality television shows have gained both popularity and momentum due in part to the success of modern-day programs like *Survivor* (CBS) and *The Real World* (MTV). A 2001 study by *American Demographics* found that 45 percent of all Americans watch reality programs and a fifth of these viewers classify themselves as "die hard" fans (cited in Andrejevic, 2003, p. 9).

These shows are premised on the assumption that they are giving their audiences a glimpse into the "real" lives of their participants. In examining how "real" *The Real World* actually is, Mary Ellis Bunim (co-creator of *The Real World*) categorizes the show as a "fantasy…at the same time declaring it to be 'real people,' undirected, sharing their lives" (cited in Bagley, 2001, paragraph 13). Bunim's statement illustrates the concept of "reality" in these types of programs. Instead of presenting "reality" in its truest form, these programs create a sense of fantasy that is masked as "reality."

Of specific interest to this study is the reality television program, *The Bachelor*. The program, executive produced by Mike Fleiss, owner of *Next Entertainment*, debuted in 2002 on ABC. The program deals directly with relationships between men and women, as one bachelor searches for his ideal mate out of a group of twenty-five women. All but one of the women are white in season six—this is typical of most seasons. With each

passing episode, participants are eliminated until the bachelor has narrowed his search to one, usually resulting in a marriage proposal.

Since its premiere, *The Bachelor* has remained popular with its audiences, usually a top-twenty favorite in Nielsen ratings through at least its first three seasons (information obtained from zap2it). However, in recent seasons (beginning with season four), the show has seen a decline in ratings.[1] Season six, the season examined in this study, averaged 6.1/10 rating/share for the season, usually placing second or third in its time slot (9 p.m., Wednesday nights) behind programs like CBS' *CSI: Miami* and NBC's *West Wing*. The program won its time slot during its season finale on November 24, 2004 (information obtained from TV Week, *Weekly prime-time ratings*, 2004).

The popularity of programs like *The Bachelor* warrants its study. I focus on media consumption and reception activities of a segment of *The Bachelor's* female audience through in-depth interviews and observations, exploring what female viewers are actually doing with this particular text. In addition, I conduct a textual analysis of all nine episodes in this season examining issues of gender role representation. This mix of methods allows for triangulation in my study.

Studying Reality Television

Reality television is a genre currently dominating television schedules. As Rob Owen, TV editor of the *Post-Gazette* TV argues, "There's no escaping it: as a genre, reality television is here to stay…just as sitcoms and dramas have become regular staples, reality TV has no sign of abating" (cited in Wells & Tibaldi, 2002, p. 188). The genre has

[1] While this trend will not be directly investigated in this study, it is likely that some of the novelty of the program has worn off because of the increasing numbers of copy-cat programs that have followed *The Bachelor's* footsteps since its premiere. In addition, there is only one successful *Bachelor* relationship from its six seasons (the couple from the season under study (6), Mary and Byron).

been defined in many ways by various researchers, but a useful definition for this study is provided by the August 2001 edition of *The Education Age*: "Reality TV is the name given to the new genre of programmes that features 'real' people in 'real' circumstances" (cited in Wells & Tibaldi, 2002, p. 188). However, these programs move further and further away from what is "real" to what a creative team constitutes as "real," by the deliberate scripting activities of production teams.

Reality television programs are premised on the idea of showing "normal" people in a "real" setting, yet both are actually artificially chosen by production teams. Wells and Tibaldi (2002) argue that as audiences have grown increasingly disinterested in "the predictable storylines of sitcoms, dramas, and soap operas," (p. 190) reality television has experienced success in mixing reality and fantasy. This mix has proven to be a way for audience members to channel their voyeuristic tendencies through their "fly-on-the wall" approaches to showing reality. This "fly-on-the wall" approach gives a sense that what audiences are viewing is occurring in real time, which helps "to produce the affective discourse that is so important to the power of reality television" (Tricknell & Raghuram, 2002, p. 204). The feeling that events are occurring in "real time" is further enhanced by the way in which the narrative is presented, adding a heightened sense of drama, "realistic" content, and voyeurism.

While reality television is not a new phenomenon,[2] our growing fascination with seeing the intimate details of others' lives has escalated with the increasing number of reality television programs. As Mhando (2002) argues, the type of reality programming on television today is more voyeuristic in nature than earlier television programs in that

[2] Reality television programs' debut on television is unclear as some argue the genre started with programs like *The Dating Game* (premiering in the mid 1960s) while others believe the genre began with the premiere of shows like *The Real World* in the early 1990s.

the former reveal, and thrive on, showing the intimate details of participants' lives. Such a revealing look into the lives of participants leaves the viewer with a sense of being a Peeping Tom, where one can "listen in to conversations that you wouldn't normally listen in to. You'd either have to be a participant or you wouldn't know about it" (Mhando, 2002, p. 184). It is this voyeuristic sense of wanting to know what will happen next that creates a sense of expectation for dramatic, entertaining content at the expense of showing true "reality" for this genre's audiences.

Audiences' perception that through these shows they can "see" the "real" lives of participants is actually a misconception. The "reality" that is being presented on screen is actually scripted under the direction of a group of production executives. As Deery (2003) argues, "reality TV invokes though it does not fulfill, the fantasy of absolute vision, of having complete access to all that is hidden" (p. 6). Due to time constraints, among other factors, requires producers exercise their power to edit unnecessary footage—often that which is thought not to provide entertainment for audiences. Deery (2003) states, "The mass media have forced a reversal, which I argue is highlighted by reality TV" (p. 7). This "reversal" (Deery, 2003, p. 7) refers to the absence of "the obscenity of the hidden, the repressed, the obscure, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more than visible: it is the obscenity of that which no longer contains a secret and is entirely soluble in formation and communication" (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 22).

In this sense, with the overabundance of "intimate" details of the show participants' lives, the viewer of reality television shows actually loses this close relationship with these participants. Every experience shown on the screen is overtly visible, edited, and heightened in drama. Hence, audiences are not given the opportunity

to “see” inside a participant’s “real” life. They instead look at a production team’s idea of a participant’s life—a commercial imperative for shows in this genre.

Reality television incorporates surveillance as a foundation marker for the genre. Surveillance involves at least two persons—“the surveilled” subject (Gillespie, 2000, p. 41) who understands she is being watched, and the viewer, an authority figure of sorts, who watches the subject. These two persons work together and, as a result, there is a power structure in place (Gillespie, 2000). Whether or not viewers realize that their habits and actions too are also being surveyed (via Nielsen, among other devices) is an answer that varies between and among individual viewers. Nevertheless, producers of reality television shows gather ideas about future series by examining audience responses from a variety of resources: chat rooms, Web site message boards, and ratings information, among others. The gathering of such information influences the direction of events on current reality television programs and future reality programs, especially as it relates to which images will be shown and which images will not be aired in the program (Andrejevic, 2003).

With the popularity of the genre, television is increasingly becoming a mechanism through which audiences are able to gain a seemingly close and often overexposed view of others’ lives. For this study, discussions of voyeurism and surveillance are necessary because of the intimate details revealed about the interactions between the bachelor and his potential wives. The show seeks to reveal as much as it can about the intimate details of dates—including the sexual encounters that occur on them—in an effort to maintain what producers assume is the interests of the audience.

Justification for the Study

This study speaks to the relative power of the text and the audience in the construction of meaning. Specifically, it will be argued through the use of in-depth interviews and observations and further reinforced through textual analysis that *The Bachelor* serves as an impetus for a struggle over meaning (S. Hall, 1996; Williams, 1976). On one hand, this text reinforces a traditional, patriarchal portrayal of women in domestic roles: women must "beat" the other female competitors and "win the man" for their lives to be complete. On the other hand, *The Bachelor* could serve as a site of resistance against such representations by giving audience members the ability to be oppositional readers (S. Hall, 1973a) of the text. Audience members actively engage with media texts in different ways. As such, the interpretations viewers gain from this text vary from individual to individual. Exactly how much these audience members buy into the text's messages and what they do with these messages in their meaning-making processes (both individually and in a group setting) will be of considerable importance to this study.

The study suggests the importance of studying television as more than just a source of entertainment, but, rather, as a medium containing ideological messages that can exert an influence over audiences and their interpretations of the world around them (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972; S. Hall, 1973a). Audience members are active in their meaning-making abilities and processes, which behooves us to study them more and gives credence to audiences' meaning-making processes in order to expose the ideological impact of media texts.

The topic of this dissertation reflects my interests in studying the reception and consumption of media texts by female television audiences, which I began to explore in my master's thesis (2002), *Eat. Sleep. Watch Dawson's Creek: Teenagers' Perceptions of Teenage Life on Dawson's Creek.* Being a member of *The Bachelor's* audience influenced my topic choice. Shows like *The Bachelor* are able to draw viewers each week by playing on their desires to find out what will happen the next week. In addition, I suspect that many members of the viewing audience, including myself, enjoy and want the happy, fairy tale ending, which this show tries to provide to its (primarily) female audiences.

This dissertation investigates the ideological role of the mass media. The mass media shape how we view the world around us by providing us with dominant representations of ideas. I believe shows like *The Bachelor*, while making a media spectacle of dating and relationships, reinforce viewers' desires for romance and successful relationships, both on the television screens and in their own lives. However, no two consumers of media texts are alike, and, consequently, texts are given different meanings according to viewers' social experiences and upbringing (Condit, 1989). Hence, an examination of this viewing audience is crucial to explore how texts are consumed, how texts shape our identities, and how these messages are reified in society.

In this study, I bring in my own subjectivities regarding the program and the audience. The show elicits in me both pleasure and concern. While I enjoy watching the drama unfolding on screen and hold hopes for a fairy tale ending, I also realize that this program does little to move women away from stereotypical, traditional, feminine roles associated with patriarchy. I noticed, however, that this concern does not keep me from

watching. I found that my viewing experience was enhanced by watching the program with other women. In fact, I enjoyed such experiences because not only did we get together to watch the program, but we also used this time to socialize and catch up on events happening in our lives. This group experience contributed to my desires to include observations as part of my research design.

This study is perhaps a way for me to justify why I watch the program. By talking to women like myself, I can better understand not only why they watch, but also why I watch. In other words, this experience provides me with an opportunity to find other women like me who understand the complexities associated with this text. As such, I feel that I can delve into these complex issues by virtue of my own personal experiences with this particular television program.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early mass communication scholarship focused on media effects and message-based analyses. It consisted largely of behavioral studies in an artificial, experimental setting (Morley, 1992). In recent years, there has been a move to studying audiences' meaning-making processes with seminal studies conducted by Fiske (1986; 1987; 1989b; 1996; Fiske & Hartley, 1978), Fiske and Hartley (1978), Radway (1984), and Jenkins (1992), among others. This dissertation, focusing on the audience and its degrees of openness to media messages, though not the first of its kind, seeks to push the field further into a third stream—an interpretive approach examining media texts in a social setting.

Reality Television Studies

While the premise of reality television programs appears to be simple, to present "reality," upon a deeper examination it is not so. So far, most studies have reflected an interest in the reality television text (Curnutt, 2003; DeRose, Fursich, & Haskins, 2003; Engstrom, 2003; E. Johnson, 2003). This study, however, seeks to expand the examination of reality television programs by exploring the consumption and reception activities of women who watch *The Bachelor*.

Mark Andrejevic's *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (2003) is a critical examination of reality television examining the "modes of consumption, production, and cultural practice that employ the capabilities of interactive media anticipated by the

reality trend" (p. 8). Andrejevic's work underscores the tensions between audience consumption and reception activities on the one hand, and on the other, production imperatives. He argues that due to the ever-present mode of surveillance in these programs, we as audience members have come to expect that what we "see" on the screen is "real." Hence, we are exploited because we do not realize that this "reality" is scripted and is designed for a particular purpose—making money and maintaining viewers. To make his argument, Andrejevic focuses primarily on a variety of reality television texts including *Temptation Island, Survivor, Joe Millionaire, The Bachelor,* and *The Bachelorette*. He also conducted interviews with audience members and show producers. Ultimately his work sheds light on the tensions between audience consumption and production activities. Specifically, he questions how "free" audiences are to interpret the texts in these programs as "realistic," since, in fact, they are highly scripted.

Issues of Commercialization and Consumption on Reality Television

Because of its formulaic scripting designed to attract viewers, it is undeniable that reality television has been influenced by consumption. Deery (2003) studied reality television as "advertainment" (p. 9) (a combination of advertising and entertainment). She examined the content of several reality programs (e.g., *Survivor*, among a few others) and argued that the genre has an inextricable link with consumption, commercializing viewers' entertainment: "Commercial pressure is one factor which prepared the way for mundane exposure on reality TV, which excites audiences by going one step further and removing the actor's mask [like in traditional advertising]" (p. 9). Like actors in commercial advertising, the participants on reality television programs are taken out of their natural environments and placed into artificial settings, often "to attract a broad

audience with matching demographics…[creating] just enough conflict to generate drama, but not enough to really question the status quo" (Deery, 2003, p. 16). Johnson (2003) agrees. In her study of *The Real World*, she concludes that participants appear to function as unpaid actors performing "reality" on these programs.

A marker for these programs is their use of the confessional setting where participants reveal their feelings and emotions to the audience. Through the use of the confessional, viewers get a glimpse into the "real" lives of participants on these programs.[3] For example, Curnutt (2003) argues that the "personal insights made by the cast epitomizes a crucial aspect of the spirit of the reality television genre. In this way, confessional-reflexivity is the commonality that unites the genre under a stylistic canvas supported by the minutia of personal spectacle" (p. 2).

The confessional is linked to issues of surveillance. As Foucault (1977) describes these concepts, the confessional and surveillance activities serve as a means to regulate one's behavior and actions. Pecora (2002) used these two concepts as a way to analyze the texts of several reality television programs (e.g., *Big Brother, Temptation Island,* and *The Weakest Link*, etc.) and films tackling issues of reality (e.g., *The Truman Show* and *Final Fantasy*). He asserts that surveillance on these programs should not be conceptualized in a Foucauldian sense where this activity is a means for control over one's actions (Foucault, 1977). That is, instead of foregrounding authority, surveillance can be conceptualized as a "a populist path to self-affirmation and a ready-made source of insight into the current norms of group behavior" (Pecora, 2002, p. 348). He further argues that we can learn about ourselves through watching others as "many of us want, desperately it seems, to be watched, and the rest of us are more than happy to play

[3] The typical reality show audience consists of people in the under-35 age bracket (Wells & Tibaldi, 2002).

observers, even *if* we're not so sure about the benefits of being watched ourselves" (p. 357, emphasis in original).

Furthering this argument, Jagodozinki (2003) examined several reality programs, including *America's Funniest Home Videos, Hard Copy, A Current Affair, The Mole, Survivor, Temptation Island,* and *The Amazing Race*, and concluded that we, as viewers, make judgments about the participants as:

> a way to vent anger and hatred against those who are held up to be the evil perpetrators of society…in order that we, their audience and moral judges, can deny and disavow these same tendencies in ourselves…as *long as the distance between them and us is preserved*." (Jagodozinki, 2003, p. 325, emphasis in original)

These arguments suggest that in watching intimate footage of reality show participants, we "feel" like we get to know them better and try to determine how we fit into society. Since participants on these shows are highly successful, well-educated and attractive, they are in fact selling us a version of how life should be. Therefore, if an audience member is not "there" in his or her own life, then he/she should strive for this lifestyle. As Gillato and Wang (2003) state, "Reality makes for strange bedfellows" (p. 69), alluding to the power and influence reality television programs may have over viewers' ideas about life, love, and relationships. In this way, the 18-35-year-old audience engages with these shows as producers sell a particular lifestyle to them. For viewers of *The Bachelor*, it can be argued that its primarily female, heterosexual audience is continually encouraged to consume the patriarchal values associated with the show—get married, have children, and live a happy life—anything less is considered a commercial failure.

"Trash TV" and Pleasure

Reality TV has often been viewed as "trashy, dirty, sleazy and even pornographic" by many critics (Grindstaff, 1995, paragraph 18). The genre has been equated with "trash TV" which has been associated predominately with talk shows, but now includes reality dating programs.

Grindstaff (1995), in her examination of popular press coverage of reality television asserts that arguments about "trash TV" resemble Adorno and Horkheimer's (1972) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, opposing mass culture and favoring instead "high art" (Grindstaff, 1995, paragraph 10). "High art" is equated with "quality" television programs (i.e., news) and "low art" is associated with reality television programs (i.e., "trash TV"). Further, Grindstaff discusses some of the criticism associated with "trash TV," including how the "genre" is "dominated by commodity fetishism, has no genuine content because it is essentially mimetic, and manipulates people by colonizing their minds" (Grindstaff, 1995, paragraph 10). Opposing such arguments, she warns us against the complete dismissal of reality television and instead asserts that the pleasure audiences find in viewing these programs is just as important, if not more important, than the actual content of these shows:

> Denouncing Trash TV for distorting the truth and corrupting the masses—and all in the name of 'reality'—is more than a little disingenuous…their [critics] hysterical response to Tabloid TV is every bit as sensational and audience-grabbing as the material they condemn (Grindstaff, 1995, paragraph 19)...If intellectuals want to trash Trash TV, they need to do more than complain it lacks realism or that it signals the triumph of technofacism over the mass (and duped) TV audience. They should avoid castigating "the masses" for their popular pleasures, particularly when we don't even know what those pleasures are. (paragraph 21)

Discussions about audience pleasure are important not only in media studies in general, but also for studies about reality television in particular, including this dissertation. While audiences may perceive shows like *The Bachelor* as degrading or oppressing to women, there is also pleasure in their viewing.

Susan Douglas (1995), in an analysis of popular music and television from the 1950s through the 1980s, discusses the complexities of the viewing situation. In a discussion about the *Charlie's Angels* text, where she examines specifically the program's portrayal of women, she argues, "When I first saw the show, I was as outraged as other feminists were over its objectification of women and in celebration of patriarchy…At the same time I hated it, I loved it" (p. 212). Audience members have a "love-hate" relationship with the media and, I suspect, they feel the same way about *The Bachelor* because it is entertaining to watch, but also it is oppressive in its messages regarding heterosexual relationships. As such, reality television audiences need to be analyzed in greater depth.

Both Grindstaff's (1995) and Douglas' (1995) work point the importance of audience pleasure as a key topic of study. While audience members may critique the programs they watch, it is necessary to examine why they favor certain programs over others and the reasons audiences keep watching. In addition to addressing these questions of consumption, it is also necessary to analyze the text more specifically to examine the hidden structures of power at play.

Reception of Gender Roles in Television

Gender plays an important role on reality television. As women and men are represented, "female" and "male" identities are constructed. In particular, the media,

among other forces, draw attention to certain types of women as being deemed "proper," while others are constructed as "inappropriate."

Sociological and media studies have examined the public and private dichotomy that underpins gender roles. Women are assigned to domestic work, while men are given the freedom to find work in the public realm. Domestic work is considered both private and unimportant while working outside the home is a legitimate act—a reflection of the power structures present in heterosexual relationships (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003b; Bartky, 1990; De Beauvoir, 2000; Douglas, 1995; Friedan, 1963; Pateman, 1988). Gender roles are socially constructed at an early age. Pressures are placed on young girls to adopt traditional roles as domestic caregivers and homemakers (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). These roles are usually defined by the female's social networks, including family and friends, and also by media. For young girls, adopting appropriate gender roles and behaviors is rewarded while adopting inappropriate behavior is usually punished (Hyde and Jaffee, 2000).

In their review of descriptive data from previous studies related to the heterosexual experiences of adolescent girls, Hyde and Jaffee (2000) found that the media are influential in shaping young girls into heterosexual adults. They further concluded that as a result of this socialization, girls were found to be less likely to engage in sexual activity without love or romance in their relationships. Still this socialization was not all positive. The media's overarching emphasis on the importance of appearance, in order to be "attractive" to males, is a key factor in defining female gender roles.

The examination of gender roles is also contextual. In her examination of the state of feminism for the years, 1970-2000, Gross (2003) argues that it is far too general to

state, for example, that all women are oppressed in television texts without examining how they are represented because: “By themselves, images of masculinity and femininity are not imprisoning: they are useful cultural constructs with which to discuss human options and possibilities” (p. 9-10). When applied to media studies, one can further analyze how a particular gender role can be liberating or oppressive for that character and, by extension for women in general. Such an analysis involves examining characters’ interactions with other characters and their behaviors, and how such representations subvert or reinforce dominant ideas associated with patriarchy (Gross, 2003).

Mason and Meyers (2001) also highlight the importance of context in studying gender roles. They interviewed ten Martha Stewart fans to analyze “the roles Stewart and her media products play in their lives and why and how they use these media products” (p. 801). Their study underpins a key area of study in gender roles—domesticity. Through these interviews, Mason and Meyers (2001) found that domestic work in different contexts can be liberating or oppressive depending on how it is represented to these women. Domestic work can provide women with a sense of liberation. If a woman serves as the primary domestic worker in her family, then perhaps she can gain a sense of achievement and pride in her life by performing her domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, the assignment of women to traditional, domestic roles can be thought to reify the popular contention that a woman’s place is in the home, doing the very same work Stewart encourages, “an anti-feminist backlash” (p. 804) as some critics argue.

Munshi (2003) elaborates on representations of domesticity examining the media texts of print and television advertising in India. Specifically, she discusses how women are able to reappropriate domesticity through their consumption of hegemonic discourses

in media about traditional "female" roles. In her examination of the "New Indian Woman," she finds that advertising domestic, consumer goods to women helped some Indian women become liberated from their domestic roles:

> In examining the larger socioeconomic Indian context, even when it appears that women are subjugated and dominated, new spaces are constantly being opened up from where women create their own terms of resistance…[and] shows how women's spaces of resistance can be and are created by producers of media messages, even if that may not be their first intended aim. (p. 574)

She concludes this study by arguing that this "New Indian Women" has been created through advertising appropriating:

> traditional feminist identity on the one hand and liberating feminist discourses on the other and threaded them around discourses of consumerism…feminism becomes somewhat tamed, being closely linked as it is, to consumerism …remain[ing] posited within traditional structures of patriarchal hegemony. (p. 573)

Hence, this "new woman" is a complex media figure, both embracing and distancing herself from traditional expectations of female gender roles.

The objectification of the female body is another topic in gender role research. Johnson (2003) explored how women are objectified and their bodies commodified on MTV's *The Real World*. Specifically, she argues that unreal physical standards of beauty exhibited by the women on these shows often creates, or at least maintains, the patriarchal idea of a woman as a sexual object of male desire (van Zoonen, 1994) as "television constructs the woman's role in the bedroom and office as well as the physical expectations as defined by men" (E. Johnson, 2003, p. 2). Her research reveals that the artificial and contrived conditions of reality television objectify women as they are "told to do the 'real'" (p. 2).

Further, Johnson (2003) found that such representations feature women in subordinate positions to men, a common characteristic of this and other reality programs. Aside from the deliberate casting of female participants into particular roles (Meehan, 1983), Johnson argues, "reality television uses editing and cinematography to construct and ultimately objectify its women in a 'natural' environment that producers call 'real'" (E. Johnson, 2003, p. 7). In this way, being an object is naturalized as a female role.

In Douglas' (1995) already-mentioned study of popular music and television texts from the 1950s through the 1980s, the study of gender roles is complex. She found that these texts provide contradictory representations of what it means to be a "woman." Media representations, she argues, are not stable and have a potentially strong influence on how women view themselves and their positions in society, both in the private and public arenas.

In sum, a review of the academic literature pertinent to this study suggests that scholarship about reality television in its early stages. There is a lack of studies about reality television audiences as most of the scholarship related to the genre examines only the text. This dissertation contributes to the reality television scholarship by widening the focus from the text to the interaction between the audience and the text.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation is informed by cultural studies and feminist media studies. Of particular interest are issues of power and ideology in the text of *The Bachelor* and how the audience consumes this particular text.

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is concerned with the relationship between culture and power structures. It examines the "complex nature of culture in relation to issues of power: the power relations…which affect who is represented and how, who speaks and who is silent, what counts as 'culture' and what does not" (Couldry, 2000, p. 2). The concept of culture is central to the project of cultural studies. As Williams (1976) defines it, culture is "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, [or] a group" (p. 90). Storey (1996) defines culture as "a terrain on which takes place a continual struggle over meaning, in which subordinate groups attempt to resist the imposition of meanings which bear the interests of dominant groups. It is that which makes culture ideological" (p. 3). van Zoonen (1994) defines cultural studies as involving a variety of topics and issues:

> That share among other things a concern with manifestations of popular culture and issues of representation and collective identities, such as national, ethnic, and gender identities…[focusing] on the 'politics of pleasure,' in particular, on the meaning of popular genres like soap opera and melodrama, women's and gossip magazines or romances for the emancipation or liberation of women. (p. 6)

As the above quote discusses, popular culture is a key topic in cultural studies. While many scholars may disagree on a single definition of popular culture, one that is pertinent for this study is the following:

> The arena where we find who we really are, the truth of our experience. It is an area that is profoundly mythic…It is there that we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are represented. Not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time. (S. Hall, 1992, p. 22)

As such, studies of popular culture are not interested only in the text, but also in the identifications the audience makes with the text. In addition, popular culture is a problematic concept because "popular" is not a simple, natural category, but is itself already a social construction, defined by those in power (S. Hall, 1981, p. 29). In this sense, popular culture is "an arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured" (p. 29).

The study of popular culture emerged after industrialization and urbanization (Storey, 2001). During that time, there were debates about high culture versus low culture and many definitions reflect this distinction. The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) addresses some of these differences. Bourdieu argued that differences in how one defines and classifies "culture" are reflective of one's social class. As he argues, "A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded" (p. 2). Cultural competency comes from education; the more privileged one is and the more educated they are, the greater the "cultural competency" they possess—i.e., they know how to decode the object and recognize it as "art." Another way of looking at this is through his concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital discusses one's ability to define what "art" is and is based upon one's education,

social class, etc.—each of these factors influences the amount of cultural capital one possesses.

Bourdieu's (1984) discussion of cultural capital posits consumption as both a "material and symbolic activity. It involves active discrimination through the purchase, use, and evaluation of commodities and hence their construction as meaningful objects" (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997, p. 97). As such, cultural capital speaks to the type of cultural goods a person consumes, the ways in which these cultural goods are consumed, how legitimate these cultural items are perceived by the consumer and others, and the construction of an identity through consumption. These judgments are underscored by ideological concerns, because they establish a hierarchy of high versus low culture.[4]

Another key concept in cultural studies is ideology. It refers to "a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people" (Storey, 1998, p. 3). Ideology, when applied to media studies, enables one to analyze why particular groups are attributed certain representations and why messages produced by dominant power groups are heard while others are silenced, a means of hegemonic control (Storey, 1998).

Moreover, ideology is "concerned with how we as individuals understand the world in which we live. This understanding involves the complexities both of individual psychologies and of social structures" (Cormack, 1992, p. 9), suggesting that both one's ideology and the culture in which one lives are constantly changing. As Fiske (1996) argues, culture is a "dynamic social practice…constantly reproducing itself" (p.118) and,

[4] It should be noted that Bourdieu has been criticized for using a survey to measure cultural capital: "the survey can only paint a static, quantitative picture of who consumes what; it cannot offer a vibrant, qualitative picture of how something is consumed and what meanings are produced through those processes of consumption" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 102).

as such, culture, the site in which the meaning making occurs, is inherently a political project. Each person brings his or her own politics—beliefs, values, and such—to the meaning-making process (Condit, 1989).

Hall (1982) developed the concept of "articulation," arguing that cultural texts and practices do not have one definite meaning determined in the stage of the production of meanings, rather,

> Meaning is always the result of an act of 'articulation' (an active process of 'production in use'). The process is called 'articulation' because meaning has to be expressed, but it is always expressed in a specific historical moment, within a specific discourse(s)…Meaning is therefore a social production; the world has to be made to mean. (cited in Storey, 1996, p. 4)

The media play a central role in the meaning-making process of their consumers: "It is not that there is a world outside, 'out there,' which exists free of the discourse of representation. What is 'out there' is, in part, constituted by how it is represented" (S. Hall, 1996, quoted in Storey 1996, p. 3). Hence, media, in particular television, are important conduits for the circulation of meanings. Viewers are not simply passive in their television-viewing experience; rather, they actively construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the meanings they receive from television programs (Fiske, 1987). However, each viewer uses television in different ways and, consequently, interprets its texts differently.

Hall (1973b) generated one of the first cultural studies reception theories focusing on the relationship between the media and the audience. In his seminal *Encoding, Decoding* piece, he suggests a four-stage model of communication involving production, circulation, use, and reproduction. Hall further argues that, during the stages of reception and consumption, messages may be decoded from three possible positions—dominant-

hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional—each of these positions involves varying levels of audience participation. Although this model is helpful in noting that there is no single reading to any media text and gives power to the audience to interpret texts differently, it has received much criticism for being too limited and deterministic in that there is one direction in which communication can flow.

In response to the linear model of audience research, there have been several models developed that view the activities of consumption, identity, production, and regulation as moments in a cyclical movement. Richard Johnson (1986-1987) developed a model that views the influence of one's social context and subjectivities on these different activities. Johnson's model strongly influenced the creation of a second model, *The Circuit of Culture*, developed by du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (1997, refer to Figure 1). In a cultural analysis of the Sony Walkman, they argue that communication stages are neither separate nor invariant, but rather they are a series of distinct, but not discrete, moments (Acosta-Alzuru, 1999). This is a crucial point for media scholars because a linear model is too simplistic to understand the complexity of communication. As du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (1997) argue,

> It does not matter where on the circuit you start, as you have to go the whole way around before your study is complete. What is more, each part of the circuit is taken up and reappears in the next part…they are the elements which taken together are what we mean by doing a 'cultural study' of a particular object. (p. 4)

The circuit is comprised of five moments: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. Representation involves not the meaning of the object in itself, but rather the way it is represented in language, both orally and visually, its "cultural meanings" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 60). Moreover:

> Representation can only be properly analysed in relation to the actual concrete forms which meaning assumes, in the concrete practices of signifying, 'reading,' and interpellation; and these require analysis of the actual signs, symbols, figures, images, narratives, words, and sound—the material forms—in which symbolic meaning is circulated. (S. Hall, 1997, p. 9)

As the above quote suggests, representation is inherently linked to language where meaning is never stable, and is always changing: "It is a slippery customer, changing and shifting with context, usage, and historical circumstances. It is therefore never finally fixed" (S. Hall, 1997, p. 9). Representation is a key part of the meaning-making process—"Meaning depends on the relationship between things in the world—people, objects, and events, real or fictional—and the conceptual system, which can operate as *mental representations* of them" (S. Hall, 1997, p. 18, emphasis in original).

Identity examines how viewers establish identification between the meanings encoded in production and themselves. Further, as van Zoonen (1994) argues, "identity is always in process, never finished, stable, or true. Media reception is one of the practices in which the construction of (gender) identity takes place" (p. 123). Consumers use media texts to make sense of themselves and where they fit into the world—hence, they are active in the meaning-making process. In particular, gender identities can be constructed and reconstructed through the pleasure consumers gain from the viewing experience which may offer them ways to subvert dominant media messages (van Zoonen, 1994, refer to Radway, 1984a, 1984b).

Production examines how the message is produced technically and culturally (du Gay et al., 1997), or encoded. While this moment is not being studied in this dissertation, production is an important part of the circuit to examine because "Cultural products…are produced in ways that make them meaningful" (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003b, p. 274).

Consumption examines how audiences use messages. This moment assumes an active audience that negotiates messages and uses them in their everyday lives. Linking consumption to identity, Bourdieu (1984) argues the consumption of products is a way for people to express their tastes and styles. Michel de Certeau's (1984) work also illuminates the importance of consumption. He argues that meanings are made in our everyday use of goods and products—an important argument for this study. He posits:

> The analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer "makes" or "does" during this time and with these images (p. xii)…Today the text no longer imposes its own rhythm on the subject, it no longer manifests itself through the reader's voice. This withdrawal of the body, which is the condition of its autonomy, is a distancing of the text. It is the reader's *habeas corpus*. (p. 176)

In response to the Frankfurt school's emphasis on the audience's passivity, de Certeau asserts that scholars should focus on the "uses" that people make of products in their everyday lives. Moreover, the focus on everyday life can be considered a form of production in itself, but in a way that is less obvious from how we usually conceptualize production:

> To a rationalized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another production, called 'consumption'. The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through ways of using the products imposed by a dominant order. (p. xii-xiii)

de Certeau considers that reading, the starting point for consumption, is a "silent production" since the reader:

> [I]nsinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body… The readable transforms itself into the memorable ….A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient. (p. xxi)

By presenting such an argument, de Certeau (1984) maintains a balance between consumption and production where the former emphasizes the importance of creativity on behalf of the consumer and the latter discusses the restraints imposed by production (A. S. Hall & Acosta-Alzuru, 2004).

Regulation examines how the meanings use "representations of public and private space and how its status…leads to attempts by institutions to regulate its usage" (p. 61). Moreover, regulation examines how the meanings we make from texts help to define our cultural practices (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003b). This moment involves consumers taking the meanings they have made and using them outside of their viewing experience to make sense of the world around them.

This model suggests that the struggle between the text and audience is not a "zero-sum" situation. Further, the circuit does not privilege one moment over another. Rather, meanings are made not only in the production (the encoding of texts where the study of representation occurs), but also in consumption of these texts. In the next section, the text and audience relationship will be analyzed in more detail.

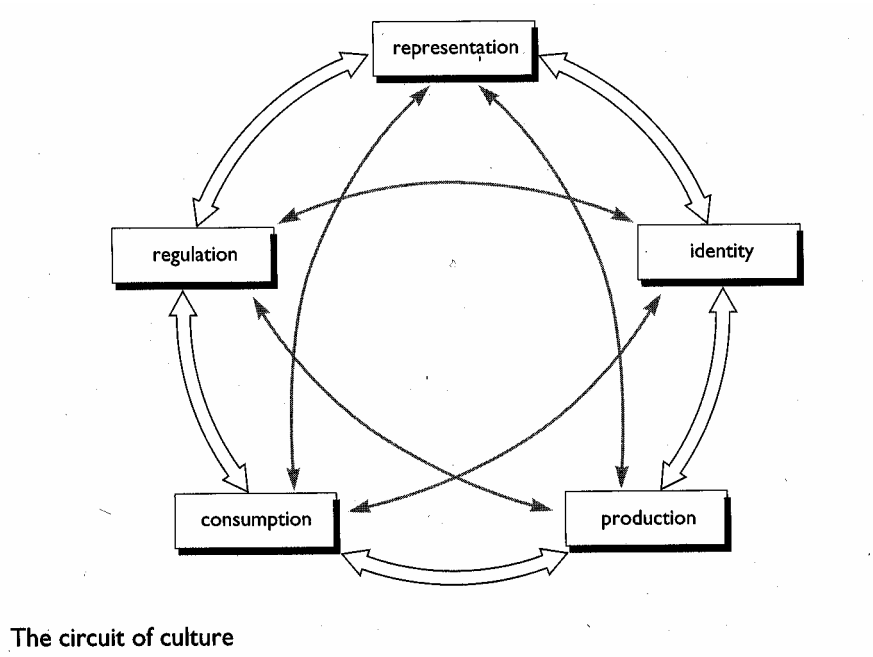

Figure 1: *The Circuit of Culture* (du Gay et al., 1997)

The Text and the Audience

The debate over the power of the audience in relation to the text is ever-present, especially in cultural studies. Regarding this debate, there are two extremes on a continuum. On one end are Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) who give all of the power to the text and no power to the audience, and on the other extreme is John Fiske (1986; 1987; 1989a; 1989b; 1996; Fiske & Hartley, 1978), who assigns all of the power to the audience and no power to the text. Scholars in between the two extremes locate themselves in this continuum according to their particular position on the debate.

In Adorno and Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1972) there is a particularly interesting piece entitled, *The Culture Industries*, in which they focus on the influence of capitalism on the culture industries (e.g., art, theater, etc.). Adorno and Horkheimer conceptualized the audience as passive, with little power to overcome the capitalistic messages inherent to these products. In other words, the power of the text far

outweighed the power of the audience. The audience was viewed, in essence, as completely helpless and pacified by the culture industries. This traditional view of the audience was continued under Richard Hoggart at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in England where the text continued to be viewed as more important than the audience (Brocker, 1998).

When Stuart Hall joined the center in the 1970s, this view of the audience started to change as discussions about the power of the audience began to surface (Brocker, 1998). Hall's encoding/decoding model had significant influence over the work of David Morley (1980) who also argued that the text could not be considered in isolation from the contexts of production and consumption. In his examination of the *Nationwide* audience, Morley concluded that individuals' readings of texts vary according to their social positions (their class, race, gender, age, etc.). Such differences exist because of the codes that different subcultures use in making meaning from texts.

In 1991, McRobbie used the active audience model developed by Hall, but criticized audience research as being too patriarchal because of its lack of female voices. In order to include these voices, she focused on the meaning-making abilities of a group of female teenagers and their subcultures. Her work had significant influence over the development of feminist media studies and underscored the importance of examining this often under-analyzed group.

Fiske examined the widespread consumption of commercial products ranging from Levi's jeans to Madonna's music. He wrote extensively about television and its openness for interpretation and meaning making, or what he refers to as the polysemic nature of television texts. He argues, "In order to be popular, television must reach a wide

diversity of audiences and, to be chosen by them, it must be an open text" (Fiske, 1986, p. 392). Moreover, Fiske argued that media products, especially television, cannot be examined or understood as singular entities; rather, they are better studied in relation to other texts and their social contexts:

> We may not be able to predict the actual reading that any one empirical viewer may make, but we can identify the textual characteristics that make polysemic readings possible, and we can theorize the relation between textual structure and social structure that make such polysemic readings necessary. (Fiske, 1986, p. 394)

For Fiske, textual readings and interpretations are political acts, as "it is the polysemy of television that makes the struggle for meaning possible, and its popularity in class structured societies that makes it necessary" (Fiske, 1986, p. 394). As such, Fiske's work gives credence to the audience's ability to actively engage with media texts and celebrates the audience's power vis-à-vis the text. However, he is criticized for denying the existence of constraints—e.g., a person's background, economic standing, etc.—that influence how people interpret texts. Hence, he deems the audience too free for textual interpretation, assuming that a person's living conditions will have little influence on how they interpret media texts (Brocker, 1998; Condit, 1989). Further, Fiske does not consider the text to have any power in and of itself.

Celeste Condit (1989) critiqued the active audience model, particularly Fiske's arguments related to polysemy. Unlike Fiske, she did not view the audience as being able to freely decode texts and, instead, argued that audiences' decodings were influenced by polyvalence. Polyvalence occurs when a group of readers understands and interprets the denotative meanings of a text in the same way, but they develop different connotative meanings. The difference in the connotative meanings comes from the audience's own

subjectivities which are a part of the meaning-making process. Hence, Condit gives more importance to the text than Fiske.

Janice Radway is one of the first scholars to take an ethnographic approach to studying consumption. In *Reading the Romance* (1984), she further builds on reception studies and theories. Radway examined how working-class women formed interpretive communities. In her study, she asserts that through the support of romance reading, women find their own personal space and time "to select and construct romances in such a way that their stories are experienced as a reversal of the oppression and emotional abandonment suffered by women in real life" (Radway, 1984b, p. 581).

Another influential audience study is Henry Jenkins' (1992) study of the *Trekkies*, fans of the popular television show *Star Trek*. He refutes the traditional view of these fans as "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers," (p. 23) viewing them, instead as actively engaged audiences "who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture" (p. 23). Using the concept of "textual poaching," a form of active reading where pleasure is made in the meaning-making process, he views fans as "not unique in their status as textual poachers, yet, they have developed poaching to an art form," (p. 27) because they "attempt to build their culture within the gaps and margins of commercially circulating texts" (p. 35).

Currently, several scholars build on studies like Radway's and Jenkins' and advocate an ethnographic approach to audience studies. For instance, Parameswaran (2004) and Clark (2004) view the importance of studying in depth the consumption activities of the audience by taking a holistic approach to the examination of their

decoding activities. These researchers give the audience credit, while they acknowledge the power of the text.

In sum, in the transition from effects research to studies focusing on the polysemy of television texts, scholarship has moved away from the traditional views of the Frankfurt School (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972) which assumed audiences were "cultural dupes," (Condit, 1989, p. 104) to a conceptualization of the audience as active participants in media consumption and meaning-making activities. This move signals "The reader's activity is no longer seen simply as the task of recovering the author's meanings, but also as reworking borrowed materials to fit them into the context of lived experience…The text becomes something more than what it was before, not something less" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 51-52). In the case of *The Bachelor*, what does the text "become" when it is consumed by its female audience?

Feminist Media Studies

In this dissertation, I draw on feminist media studies' foregrounding of gender and insistence on the presence of female voices in audience research (van Zoonen, 1994). The goal of feminist media studies is to "locate patriarchal ideology as being articulated to power structures in this sense: representations of the feminine work to sustain gender inequities and sexual subordination" and, further, to critique these structures (Durham, 1999, paragraph 11).

van Zoonen (1994) argues that feminist media studies complements the active audience model, particularly Hall's (1973a; 1973b) *Encoding, Decoding* model. The model is useful for analyzing how gender is negotiated. In contrast to traditional media studies, gender is never viewed as a given or a constant, contrary to the case in traditional

media studies. Gender is instead unstable, dynamic, contextual, and framed by how we consume and negotiate media texts. As such:

> Gender can thus be thought of as a particular discourse, that is, a set of overlapping and often contradictory cultural descriptions and prescriptions referring to sexual difference, which arises from and regulates particular, economic, social, political, technological, and other non-discursive contexts. Gender is inscribed in the subject along with other discourses, such as those of ethnicity, class, and sexuality…as part of an ongoing process by which subjects are constituted in paradoxical ways (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 33)

With the foregrounding of gender, feminist media studies moves scholarship from "What is the media doing to women?" to "What are women doing with media?" This approach opens up the argument of women reading against the grain of patriarchal media texts. Further, the transition suggests:

> [T]hat women actively and consciously seek particular types of gratifications from mass media…Such a 'uses and gratifications' perspective on media use has advantages over the earlier 'effect models' by raising the question of differential uses and interpretations of media output and in its perception of the audience as active. (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 36)

At the heart of feminist media studies is female/feminine experience. Our experiences do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they occur within the contexts of power relationships.

When discussing feminist media studies, it is also necessary to define "feminism." While there are many ways to define the concept, I will be drawing on the definition provided by van Zoonen (1994) as the concept applies to feminist media studies. First, feminism analyzes gender as "a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 4). Second, power is inherent in discussions of feminism. Power is not "a monolithic 'thing' that some groups have and others have not" (Mouffe, 1992, cited in van Zoonen, 1994, p. 4). Instead, power can be

conceived as the challenge to "theorize the multiplicity of relations of subordination" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 33).

Feminist criticism does not speak with one voice; instead, it consists of multiple voices—some heard, while others are silenced—all of which construct a feminist identity. As McRobbie (1994) argues:

> The feminist social self, it might be suggested, is an amalgam of fragmented identities formed in discourse and history and called into being both by the experiences of femininity and by the existence and availability of a feminist discourse whether that comes in the form of books, education, mass media, or through friends, politics, and community…the communicative aspect of female experience. (p. 71)

It is our experience with social forces that shape our feminist and female identities and, as such, it is of necessity that we examine how the media constructs a female identity.

Moreover, feminist criticism "is not about discovering or reporting the meaning in texts. Rather, it becomes a performative activity that is, in some sense, dedicated to creating meaning" (Dow, 1996, p. 4). Feminist television criticism has concrete implications for how and where women are positioned in social settings—"it tells us something about the world and how it works…we watch television and it is therefore part of life…what criticism can do is accentuate the importance of that realization and offer specific arguments for its meaning" (p. 5).

A central goal of feminist media criticism is the desire for change—it is "a writing committed to the future of women"(Modleski, 1991, p. 47, cited in Dow, 1996, p. 6). This dissertation is a step in that direction as it seeks to explore the patriarchal structures in the text of *The Bachelor* and how these structures are consumed by a segment of its female viewing audience. For this reason, the moments of consumption, representation,

identity, and regulation in *The Circuit of Culture* are analyzed in this study as they relate to the text and the female viewers of *The Bachelor*.

Research Questions

The literature reviewed and the theoretical framework described suggest the following research questions:

1. How are gender roles and patriarchy represented on *The Bachelor*?
2. How do the study participants consume *The Bachelor's* messages?
3. How do the study participants identify with *The Bachelor* text?

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to extend media scholarship grounded in feminism, in addition to reception, consumption, and representation studies by examining a new, prevalent genre in the television industry—reality dating programs. My dissertation uses a mix of methods as this study attempts to understand the popularity of *The Bachelor*, through the use of in-depth interviews, observations, and textual analysis organized by *The Circuit of Culture*. Representation and identity are explored primarily through textual analysis. Identity is further studied through interviews and observations. These observations and interviews also explore the moments of regulation and consumption.

Qualitative Research

> *Qualitative research is multimethod in focus involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.*
> *(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2, quoted in Creswell, 1998, p. 15)*

This study's approach is qualitative. As the quote above suggests, qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena in their natural settings. This contrasts with quantitative approaches which try to understand how phenomena operate in experimental and/or other controlled settings. In qualitative research, the researcher does not strive for objectivity or isolation from phenomena; instead, "the researcher is an instrument of data

collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 1998, p. 14). The goal of qualitative research is to, as close as possible, examine and analyze the "complex, holistic picture" in which the phenomena occurs (p. 15). Further, quantitative research tests "few variables and many cases," whereas, qualitative research relies on "few cases and many variables" (p. 15-16).

With such considerations, it is necessary to discuss further some of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of qualitative research. First, qualitative research relies on depth of responses, not breadth in response topics. Since no two people are alike and, therefore, they do not consume texts through the same processes, there is no single, statistically generalizable "answer" to the questions I ask in the interview, the interactions I note in the observations, or the interpretations that I make in the textual analysis. Instead, my research seeks to understand the richness of multiple interpretations of the same media text.

Qualitative research is reflexive, involving "the capacity of researchers to reflect upon their actions and values during research, whether in producing data or writing accounts" (Seale, 1998, p. 329). Because the qualitative researcher is a tool in the research process, it is vital to reflect upon one's role in the research process. This adds another layer of rigor to the study. In addition, as Patton (2002) argues, "Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports" (p. 65). Hence, the reflexive nature of qualitative research requires the researcher to bracket

subjectivities and assumptions to give voice to study participants. Reflexivity is important to my study because of the topic I chose. My initial rationale for choosing this topic is centered on my own experiences as a consumer of *The Bachelor* and, as such, I must bracket my own subjectivities.

Since qualitative methods attempt to examine reality in its complexity, I use a mix of methods seeking to understand the complexity of *The Bachelor* from multiple perspectives—one-on-one settings through interviews; group settings through observations, and textual underpinnings/assumptions of gender roles, audiences, etc. through textual analysis—that provide triangulation to my study (Patton, 2002). Triangulation offers for "cross-data validity checks" and lessens the risks of loaded questions being asked by the researcher and biased responses being provided by study participants (Patton, 2002, p. 248). Hence, a more rigorous study insists on triangulated methods.

Feminist Qualitative Research

At the heart of any feminist methodology is the foregrounding of gender. While some argue that feminist concerns lend themselves to qualitative research because of the focus of understanding in-depth, female experience (Bowles & Klein, 1983), others argue that feminist qualitative research should have more governing principles and less prescriptions for methods to be used. An example of the latter argument is provided by Boxer (1998)—"no one approach is unique to women's studies," but at the heart of feminist inquiry is "its commitment to feminist politics" (p. 5). Feminist inquiry is concerned primarily with giving voice to women and empowering them to work against oppression and domination. Regardless of what methods a feminist researcher takes to

studying a phenomenon, what ultimately matters is "the one most appropriate to the specific set of research questions and to the overall research context" (Seale, 1998, p. 44)

Further, as Järviluoma, Moisala, and Vilkko (2003) argue, feminist qualitative researchers should not only "explore but also…question the cultural patterns relating to gender in all human actions and its products" (p. 1). For this study, gender is a pervasive topic, one that intersects the interviews, observations, and textual analysis. Further, "in the analysis of qualitative materials, gender can be identified and analyzed at all levels: at the individual/personal level (identifications, subject positions), and in the socially constructed and maintained discourses ('texts,' ideologies, and social institutions)" (p. 2). Each level is explored in this dissertation and is organized by *The Circuit of Culture*.

A feminist qualitative analysis is contextualized, probing the following topics—time and place of gender performance, the settings or circumstances of these performances, and the historical situation of each performance. Moreover, it is not possible to study the "total situation" of gender, so the researcher must choose which elements are the most relevant (Järviluoma et al., 2003, p. 25). For this study, I chose to examine gender through *The Circuit of Culture*—representation, identity, regulation, and consumption—therefore, I had to make decisions for how I would study these topics in *The Bachelor*. I chose to study the social implications regarding gender roles as addressed on *The Bachelor* text and through a sample of its female viewing audience.

Textual Analysis

As Acosta-Alzuru and Roushanzamir (2000) argue, textual analysis "recognizes a fundamental assumption: that meaning is a social production…the object of analysis is

not the meanings of the text, but rather the construction of those meanings through the text; more concretely the text itself" (paragraph 51). Further, a text is:

> A finite, structured whole composed of language signs. The finite ensemble of signs does not mean that the text itself is finite, for its meanings, effects, functions, and backgrounds are not. It only means that there is a first and a last word to be identified…even if those boundaries…are not watertight. (Bal, 1999, p. 5)

The text in this study focuses on season six of *The Bachelor*. It consists of nine episodes, or eleven hours of programming (the premiere and finale episodes were two hours each in length).

Textual analysis involves a multi-staged process. The first stage of textual analysis involves what S. Hall (1975) calls a "preliminary soak," (p. 15) in which I collected and viewed all episodes to familiarize myself with the text. The second stage involves closer readings of the text, looking for specific patterns and themes. In the third stage, these themes are interpreted within the theoretical framework of the study.

For my textual analysis, I am drawing on several approaches—narratology, semiology, discourse analysis, and Meehan's (1983) typologies of female characters on prime-time television. Each of these approaches informs my textual analysis by providing a framework to analyze various aspects of the text, especially gender roles as they are represented on *The Bachelor*.

Narratology

I analyzed the episodes' narrative structures primarily using Mieke Bal's (1999) *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* and Michael Toolan's (2001) *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. Though this particular text under analysis is seemingly reality-based, and narrative analysis is usually associated with fictional texts, I

find the application of narrative theory appropriate because of this text's similarity to fictional programs, especially as the text displays characteristics of a fairy tale love story told through the eyes of a male point of view—Byron, the bachelor.

To understand narrative analysis, the concept of *narrative* must be defined. According to Toolan (2001), there are several characteristics of a narrative:

1. It consists of a predetermined course of events. It is constructed. As Toolan argues, a narrative is "worked upon" (p. 4).
2. It contains elements of things that we have seen or heard in the past—or at least things we think we have seen and heard.
3. It has an expectation from the reader that it will end in some sort of resolution or will reach a conclusion.
4. The teller plays a vital role in the narrative.
5. It relies on displacement where the language used gives a sense that the narrative's events are removed from the reader's own time and space.

A narrative must be recognized by the reader as such for it to exist (Toolan, 2001). Further, narrative analysis is concerned with three different concepts—"A tale, a teller, and an addressee, and these can be 'placed,' notionally at different degrees of mutual proximity or distance" (Toolan, 2001, p. 2).

Semiology

"A semiological analysis entails the deployment of a highly refined set of concepts which produce detailed accounts of the exact ways the meanings of an image are produced through that image" (Rose, 2001, p. 70). Semiology and narrative theory complement one another in that they each look at how images are constructed and acknowledge that their meanings are unstable. Narrative theory looks specifically at the structure of the text (e.g., narrators, actors/characters, and scene) and is interested in the meanings held within the text. Semiology looks at the ways that certain elements (e.g.,

signs, signifiers, signifieds, and referents) construct both internal meanings and meanings outside of the text (external).

Ideology is an important concept in semiological analysis. Through the examination of signs (the basic unit of analysis, e.g., baby), signifieds (a concept or object, e.g., "a very young human unable to walk or talk"), referents (the actual object to which the sign is related; in this case, the actual baby), and signifiers (sound or image attached to the signified—they can vary; e.g., "term of endearment between adults"; "bimba" or "bimbo" in Italian—different ways of using "baby"), one can examine how images are constructed and analyze the unequal power relationships that exist in the construction of these images (Rose, 2001, p. 74).

Dyer (1982, quoted in Rose, 2001) provides a useful checklist for a semiological analysis. He suggests looking at (among other things) *the representation of bodies* (age, gender, race, hairstyles, body type, body size, looks, etc.)*, the representations of manner* (expression, eye contact, pose, etc.)*, the representations of activity* (touch, body movement, and positional communication)*,* and *props and settings* (props used and physical settings or locations). In my analyses I adopt some of these suggestions.

Discourse Analysis

My study also uses aspects of discourse analysis, a technique most commonly associated with the scholarship of Michel Foucault. Discourse analysis pays attention "to the ways of seeing brought to particular images by specific audiences, or to the social institutions and practices through which images are made and displayed" (Rose, 2001, p. 135). Further, by connecting discourse to the construction of knowledge, discourse analysis examines how knowledge shapes our understandings of the world around us.

Knowledge, as discussed in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), is directly related to issues of power and coercion. Certain discourses are dominant and naturalized as "truth." For Foucault, there are "regimes of truth" or "sustained discursive formations—texts and practices—that construct meaning, while supporting certain institutional patterns and a common worldview" (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003a, p. 144). As such, these "regimes of truth" are laden with ideology.

The confessional situation or setting is a particularly poignant moment for truth-telling situations in that it forces one to tell the "truth" or risk further torture for not telling the "truth." Moreover, the confession gives us "liberation from our problems [and] requires that we 'tell the truth,' confess to someone who, by the ritual's definition, has more power than we have" (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003a, p. 144). In addition,

> The confession had priority over any other form of evidence. To a certain extent it transcended all other evidence; an element in the calculation of truth; it was also the act by which the accused accepted the charge and recognized its truth; it transformed an investigation carried out without him into a voluntary affirmation. (Foucault, 1977, p. 38)

It is this argument that I find most useful to this research. Foucault's discussion of the confessional is applicable to my study because of the confessional's prominence in *The Bachelor*. Through the way the text is constructed, we, as viewers, are lead to feel that true feelings are revealed through the participants' discussions with the camera, providing for us an opportunity to gain an inside perspective on the participants' lives and their experiences on the show. Further, the confession "is an essential technique in the production of truth, because the latter is not merely constituted by the subject's confession, but also includes the interpretation of the one who listens to the confession" (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003a, p. 145).

Hence, in a confession, there are always two parties: the person who confesses and the confessor who listens, interprets, and judges. In the case of *The Bachelor*, the show's participants provide their confessions. The production team, through their participation in the editing process where this confession is created, also contributes to the confessional. Participants are responsible for telling the story and need affirmation that their confession has been received by the confessor. In this case, the confessor is the audience member who makes sense of the participant's testimony.

Moreover, Foucault (1977) argues that the public's presence is required for performances involving public spectacles (e.g., events that occur in public settings). As they witness the events, the public assigns these events meanings—they make meaning from the event. As a media product, *The Bachelor* is a public spectacle, the success of which is predicated on the audience's consumption and meaning-making.

Meehan's Typology of Female Characters on Prime-Time Television

I also draw on Meehan's (1983) typology of women on prime-time television to supplement my textual analysis. Meehan combines a variety of approaches—quantitative, content analysis, interpretive analysis of the power of female characters, and comparative analysis of these "prime-time" women to "real" women—to explore how television "gives us ideas about who we are and what's important" (p. 3). In my textual analysis, I adopt several of Meehan's character-types—"The Goodwife," "The Bitch," "The Victim," and "The Siren"—and apply them to some of the women on the program: These character-types are important because they "convey information about roles (that is, how to act in such and such situation)…Furthermore, our media models tell us what other

people are supposed to do, too" (Meehan, 1983, p. 4). Hence, each of these characters prescribes expectations of gender behavior.

In sum, I draw on semiology, discourse analysis, and narrative theory which are connected through their concerns over power to examine *The Bachelor* text. The use of Meehan's (1983) typology further contributes to my interpretations.

Interviews

In addition to the textual analysis, I also conducted in-depth interviews with study participants who watched *The Bachelor*. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured, meaning there was a sequence of themes to be covered in addition to some suggested questions (Kvale, 1996). There is no common set of procedures for conducting an in-depth, qualitative research interview. What must be kept in mind is that the interview seeks to obtain statements where participants describe as precisely as possible what they feel and experience related to a particular topic (Kvale, 1996). While it is important for me to address the themes in my interview guide, participants are also given the opportunity to digress and bring out new themes—ones that I may not be able to anticipate.

As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue, qualitative interviews are "well suited to *understand the social actor's experience and perspective*…Researchers usually select persons for interviews only if their experience is central to the research problem in some way" (p. 173, emphasis in original). The interviews I conducted were essential to this study because I wanted to examine how other women (like me) consumed and negotiated messages from the program. Further, interviews "allow us to hear people's stories of their experiences"—a key to understanding the consumption and reception activities of the

audience (p. 173). Moreover, interviews are an appropriate method to use in conjunction with other methods such as observation; interviews "are often used to *verify, or comment on information obtained from other sources*. Interviews and fieldnotes can complement each other very usefully, but only rarely can one substitute for the other" (p. 173, emphasis in original). Hence, using both methods to understand consumption is important.

While no interview participant or experience is alike, it is useful to maintain some consistency in how interviews are conducted. To help provide consistency and rigor to this study, I kept in mind Kvale's (1996) stages of the interview process:

1. Thematizing – Involves clarifying the *why* (purpose) and the *what* (the topic or subject) of the investigation.

2. Designing – The plan of study with regard to obtaining the intended knowledge; also involves the preparation of an interview guide.

3. Interviewing Process – Conduct the interview based on a developed guide with a reflective approach to the knowledge desired and to the interpersonal nature of the interview situation.

4. Transcribing – Prepare the interview material for analysis and prepare the transcript.

5. Analyzing – Decide which methods of analyses are appropriate (condense amount of information to determine themes present and determine if analysis will be done by hand and/or by software).

6. Verifying – Determine the generalizability (if that is a goal of the investigation), reliability, and validity of the findings from the interview.

7. Reporting – Communicate findings of the study and the methods used in a format that follows scientific criteria and takes into account ethical implications; produce a readable product.

These steps provide a more thoroughly planned interviewing process. Also, they help to provide structure to the in-depth interview—making the study more systematic and rigorous.

I interviewed a total of 25 women regarding their consumption activities related to *The Bachelor*. In addition, they were asked a variety of questions based on their experiences watching the show and their opinions toward the show participants, among other topics. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 55 years of age. Twenty-four out of the twenty-five women are light-skinned—only one participant identified herself as African American. In addition, all women are in or have been in heterosexual relationships.

I worked from an interview guide (refer to Appendix D) to ensure that certain themes and topics were addressed in each interview. Since my project does not seek to produce statistically generalizable information, and instead seeks to gain in-depth knowledge about a topic, I conducted enough interviews to achieve redundancy in participants' responses.[5]

Seventeen interviews were conducted by phone with the use of a telephone-recording device. Eight interviews were conducted in person—some were conducted at the participants' houses, others were conducted in an office at a public university. Moreover, the interviews occurred independently of, prior to, or after observations—these conditions were dependent on whether the study participant was included in an observation group or not. Participants were recruited by snowball sampling, or sampling by recruitment (Patton, 2002). The first interview served as the first "seed" in the snowball sampling.

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[5] For Kvale (1996), the total number of interviews conducted in most qualitative studies is 15± 10.

After each interview was conducted, I immediately wrote down notes and comments about the participant. These notes included the participant's perceived level of comfort with the interview setting, the room's set-up, and other comments that helped me with my interview analysis.

Interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word, pseudonyms were assigned to protect my participants' confidentiality, and then transcripts were read and re-read several times. From these readings, I made note of themes that were common to all of the interviews. While this step provided one level of interview analysis, another level of analysis took place when I imported the transcripts into NUD*IST (qualitative analysis software). The software assisted me in organizing themes and developing "codes." As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue, coding and categorization of data are "essential to making sense of qualitative data" (p. 214). These codes helped me to analyze the many pages of transcripts I had from my interviews by providing some organization to the data which as a result enabled me to develop a deeper level of analysis.

Observations

To further examine the media consumption process in a more interactive, group setting, I conducted nine sessions of participant observation of groups of women who usually watch the program together each week. The purpose of the observation was to note the interactions and attitudes of observation participants as they watched the show. I observed these women's interactions with the show's themes and participants. In addition, I noted the interactions that occurred among the groups of women as they watched the show. Participants for the observations consisted of the women I interviewed and others who were recruited through snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) from interview

participants—the women I interviewed offered to have me observe them and their friends watching the program. Furthermore, I had no knowledge of these groups prior to the study.

Observations are difficult to conduct because as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue, "Fieldwork requires researchers to deliberately abandon their certainty and expertise. It obligates them to adopt a stance of curiosity and openness to the unexpected that may leave them feeling frustrated, humbled, and vulnerable" (p. 133). Observers take a multi-faceted approach to their research involving a variety of activities including: remaining engaged with the phenomenon under study for a sustained amount of time, accounting for how the observation is conducted, observing attentively and proactively, focusing and summarizing events during the observation, and grounding studies in their natural context—including spaces, places, activities, and events—which interact with the phenomenon under examination. Ultimately, "the success of observing depends on what the observer *learns* through participation and the uses to which that knowledge is put" (p. 134, emphasis in original).

It is up to the researcher to determine how involved she wants to be in the process, since "researchers are *bodies in fields*" (Conquergood, 1991, quoted in Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 138, emphasis in original). How involved a researcher becomes in an observational setting depends on the goals of the research being conducted. I adopted the role of *Observer-as-Participant* (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), in which "participation derives from a central position of observation…the agenda of observation is primary, but this does not rule out the possibility that researchers will casually and nondirectively

interact with the participants" (p. 149). While there are limitations to taking on this role,[6] there is a distinct advantage for taking this role in the study—as "group life will not be overtly disrupted and…the study will not stray into unforeseen areas" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 149). As such, adopting this role allows for a more "pure" observation; my presence has minimal effects on the events I am observing.

In planning for my observation, it was useful to keep in mind Kvale's (1996) suggestions for conducting an observation:

1. Design an observational protocol as a method for recording notes in the field (include descriptive and reflective notes).

2. Record aspects such as portraits of the informant, the physical setting, particular events, activities, and your own reactions.[7]

3. During the observation, have someone introduce you if you are an outsider, be passive and friendly, and start with limited objectives in the first few sessions of the observation.

4. After observing, slowly withdraw from the site, thanking the participants and informing them of the use of the data and their accessibility to the study.

Fieldwork produces knowledge which is "based on observing social action and reflecting about what it was like to be a participant" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 159).[8] The knowledge gained through observations is expressed in fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are the recorded events which happen during the observation, and "make up the permanent record signifying—and verifying—that field events did in fact occur in particular ways" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 160).

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[6] Lindlof and Taylor (2002) note that this role in an observation may not allow the researcher to gain complete access because usually the observations are brief, meaning they do not occur over an extended length of time.

[7] This step involves asking the following questions: who are the actors?; how is the scene set up?; how do initial interactions occur?; how do actors claim attention?; where and when do actors interact?; and which events are significant? (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

[8] Even though I am removing myself from direct participation with the group, by simply being present at the observation, I am considered a participant.

As the observations took place, I wrote condensed fieldnotes, or "those the researcher takes in the site in the midst of complex and ongoing social interactions…the fieldnotes are condensed reconstructions of the multitude of activities and interactions that take place…The researcher can never hope to catch everything" (deMarrais, forthcoming, no page). I typed my condensed fieldnotes on my laptop computer. The participants, for the most part did not appear to be uncomfortable with my laptop being present in the observations. After leaving the site, I typed expanded fieldnotes. At this point, I assigned pseudonyms to protect my participants' confidentiality. Expanded fieldnotes are more descriptive and elaborate than condensed fieldnotes. However, condensed fieldnotes are invaluable because they "will serve as reminders to help you elaborate on your field observations" (deMarrais, forthcoming, no page). My expanded fieldnotes helped me in analyzing participants' responses and develop some preliminary findings.

To help in the development of my interview guide and observation skills, I conducted a pilot study in July 2003 that consisted of interviews with two women in addition to one observation. During this pilot study, I had an opportunity to refine my interview guide and practice observing.

With the triangulation of methods in this study, I hope to better understand the popularity of *The Bachelor* from both the audience standpoint and the text. Ultimately, I hope to shed some light not only on this reality program, but also on how its audiences interpret and consume messages related to gender roles and heterosexual relationships.

CHAPTER 5

THE BACHELOR TEXT

The Bachelor is a reality television program focusing on a single, attractive, wealthy, and, up until this point, white bachelor's quest to find his future wife. The show is essentially a competition where the bachelor is provided with 25 women among whom to select a bride. In each episode, he must narrow the field by dismissing women whom he sees no future with in the "competition."

To help him make these decisions, the bachelor goes on dates with groups of women initially to get to know them better—e.g., he wants to understand their feelings toward him, their intentions for being on the show, etc. As he gets to know the women better, he chooses to spend time alone with some of them on one-on-one dates. Meanwhile, he is also making decisions about which women he wants to keep in the competition and which women he wants to eliminate. His official acts of narrowing the field are shown at the conclusion of each episode during the rose ceremonies. These ceremonies involve the bachelor giving roses to the women he wants to continue in the competition. Those women who do not receive a rose are dismissed.

As the season progresses, the relationships become more "real" as the remaining women and their parents meet the bachelor and his parents. Also, the remaining women and the bachelor meet each other's friends. Through all of these events the relationships move from casual to more serious, with more discussions between the bachelor and the women centered on feelings and on the future of their relationships.

A pivotal moment in each season of *The Bachelor* occurs during the second to last episode (this season, episode eight) where all of the "rejected" women discuss their experiences on *The Bachelor: The Women Tell All* episode. During this episode, the "rejected" women confront one another for things that they said about each other or did to one another, providing for the live audience in the studio and the viewing audience at home a chance to witness these exchanges in which "catty" behavior is prevalent.

The Women Tell All episode is telling of how the narrative is constructed on *The Bachelor*. In keeping with its similarities with soap operas, subplots are only revealed at particular times in the episode. This helps to heighten suspense and drama in the program as this episode reveals footage that has not been seen by the audience before. Events are framed (and re-framed) according to how the producers see fit. Hence, the inclusion of a "new" event can change the narrative structure of the program—including how we look at characters, narrators, and scene.

The competition culminates in the season finale, in which the bachelor must select the woman with whom he feels most compatible, and his decision is often solidified by a marriage proposal. Despite the romantic overtones of the program, however, all but one of *The Bachelor* relationships have ended shortly after the season finale aired. The only one that has not ended thus far is from this season's show. It should also be mentioned that none of *The Bachelor's* relationships have resulted in marriage.[9]

The format of season six is slightly different from past seasons because in episode one the women voted on whom they wanted as a bachelor from two possible choices, Byron and Jay. In addition, the "rejected" women confronted the bachelor directly in the *Women Tell All* episode—a change from past seasons where the women had not been

[9] *The Bachelorette*, the spin-off from *The Bachelor*, has actually resulted in one marriage.

given a chance to confront the bachelor face-to-face. Despite these changes, the program has remained true for the most part to its original format.

The Scene

As mentioned, this analysis combines three different approaches—narratology, semiology, and discourse analysis in addition to using some of Meehan's (1983) typologies of female characters in prime time television. This analysis chapter is organized primarily using narratological concepts. Through this analysis, I examine issues of representation of women and men on the program. It is my argument that this program assigns women to traditional, domestic roles and further reifies the patriarchal underpinnings of heterosexual relationships.

To illustrate my argument, I will first discuss an important narratological concept, *scene*, since it holds together the narrative and allows it to unfold (Bal, 1999). My use of *scene* in this study refers to not only the physical aspects of the narrative (e.g., setting), but also the intangible elements—including the implicit assumptions the text makes about gender roles and patriarchy. Together all of these elements create a *scene*.

First of all, *The Bachelor* is a white (White) and wealthy world—filled with limousines, mansions, and dates to tropical locations—among other things. Money is no object and everyone (men and women) seems to have enough of it, or at least do not appear to be concerned with it. These participants leave jobs and sources of financial security when they participate on the program. It is never mentioned that these participants might lose their jobs because of the months (usually several months) they spend filming the program away from their careers. Instead, they live a lavish lifestyle—in mansions where the luxuries of life are all within easy reach.

The women are all white (or at least very light-skinned) and appear to come from comfortable personal circumstances. There is not a great deal of emphasis on the women's careers. They wear the best of clothes, careful make-up, and their hair is well-coiffed. Each of the women is physically fit—though she is never shown exercising or eating healthy. Instead, their routines consist of lounging around the pool and drinking alcohol.

Though there is no direct discussion about their educational backgrounds, I can assume that most women have college educations based upon the careers they hold (e.g., mortgage brokers, school teachers, etc.). The women do not appear to be as wealthy as the bachelor because there is not as much emphasis placed on their financial situations as is placed on the bachelor's—typical not only of this particular season, but also previous seasons of the show. There is more focus on the bachelors' careers where all of them make a great deal of money. Moreover, the women appear to come from more traditional upbringings where they are still close to one or both of their parents. In addition, most women have lived a life void of any major obstacles (e.g., deaths in the family, etc.) or if they have faced any such obstacles, they do not speak of them. The women are also well spoken. From such assumptions, the women appear to be from middle to upper income classes though I would hesitate to call them wealthy—unlike the bachelor who is always wealthy.

The bachelors too appear to be from privileged upbringings and as I mentioned earlier, they are wealthy. Likewise, they are also physically fit and attractive. The bachelors present themselves as being dedicated to their jobs to provide a comfortable

future for themselves and their future wives. In contrast, the women rarely discuss career ambitions and, instead, most of the focus given to them is on their physical appearance.

Because of the focus on the women's appearances, *The Bachelor* is also voyeuristic. Mulvey (1975) argues that voyeurism usually has some sexual component at its core and the nature of this particular television program is no exception. The bachelor playing a traditional masculine role is constantly watching the women. In an overt illustration of voyeurism, episode one shows Jay and Byron (the two bachelors between whom the women choose) watching the women through a secret video camera without the women's knowledge. As the bachelors watch the women interacting with one another, they make comments—regarding Wende, Byron states she is a "natural red head…gorgeous girl"; and regarding Jayne, "She's beautiful…my favorite."

The women are scantily clad, usually wearing bikinis on their physically-fit bodies. The display of these idealized body types reinforces the message that a woman's body is not acceptable unless it achieves this perfection. In addition, such images further cater toward male sexual desires because these women do not represent the "average" woman, but a sexual fantasy. My argument helps to illustrate what Bartky (1990) argues is woman's destiny—"to be the object and prey for men" (p. 72). As such, gender roles are linked inextricably to one's (hetero)sexuality as portrayed through this media text.

The bachelor usually remains calm throughout the competition, even when he has to make difficult decisions about which women to cut from the competition. As Byron stated throughout this season, he was on a search for his future wife and all of the difficult decisions he made were worth the "stress" he felt. At the end of his journey, he

found the woman he wanted to marry and admitted that he was “falling in love with everything I see inside her.”

Byron remains composed in difficult situations while the women are shown crying and very emotional. The women speak about their hearts possibly being broken, but most of them agree that this is a risk they are willing to take. As Mary admits in her confessional in the season finale, she is nervous, but does not regret her “heart being wide open” for Byron. Cyndi had an emotional breakdown after she was eliminated from the competition and this breakdown was revealed in *The Women Tell All* episode. She is shown falling apart after Byron’s rejection. As she states in a piece filmed prior to this particular episode, the entire experience was a “bad joke” in that Byron “opened up a vein in me and now I don’t know what to do with it.” After the women are rejected, they all speak about how hopeless they feel about falling in love and finding a husband. As such, women are shown on the program as emotionally fragile and as people who center their lives exclusively on finding a husband. The bachelor, meanwhile, remains in control of his feelings and confident of his decisions.

But the bachelor controls not only his feelings, but also the women’s fates. He has exclusive control on whether to pursue, continue, or end the relationships with the women. Early in this season, the women were given a glimpse of control by being allowed to choose the bachelor in episode one. Nevertheless, they lose this power quickly in subsequent episodes as they are the ones who ultimately are not given the opportunity to choose to stay in the competition or leave it because within this narrative the women lack agency.

All of these contradictions help to illuminate the binary opposition on *The Bachelor* where the bachelor occupies the traditional, masculine, "bread-winner" role and the women occupy a more traditional, domesticated, and sexualized role. One role is active, rational, and legitimate (the bachelor), the other is passive, emotional, and devalued (women). Throughout the season, *The Bachelor* upholds traditional expectations of gender roles and does so under the guise of a television program that is thought to present "reality."

Narrators

In *The Bachelor*, the key players are: Byron as the main narrator—a "teller" (Toolan, 2001, p. 2), host Chris Harrison as a less prominent narrator, and the women are actors/characters. Since Byron as a narrator is the only prominent role on the program, the women serve a means to an end for Byron's search for a future wife. His voice dominates the show. Women are rarely given the opportunity to be heard. The only time they speak is in reference to their insecurities about Byron's feelings toward them—usually these discussions occur in the women's confessionals. The narrator in any narrative piece has an important responsibility in helping the reader make sense of the text in front of them. In a reality television program, the narrator plays a key role as she/he bridges the gaps created by the editing process between what is shown on the screen and what is not.

The narrative structure of *The Bachelor* begins with the narrator, the show's host, Chris Harrison. Chris can be considered an external narrator (EN) for the most part as he "tells about others" and does not refer directly to himself in the narrative (Bal, 1999, p. 22). As narrator, Chris sets the tone of the program and guides us through the episodes.

For example, in episode one, he states, "Once upon a time, there were two bachelors searching for the women of their dreams," helping to set the stage for the rest of the season. This quote positions the story as a fairy tale love story in which a man searches for his love match—much like *Cinderella*, where Prince Charming searches for his Cinderella.

Chris serves primarily as a witness, or a narrator that stays out of the action in the fabula.[10] Most of his responsibility is to guide the viewer through the action on the screen, through the use of retroversions (reviewing events that occurred in previous episodes), anticipations (previewing events for us that will happen in future episodes), and filling in some of the gaps in the storyline due to editing. Through the use of such narrative devices, Chris also serves as a focalizor (Bal, 1999), i.e., presenting us with the steering perspective of the events in which some of these interactions between or among show participants receive more emphasis than others.[11] While the same event can be interpreted differently by different focalizors on the program, most of the events on the screen (in these retroversions, anticipations, etc.) are focalized through Chris.

On occasions, Chris is also a perceptible narrator. As Bal (1999) describes the term, a perceptible narrator (PN—as I refer to the concept) refers to himself or herself in the narrative (different from an EN who does not refer to himself directly in the narrative). Though Chris typically refrains from directly interacting with other participants, he is directly involved in some events on the screen—for instance, speaking with Byron prior to his selections, addressing the women prior to the rose ceremony, and

[10] The fabula is comprised of the events that occur in the narrative and includes scene, narrators, and actors/characters.
[11] In narrative theory, focalization mediates the fabula (Bal, 1998).

telling the women not selected that they must vacate the premises after the rose ceremony. All of these activities involve his direct interaction with the characters on screen. As Bal (1999) argues, "If this agent has heard the voice, he or she was, implicitly present as an actor at the scene" (p. 45). In this case, Chris responds in such situations to what the participants say, so he shifts from an EN to a PN.

Chris is not the only narrator on the program. The bachelor also serves the function of narrator. Byron, who is ultimately selected by the women as "the bachelor" in the first episode, serves as a character-bound narrator (CN), since he "tells about him- or herself—such a narrator is personified…A CN usually proclaims that it recounts true facts about her- or himself" (Bal, 1999, p. 22). Byron is a main character in the narrative and he is directly involved in most of the events on the screen. Byron is also perceptible and a focalizor because he tells about his experiences on dates with the women as they are being presented on the screen. As a narrative agent, he creates a narrative text (Bal, 1999).

There are other narrators in the fabula. The production team also displays EN characteristics through editing practices that help construct the narrative. For instance, in episode one, each of the female participants introduces herself in her filmed biographies (a monologue that each woman has with the camera). Most of these women's biographies express each of their desires to be a wife, mother, and a homemaker. Here, the EN contributes to the further domestication of women by focusing on these statements and not others the women might discuss. Moreover, each of these biographies has been edited down from its original length to accommodate the time constraints of this particular two-hour episode. As such, the production team is both an EN and a focalizor because it

makes important decisions about what footage will air and what footage will be cut. These editing decisions lead to the creation of a program with a particular (masculine) point of view. Such themes are carried over into the commercials that air during the program, most of which focus on selling products to women—e.g., cleaning supplies, cosmetics, and so on. Hence, there is a synergy that exists between the commercials shown and the program's fabula.

Moreover, the women do not serve as narrators. They serve in secondary roles as characters where their voices are rarely heard. Instead, the primary narrator in *The Bachelor* is always male. As such, the narrative tone of the text is masculine and this masculine point of view is the dominant voice in the text. To compound this situation, men—the bachelor, specifically—have all of the decision-making power in the development of relationships. While it seems a given that initially the power in these relationships appears to be in the bachelor's hands, there are references throughout the series implying that the women at times are given some power—specifically choosing whether or not they want to develop a relationship with the bachelor. For example in episode one, the women are given a choice in selecting the bachelor. In episode six, the remaining women can decide whether or not they want to spend the night with Byron in their "fantasy suites." The women make these decisions by deciding whether or not to offer an invitation to Byron to join them.

The power in the relationship, however, is ultimately in the hands of Byron. Every aspect of these relationships is developed on Byron's terms. Tanya, in the season finale, states that she is "nervous [and] …a little anxious" about Byron's decision to start a life with her or to reject her, but also states that it will be a "relief" to find out how he feels

about her. She further states that she feels "complete" around him. After Byron's rejection, Tanya mourns: "My heart's broken, Byron…I can't make you love me or be with me…I thought I was giving you everything." Later, in her limousine ride home she states to the camera, "He's made a huge mistake…I gave him my heart and he took it and basically stepped on it."

Hence, we have a problem. Each of our narrators exhibits a masculine point of view filled with expectations of how women should behave both on-screen (embodied through the participants), and off-screen (through implicit assumptions about the audiences viewing this program). Through a deeper examination of the types of characters at work in the narrative, I will discuss how certain characters become standout personalities—some by catering to traditional female/feminine roles and others by adopting less traditional characteristics.

Actors/Characters

In narrative analysis, it is important not only to analyze the narrator, but also those whom the narrator discusses—the actors/characters at work in the narrative. To distinguish between these two concepts, I again turn to Bal (1999). She argues, "Actors are agents that perform actions" (p. 5) and they are further considered "structural position[s]" (p. 115)—they are not personified; instead, they help to hold the narrative together and give the narrative structure. Characters comprise an actor's "distinctive characteristics, which together create the effect of a character" (p. 114). Initially, since we do not know much about these participants, they are most likely to be perceived as actors in that they help hold the narrative together, but we as viewers really do not know

much about them. It is not until we get to know them better (that is, they are featured on the program and their personalities become more developed) that they become characters.

This analysis fleshes out the different types of characters created in *The Bachelor*. While all of the women serve in more traditional, feminine roles (e.g., wife, mother, and homemaker), they are not the same roles; they adopt different character-types. The women become archetypal characters—we, as viewers, know who is "good," who is "bad," etc.—and to flesh these character-types out, I draw on Meehan's (1983) work regarding female characters on prime time television. Her typology is useful because *The Bachelor* adopts elements of a melodrama, a soap opera, in that much of the show's content focuses on drama and emotion.

The examination of the representations of the characters on this series is important because, as Meehan (1983) argues, "television fare conveys attitudes, beliefs, and values about the world in which we live, even if broadcasters don't intend it" (p. 3).[12] Meehan further argues that television content can serve as a model for the behaviors of the audience—"To an important degree, we become what we have seen" (p. 4)—hence the importance of studying not only the audience, but also the text. As she argues in her own categorization of female characters on television, "The reality of the image is evident in the recognizable similarities between the actions and events of the characters and the experiences of the viewers" (p. 113).

The Bachelor tells a reality-based love story, and in doing so, it embraces patriarchal gender roles by placing women in subordinate positions in relationships (as I mentioned earlier with Byron's role in relationships). Even a cursory examination of the

[12] I will be drawing on Meehan's (1983) female characters of prime time, fictional television. These characterizations are useful for *The Bachelor's* participants, who are socially constructed by editing, deliberate scripting, and literally shaped into fictional and familiar characters.

show makes its patriarchal structure apparent; it hinges on a man finding his "Mrs. Right," someone who will be able to fulfill his every desire as the wife and mother of his children. In fact, women on the program do not express any desire other than to serve in domestic, traditional, feminine roles.

To expand on this topic, the program presents a white, male, heterosexual, upper middle class, and homogeneous point-of-view regarding love, marriage, relationships, and so on, and events are framed accordingly. The notable absence of women in the role of narrators supports this perspective. This point of view features women as desperate to find "the one." For example, Kerry states in episode one that she sees herself as a "gypsy…ready to be tied down in one spot." Further, Andrea states that she has "eight yards of silk ready to make her dress," stressing the fact that she is ready for marriage. Similarly, Kristin and Abby mention that marriage is the next step in their lives. Despite the professional successes of these women (they have established careers), each mentions that something is missing in her life and the missing piece is a husband. It is useful, then, to examine the different character-types present in the women on the program, how the bachelor becomes a character too, and the tension these characters have with each other.

Byron: The Hero

In addition to serving as the main narrator, Byron also serves as the "hero" in Meehan's terms (p. 113), or a knight in shining armor as many fairy tales portray this character. He is a hero because of the way the women are constructed—e.g., he "rescues" his future wife from her formerly "unfulfilled" life without a husband.[13] Further, Byron makes judgments about the women based upon their behaviors around him. In addition,

[13] This fabula reminds us of successful "chick flicks" like *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990) and *Ever After* (Tennant, 1998).

he plays a crucial role in helping the audience get to know the women better. In fact, without some of his descriptions, it is likely that we would not get a chance to know some of them as well as we think we do. For example, in episode two, Byron while on a date with Jayne (age 37), states that he thinks Jayne is "shy, but optimistic, [and] open to the concept of love"—shaping the audience's understanding of Jayne's character.

Byron, as a hero, is charming, funny, and attractive. He "sweeps" the women off of their feet and promises them that he will make all of their dreams come true. He is also a romantic and reminds us that he is looking for his "soul mate." When he proposes to Mary in the season finale, the romantic side of him is brought to fruition. During his proposal, he speaks in Spanish (Mary's native language) and then translates it into English for the audience—"I can't see myself spending another minute without you as my wife…This Mary Delgado is my final rose. I will love you. I will cherish you. I will make you so happy." Hence, Byron plays his part in this fairy tale narrative.

Further, Byron, "The Hero," has the "voice" of a male narrator telling about his experiences with the women and the value he assigns to them. Rarely do we witness any other accounts—especially those of the women on the program. His function is that of a rescuer—he completes his future wife's life by choosing to be with her, not vice versa. The power to "choose" belongs squarely in Byron's hands.

Krysta: "The Bitch"

Some women, however, do not need Byron's descriptions of their personalities for the audience to know them and make judgments about their "character." Krysta describes herself as a self-proclaimed "high-maintenance woman" and a "bitch." She states that she expects the best of everything from life and winning Byron is one of her

expectations. Therefore, she says that she will do whatever is necessary to ensure that this desire—winning Byron—will be fulfilled. In her biography/confessional in episode one, she confesses that any man in her life must be willing to take her to "fine restaurants," because that is the lifestyle to which she has grown accustomed to and this experience for her will be no exception. Moreover, Krysta emphasizes the competitive side of her personality throughout the course of the competition. As early as episode one, she states that "All's fair in love and war!" and in episode two, upon not being selected for a one-on-one date with Byron, she exclaims that she needs to get her "A-game going!"

In Meehan's (1983) typology, Krysta would most likely be called "The Bitch" (p. 57). This character is "strong-willed, selfish, and destructive. Her schemes were self-serving, as were her standards. Often she was without morals or scruples, a sneak and a cheat. Yet her crimes were minor; she lacked the vision and power to be truly evil" (p. 57).

Krysta constructs herself as "The Bitch" primarily, but she is also constructed as such by the other women. In constructing her as "The Bitch," the women confront her about her habit of "badmouthing" them when she is with Byron. Further, the women reveal their dislike of Krysta in their confessionals where they discuss how she is creating trouble in the house. In episode two, participant Kristie leaves Byron a rose and a note by his door. Upon seeing this, Krysta does the same thing in order to not be "shown up" by Kristie. Krysta's actions infuriate Kristie who then confronts Krysta and accuses her of playing "unfair." Krysta denies this accusation and the situation is never resolved. The "cattiness" of Krysta's behavior also helps to construct her as "The Bitch."

In constructing her own "character," Krysta had an agenda from the season premiere to "win" Byron at any cost. Krysta was not concerned with making friends, as was evidenced in the eighth episode, *The Bachelor: The Women Tell All*. During this episode, several of the women confronted Krysta for the gossiping she did about them, particularly with regard to the other women's plastic surgery. In a clip that did not air until *The Women Tell All* episode, Krysta states to the camera that "There's so much silicone around here, that if I was allergic to it, I'd be dead!" In response to this comment, participant Cyndi informs Krysta that she might want to consider some silicone herself.

These were the types of relationships that Krysta appeared to have with most of the women on the program. Many of the women and Byron found her "intimidating." As Meehan (1983) argues, this is the case of "The Bitch"—"She was powerful enough to cause trouble for someone, usually some male character. The pawn of her domination was the one closest to her—husband, lover, or child" (p. 57). Krysta did not succeed in "winning" Byron's heart; instead, she intimidated him to the point that she was cast off the show (early in the season). Ultimately, Krysta ends up failing in her quest to find a husband because of her abrasive and competitive behavior furthering her construction as "The Bitch," since those characters ultimately are "losers."

Jayne: The Victim?

Jayne, a passive and "older" female (by the show's standards—37 years old) was the "front-runner" (as described by the other women) early in the season. During the first episode, when Bryon first saw Jayne he stated, "She's beautiful…my favorite." Jayne, a self-described "shy" woman, often spoke of how threatened she felt by the competition, constructing herself as a victim and a target of undeserved attack from the other women.

She further depicts herself as a "Victim" through her constant desire to place the cause of her trouble and pain on other women and not herself. As Meehan (1983) describes her, "The Victim" is "a character who suffered pain, disease, imprisonment, or death without in anyway initiating violence or courting danger. The victim suffered an unwarranted attack or injury" (p. 64). Jayne embodied the persona of the victim through the first three episodes as her conversations centered on what the experiences were *doing to her*.

Then, in episode four, she appeared to turn into a different character—"a mentally unstable female," as she was described on the show by the other women and Byron. Her "turn" in character occurs at a slumber party that the women had with Byron in the mansion. Jayne, apparently unable to tolerate seeing him talk one-on-one with the other women, confronts Byron directly regarding her feelings. She tells him she is "done" with the whole experience and accuses Byron of not taking all of the women's feelings into consideration. In a scene charged with melodrama, Jayne looked extremely angry and serious, never taking her eyes off of Byron. He looked quite uncomfortable in this confrontation.

In response to Jayne's behavior, Krysta nicknames her "G.I. Jayne" and upon hearing this, Cyndi pretends that she is Jayne shooting a machine gun. The other women discuss Jayne's strange behavior. Perhaps Cheresse summarized their feelings best when she exclaims, "That bitch is crazy! That bitch is crazy!" Later, in *The Women Tell All* episode, Jayne's change in behavior is brought up again. In a clip not shown from the fourth episode, but shown in this episode, Krysta exclaims about Jayne's behavior, "Jayne, stay in your shell. It's actually better!...Jayne looked like someone possessed her and took over her body. Tornadoes started swirling and there were definitely no ruby

slippers for Jayne!" This reference to *The Wizard of Oz* points to the troubled and dramatic environment in which these women lived and their characters were developed.

Having heard these comments and having seen her behavior on screen, Jayne reveals that, during the night in question, she was actually intoxicated. She says she is "embarrassed" by her behavior, but simultaneously states that she is not responsible entirely for her erratic behavior. Instead, she claims the other women, particularly Cyndi and Cheresse, were also to blame for how they handled the situation. In other words, despite her lapse in character, Jayne maintains her "Victim" persona by not taking responsibility for her own actions; instead, she places the blame on the other women. In this way, Jayne differs from Meehan's (1983) "Victim" because Jayne is not passive like Meehan's "Victim," in that while maintaining her "Victim" persona, Jayne still "fights back" and defends herself against how she is treated by others. Meehan's "Victim" does not possess these more assertive characteristics and does not defend herself against attacks.

Andrea: The (Unsuccessful) "Goodwife"

Andrea is the embodiment of Meehan's "Goodwife." From the premiere episode, in which she reveals she "has eight yards of silk ready to make her dress," to her eventual demise in the competition when she was cut in episode five, the only thing that Andrea appears to have on her mind is becoming Byron's wife. While each of these women expresses similar desires, Andrea carries this desire to an extreme as she began performing her "wifely" duties early on in the season. For example, in episode three, in her confessional, Cheresse states that Andrea appears to be living in a sort of fantasy world where she sees the mansion as her and Byron's house and Byron as "her man."

While Cheresse is making such statements, we see clips of Andrea preparing meals for Byron. Later, in episode four, Andrea appears to be growing increasingly jealous of the other women and states that she is "mad" at Byron because he has not called her, as if they were a more "traditional" couple. She repeatedly states that she is falling in love with Byron, even as early as the premiere episode where she states that Byron is "everything" she has ever wanted in a husband and that he has "pierced something in my heart." In these ways, Andrea constructs herself and is constructed by others as "The Goodwife."

Andrea's actions are consistent with Meehan's "Goodwife" whose "only interest was family and house, the focus of all meaningful action…Her identification was with the family and there her satisfaction lay, as well" (p. 34). Further, Andrea was often the most emotional participant character on the program, which is also consistent with this character (Meehan, 1983). However, her "Goodwife" characteristics only took her so far and eventually she was cut from the competition. It should be mentioned that Byron never provides for the audience an explanation of why he chose to cut her. The only enduring image of Andrea is her passivity in her interactions with Byron as the "Goodwife."

Mary: The (Successful) Combination

Mary, a "repeat" *Bachelor* participant from season four (featuring Bob Guiney as the bachelor), found more success in this season of *The Bachelor* as she was selected as the "winner" of Byron's heart. Mary, a Cuban woman whose native language is Spanish, rarely discussed her own ethnicity on this season of *The Bachelor*. This absence is in stark contrast to her participation on the previous season of *The Bachelor* where her

ethnicity was an important part of her character development. Mary appears to be playing different characters in each of these seasons. For season six, Mary appears as a light-skinned woman who speaks English with no accent. We are not reminded of her ethnicity until the final episode where Byron and his parents meet Mary and her parents. Since Mary's parents cannot speak English, Mary and Byron spend most of their time translating the conversations between both sets of parents. This is the only "reminder" that we receive about Mary's ethnicity.

Mary is a complex character, in that she embodies several different aspects of Meehan's typology of characters. First, she displays some characteristics of "The Victim." Many of her early confessionals and discussions with Byron focused on her insecurities of being cut from this competition, all of which stemmed from her past experiences in the show. In this way, she is constructed by her own descriptions of her persona as "The Victim" as the fault was placed on others' shoulders (e.g., season four bachelor, Bob) and not on Mary's shoulders.

Similarly, Mary continually questioned Byron about his intentions toward her and debated whether or not she wanted her parents to meet him, because they had been so disappointed and hurt when they met her previous bachelor, Bob, and then she was cut from the competition. In response to her "victim-like" behavior, Byron appears to grow frustrated with her constant introspection and in episode seven questions, "Why should I have to pay for Bob's mistakes?" Mary seems to struggle with her feelings toward Byron, because of her fears of being hurt by Byron (i.e., maintaining her "Victim" persona). While Byron does not construct Mary as a "Victim," Mary constructs herself as one.

As Meehan describes her, this character often appears to be the most passive of all female character types. Mary was not a standout personality like some of the others that I have mentioned. This character has often been perceived as "vulnerable and helpless" (Meehan, 1983, p. 67), and Mary was no exception.

However, Mary was not entirely a "Victim" character. She also displayed aspects of "The Goodwife." As Meehan (1983) describes her, "She was Miss Domestic, a paragon in the home" (p. 34). While Mary did not take this role to the extreme that Andrea did, nevertheless, she held a domesticated point of view in that much of what she says she wants from life are traditional, feminine desires—to be a wife and mother. Because Mary had been a participant on a previous season, it seems that much about her "character" was already known to the other women on the show, especially as it related to her desire to be a mother. Upon hearing that Mary has entered the competition in episode three, Krysta makes fun of her: "Hi, my ovaries are drying up! Give me a break!" Mary further supplements such statements by telling Byron that she is missing the family she "longs for." In this way, Mary constructs herself and is constructed by others as "The Goodwife."

Further, Mary seemed comfortable allowing Byron to take more of an assertive role in their relationship. She mentions throughout that despite how nervous and concerned she is about being cut from the competition, Byron is "worth it all" to her. As Meehan (1983) argues, this is an important characteristic of "The Goodwife": "Her function in her relationship with the hero was to be appreciative, concerned, and helpful when required, sacrificing her own desires and interests if necessary. She was notably inactive, serving primarily as a sounding board for the hero's musings and deliberations"

(p. 39-40). It should be noted that much of what Mary says about Byron is similar to what she said about the season four bachelor, Bob, evidencing the deliberate construction of feelings and characters in *The Bachelor*.

Mary also embodies some aspects of "The Siren" in Meehan's (1983) typology. This character has typically been associated with being "insidiously sexy, harmful yet enticing," (p. 85) but unlike most "Sirens," Mary was not responsible for her own demise. She instead used her seductive behavior to gain and maintain Byron's interests. He mentions that on several dates there were "sparks" between the two of them. Moreover, Mary often spoke in suggestive ways to Byron. After eating dinner together on a date in episode five, Mary suggestively tells Byron, "Let's go change and get into some hot water" (they later stepped in a hot tub). These are statements common to the "Siren" character: "a partner who was a sexual being with needs, interests, and desires" (p. 84). In these ways, Mary constructs herself as "The Siren."

An interesting paradox exists in Mary. Her character displays characteristics of the Virgin/Whore dichotomy. On the one hand, Mary constructs herself as the pristine, ideal homemaker who wants to be a wife and mother. On the other hand, Mary is also seductive in her interactions with Byron. Here she constructs herself as "The Siren," and speaks suggestively to Byron about her intentions toward him. In this way, Mary moves from the passive homemaker to the seductive, assertive temptress. Nevertheless, by combining suggestive statements with her romantic personality, Mary achieved the highest praise from Byron who called her "exceptional" and his "soulmate."

Upon Byron's proposal, Mary states, "This is finally my fairy tale ending." Hence, it appears that Mary was able to overcome the shortfalls of these characters by

becoming the ideal partner for Byron, something that the other women could not accomplish.

It is my argument that the narrative structure of the program plays a vital role in the way we, as television viewers, make identifications with the text. The narrative of *The Bachelor* at first glance, appears to be simple—one man looking for his soulmate—but this viewpoint is far too limited. Instead, the text is full of complexities, as evidenced through my examination of the narrative structure of the program. From this analysis, we gain a better sense for the ideological content in the program regarding our understandings of heterosexual relationships and society's expectations regarding appropriate gender roles for men and women. Hence, the importance of studying the text is a necessary part of understanding *The Bachelor*.

The Addressee

The Bachelor is a "fairy tale" for both male and female viewers. However, the fairy tale is different for both. For women, the fairy tale centers on a love story, marriage, and a "fulfilled" life. Here, the importance of traditional, "feminine" gender roles is apparent. To succeed in life as a woman, one must fall in love with "Mr. Right," marry, have children, and live happily ever after.

For men, the show is also a fairy tale, filled with beautiful women as sexual objects, further reinforcing impossible images of women. The devaluation of the female body as a sexual object for male pleasure further promotes the passive image of women. From such messages, *The Bachelor* implies that for a woman to be happy, she must be beautiful. Instead of valuing women for something other than their bodies, *The Bachelor* embraces the passive, gorgeous woman as the "ideal."

Hence, the text of *The Bachelor* is complex. It elicits assumptions about gender roles, patriarchy in heterosexual relationships, and its viewing audience through presenting a heterosexual, white, and masculine point of view. While this analysis is important, it is also necessary to examine how the audience grapples with and negotiates messages from this text. As such, interviews and observations supplement this analysis.

CHAPTER 6

THE BACHELOR'S AUDIENCE

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, this study uses in-depth interviews and observations to explore the moments of identity, regulation, and consumption in *The Bachelor*. This chapter combines the two methods as they complement one another. One looks at these moments at the individual level—interviews—and the other examines them in an interactive group setting—observations.

The Show and the Genre

When asked to define *The Bachelor* and other similar shows, participants reflected on how "real" the program and its participants are and the motives behind the show's production team in presenting this "reality." For example, KATHERINE stated, "some of the things are probably staged… [and] it is for an audience definitely 'cause they are trying to make money off of it." Similarly, ANNA expressed her concerns that participants' "true" reactions to events were edited out. Moreover, as STACEY expressed, "I think producers are kinda putting people together to see what kind of drama can unfold and to see who would hook up with who…the reality of trying to find your soul mate is virtually nil."

Some participants underscored the role played by editing in the constructed nature of the show's "reality." ELIZABETH highlighted the enhanced entertainment value of the show due to editing practices: "You can see people like you in scenarios that you would possibly be in, but they [producers] also, I mean obviously there is scripting

involved, that make it…I mean more…I guess entertaining than real life. So, it's reality, but it is more entertaining than your real life would be." Similarly, DANA felt that most situations were "set-ups… [which made the program] kind of interesting to watch."

Most of these participants felt that production concerns—e.g., gaining and maintaining viewership—played a role in how "realistic" the program and the participants are presented. They believed that editing moves the program further away from showing "real" people in "real" situations toward more contrived, scripted ones.

However, despite their questioning of how "realistic" the program is, these participants felt that the program was unique in its early days. Most participants credited *The Bachelor* as being the first of its kind—a reality program focusing on dating and relationships exclusively. This uniqueness appears to have subsided somewhat as several of the women mentioned that there are numerous copy-cat programs that have borrowed the program's format (e.g., *Joe Millionaire*, *For Love or Money*, *Average Joe*, etc.). As RENEE described it, there has been a "whole big boom" in this genre of reality television programming. Further, DANA argues, "it was a hot commodity. People actually wanted to see stuff like this, so people started replicating it"—speaking to the production imperatives guiding television programming.

According to these participants, the program appears to be more "classy" than others like it. Women on the show were often dressed "better," ("formal dresses," GRETA) and their behaviors were not as sexual as that of other programs like it: "They don't have the strong focus on sex and the intimate parts and they, you know, they let the door [to their rooms] shut sometimes" (KATHERINE). In contrast, other shows display overt sexual references. In particular, participants mentioned *Joe Millionaire* in which the

audience could hear noises that sounded like those of intimate, "foul" (BONNIE) sexual behavior.

However, for some, *The Bachelor* has become less "classy" in recent seasons. BONNIE states, "They seem to be a little bit more [sic] flashier….and this is the other thing…[there is more] pool time and string bikini time and stuff like this is a lot more common, so maybe it has become a little more trashy." Many participants speculated that this change could be to maintain viewership by making the show appear to be less "predictable" (e.g., KATHY).

There is an interesting contradiction occurring here. While *The Bachelor* is viewed as being "classier" than other programs in the genre, it has also been viewed by these women as falling victim to production imperatives—i.e., gaining and maintaining viewing audiences by using "flashier" (BONNIE) content. Hence, *The Bachelor* is increasingly categorized with other programs in the genre that are considered "trash TV." This suggests that despite their attraction to *The Bachelor*, these participants consider these shows as "trash TV."

Reception: Women in The Bachelor

In general, the women on the program were described as attractive, physically fit, and white (or at least light-skinned): "They are all gorgeous and look wonderful in a bathing suit" (ANNA); "They are all really pretty. You don't really have anybody who is more than 130 pounds probably" (DANA); and "They all have great bodies" (GRETA). Some participants mentioned the possibility that women on the show might have had cosmetic surgery—JULIE mentioned that the women must have undergone "breast augmentation."

Moreover, most women were described as:

> White or if you have like that token black person or the token Hispanic usually, they will be knocked out in the first week or two, they just kind of… they will keep them around for a week because then that looks appropriate and then they will get rid of them. (DANA)

With the notable exception of LYNNE (the only African-American woman in the study) and DANA, race and ethnicity were not mentioned that frequently by the participants I interviewed. When asked if these characteristics are representative of most women, most of the study participants did not appear to be bothered by the lack of representation of other "non-white" women on the program. An interesting comment was made by LYNNE who stated that the participants are "kind of nice to look at" and this consideration was more important for her than concerns about diversity in the show.

The study participants also picked up on the notions of beauty as prescribed in *The Bachelor*. They did not view the women on *The Bachelor* as being representative of the "average" woman. As JULIE states, "They all seem to be very, very…um…unreal, like glamorous looking when they are supposed to be dental hygienists, you know? I know my dental hygienist doesn't look like that!" Similarly,

> All of them look like they stepped off the cover of *Vogue*. They are about size zero and some of them look like they get up every day and have their hair and make-up done, which isn't really representative of the real world because not every woman in the world looks like that. (ELIZABETH)

Hence, it appears that programs like *The Bachelor* are perpetuating idealized body types for women.

All of these discussions contribute to the sexualization and objectification of the female body. Women's bodies are idealized on these programs and it appears that such messages are reaching these women. While some study participants are able to critically

evaluate some of the representations of women on the program (e.g., ELIZABETH's interpretations of women on the program; refer to quote above), they appear comfortable with the lack of diversity on the program (e.g., LYNNE). All of this speaks to the complex processes through which these study participants negotiate and consume media texts.

Reception: The Bachelor

Juxtaposed against these interpretations are the women's perceptions of male participants. Stereotypical expectations of masculinity underpinned participants' comments regarding the bachelor. For example, the bachelor is viewed as always being someone who is "handsome" ("*GQ* magazine cover look"—KATRINA) and "masculine" (AMY). However, the women felt that such characteristics actually took away from how "real" the bachelor seems as a person. For example, JEAN argues:

> They're all that quintessential bodybuilder kind of hunk that you know you don't really see too many…um…professional little computer geeks or anything. It's mainly the hunky kind or either you know funny and professional or you know like the firefighter—something like that. You know, it's kind of the hero type. Either the tall, dark, and handsome or the strong, firefighter, hero type—it's never really kind of that little meek kind of person.

Similarly, AMY states, "They were all pretty masculine. It seems like for the most part, they are pretty hairy men. I wonder if they get the ratings that they thought they would and then they decided to bring in a manly man is the only thing I can think of."

This type of characterization also contributes to how these women view the bachelor's personality (both in this season and past seasons). Several women mentioned that the bachelor appears "cocky [and] arrogant" (SAMMANTHA), a "gel head" (GRETA), "not sincere" (ELIZABETH), with "no morals, no scruples" (KATRINA), and

concerned with making money—"I've noticed a lot that monetary status seems to be pretty high [of a priority]"—JEAN.

Participants perceive the bachelor as belonging to middle to upper class socioeconomic status—though there was some question about the financial status of this season's bachelor because of his occupation as a bass fisherman. Most study participants did not consider Byron to be as financially stable or successful as the previous bachelors. Nevertheless, the bachelors featured have all been from more privileged circumstances, adding to these women's opinions that they are not representative of "real" men as they describe them.

One common sentiment most study participants expressed regarding the bachelors is that they are unsuccessful in their relationships. However, they are not considered "losers." Hence, most of the discussions about them centered on how motivated they are to find a relationship—"They are looking for a commitment or they wouldn't be on the show and hang out with twenty-five women. They are there with a purpose and with a focus of meeting them" (KATHERINE). Nevertheless, not all participants view this motivation in a positive manner. DANA is skeptical of the bachelors: "Because they are just really, they are successful; I mean there must be something wrong if they are going on *The Bachelor*." This sentiment is reflective of the skepticism with which some of the participants view the bachelor and his motivations for participating on the program.

According to the study participants time appears to be a motivating factor for the women in *The Bachelor* to behave as they do according to the study participants. Most of the participants mentioned that the women are extremely competitive, doing whatever they can to "vie for his attention… [and] cram as much of themselves in a little bit of

time so he can see them" (KIT). Due to such time constraints, these women "try to outshine everybody else and take all of [the] attention" (KIT). In trying to "outshine" the others, the women were viewed as being more willing to work for the development of the relationship than Byron as "The girls always try to establish some type of common ground with the bachelor and those you really want to be with and make it like abundantly clear that they are willing to do whatever it takes." As such, the participants felt that these women had to make the most of their time with Byron so they can continue on the program.

How "Real" are the Characters?

The competitiveness of the women in the show influenced how the study participants viewed them—these women became characters to these study participants. These characterizations of the women can be attributed to how the women on *The Bachelor* are developed through editing. Most of the study participants are aware of editing, but not all. For example, LYNNE, conscious of the editing process, expressed how the participants are "made" into characters through editing:

> They always make the guy perfect almost. Like he's not a real man. Like there…these men…have been kind of created by the producers if you will. And, they um almost make them flawless—caring, and uh, they want to know how you feel [says this sarcastically]—all of the things that most of the men you meet aren't…They kind of make the guys so perfect that the women almost fall into this fairy tale-like spell.

Through editing, several participants felt that they got to know the characters better and that they seemed more "real." However, MARJANE does not notice the role of editing on the program as she argues that "At first, I…think they really try to put on an act, but I think their true personality as the show goes on and the interactions with the bachelor comes out as more time goes on."

However, not all of the participants felt the same way that MARJANE did about these women. In fact, for some of these participants, the competition actually made these women appear to be less "real." BIANCA asserts, "Because when you only get that amount of time with him, you don't really want to be so negative. It is just a way for you to try to one up them when you know it is not actually true or could be true, but he might not think it would be, but you are just bashing the other person." It is this constant focus on competition that detracts away from how "real" these women appear to the study participants.

Regardless of how "real" study participants perceive the women to be on the screen, they do notice recurring character types on the program. As several women stated, there appear to be two extremes as far as female personalities are concerned—the shy woman versus the aggressive woman (LINDA). As SAMMANTHA argues, only one of these women is usually successful on the program (the more aggressive woman)—"It just seems like there's totally two extremes of the girls—[those] that are all over him or the girls that don't open up and those seem to be the ones that more than likely get voted off." LINDA depicts the more aggressive woman as "always trying to be on his arm or sit next to him or go to his room or get that date, so they are usually batting their eyes, just doing all kinds of flirty things…They are trying to steal his attention, get him alone."

The competitive nature of the women carried over into how these study participants viewed the women's interactions with one another. Across the board, most of the participants felt that these interactions are "catty" (GRETA) and competitive ("their claws are going to come out and they are going to fight each other"—ANNA). This kind of relationship was considered typical of most of the women's interactions. As

KATHERINE describes the situation—"Well, I mean it gets, like it does in a lot of offices and schools all over the place. It is very cliquey and the cattiness and the middle-school-ness of all the women being in the same place going after the same thing comes out."

However, others felt this situation was not reflective of most women's interactions with one another since these women are placed in a contrived situation. As ANNA explains it, "I personally cannot imagine having to live in a house with other people where we are all dating the same guy…if…you are dating someone—you are both free to date other people—that kind of thing—usually you don't know the other person." Hence, this setting contributes to how "real" these participants feel the relationships with and portrayals of women on the program are to them.

In contrast, the interactions the bachelor has with the women are much different. As several participants noted, the bachelor has complete control over the relationships he develops with the women. However, this control is thought to be a sort of façade as ELIZABETH states—"The women are the ones that look like they are uncertain and you know, so the bachelors always look like they have things under control, even if they really don't know what they are doing."

However, not all of the participants felt that way—many thought that the bachelor held all of the power (AMY). Along with discussions of control were discussions about how the bachelor "sizes up" the women. As STACEY asserts, "You can tell he is kind of sizing them up overall, which I guess is what he is supposed to do, gauging how they are with him and their personalities, enjoying the dates that they go out on and that kind of stuff."

Moreover, besides being in control of the relationships and sizing up the women, the bachelors are also thought of as being non-discriminating. Several of the study participants talked about how the bachelor tries to make everyone feel the same and treats all of the women "evenly" (AMY). ANTOINETTE especially felt this way about the bachelor: "I have felt like the bachelors did a good job of restraining themselves and actually trying to get to know the girls. In comparison to some of the other TV shows, they are actually, for the most part, trying to find a good match for themselves and not just going for the prettiest girl out of the bunch." *The Bachelor* is a different type of program for some of these women because it treats relationships in a different manner than others like it by focusing more on the interpersonal and intimate aspects of relationships. However, this "even" treatment does change over time: "It seems like pretty evenly fair [sic], but maybe that is because he has no idea of who any of them are really like and he doesn't know them, but it seems like he is pretty fair to all of them. Maybe like toward the end it gets different" (AMY). As time progresses on the show, the study participants felt these relationships became more developed and they became more "real" (MARJANE).

The Bachelor as a Social Experience

> *You must remain on your best behavior and do whatever any girl in the Girl's [sic] Night Council says, for she is your sister. You must never speak unjustly of a sister and always act with the utmost respect. When KATHERINE "sssshhhhes" us during* The Bachelor*, you must be the first one to immediately stop talking. You must always comment on a sister's story, for each and every story we tell is very important. Your eyes should be big as if very interested, with your mouth open as if in awe of what we have to say. When you tell a story, you must be very loud because you will have to talk over everyone else who is talking. You must fight for attention and once you prove yourself worthy, we will give you the attention you deserve. Nothing we do is weird, for we are the normal ones. You cannot bring some random person to Girl's Night without first asking us. We must never feel threatened by an outsider. Consequences such as no dessert or sitting on the floor will be in order if a rule is broken. Despite all the rules, we must promise to always have fun, love doing things for one another, and always be there for a sister if she should need anything!*
>
> *--Girls' Night Creed, Est. 2003 (Observation 2)*

Study participants arrive shortly before 9 p.m. each Wednesday at a designated location—often someone's apartment. The gatherings are a much-needed break from their stressful days as students and professionals. The predominantly "20-something" women sip wine as they prepare to watch tonight's episode. I note that most of the participants are dressed casually—a contrast to what they wear during the day at their jobs.

The participants in these different groups know each other well. Each group has their designated "members," meaning that they all watch the program together each week and many have been doing so for several seasons of *The Bachelor* as I soon discover. This is "girls' night out" (see the creed above, observation two), a chance for these participants to get together and enjoy one another's company. They rarely watch the program alone. As GRETA states about her own social experience:

> If I'm not busy, of course, I always turn it on. Depending on, like if someone invites use over for dinner—like, I live at a sorority house—or if you don't have a test or have plans or whatever…a lot of people enjoy going downstairs and watching it together. It is hysterical to hear what everybody has to say…it ranks much higher than others [other programs].

The interactive experience these women have with the program enhances each member's television viewing experience because *The Bachelor* serves as a topic of "water cooler" conversation. As RENEE mentions, it is important for her to watch because her co-workers talk about the show the next day. Similarly, BONNIE asserts the following:

> I usually don't miss them. My old roommate has this thing, it is just not the same if you don't watch in real time, so she always says you cannot play it back because then I guess there is the element that like everybody knows before you do and you have to be like, you know, on the edge. So, it definitely has that kind of social aspect that if you don't watch, you feel like you are out of the loop. You know it is going to get ruined the next morning via e-mail, you know, when all of your friends start discussing it, so you better watch it.

In fact, many of these participants started watching the program because of their friends. KATERHINE tells me that she organized this group (observation 2) of about fifteen women who watch the program each week. Initially, the group was small (about four women), but as she states, "We ended up finding more people and it just kind of grew and grew." ELIZABETH too joins in the conversation and states that she began watching the program in college with her friends because it "makes it more fun especially when we do [watch together]." STACEY agrees with this assessment: "If you watch it with friends, you somehow really get a lot of feedback as to how other people feel about it." Likewise, STEPHANIE enjoys the social experience of viewing the program with a group: "We all talk and laugh and make jokes and things like that while watching."

I notice that there are only women at these gatherings—men are not permitted—providing an opportunity for the participants not only to watch the program together, but

also discuss relationships in their own lives without their significant (male) others being present. They talk about their jobs, their other friends, and their plans for the week/weekend, among other topics. In doing so, they do not even take phone calls from their husbands or boyfriends during this time. Their focus is completely on the program and their interactions with one another.

The den of the apartment or house in which they are watching the program is where the women and I spend our time during these gatherings. The size of the room does not really matter to these participants as they will crowd into whatever space is available—whether they sit on couches or chairs, or end up sitting on the floor. The participants are considerate of one another as they ensure everyone (including myself) has a good view of the television set and the events occurring on screen.

A few notes about these rooms—they are all furnished comfortably. They have a couch and at least another chair in addition to coffee tables and end tables. The participants will sit wherever they can to watch the program. Most television sets are an average size (i.e., 27-inches), some are larger though. Most rooms have framed pictures of these participants and their friends interspersed throughout.

The program is about to begin. There is discussion about the previous episode before the current one begins—most of this centers on who the participants think will be cut from that night's episode. The conversation is quite lively at this point, but in stark contrast, most of the small talk stops once the program actually begins. As the host, Chris Harrison, reviews events that have happened on previous episodes, the women watch intently. This is a time of extreme concentration for these women who will yell at their friends if they are being too loud as I witnessed in observation two. There is usually little

social interaction between women at this stage; instead, they choose to watch and listen closely to Chris Harrison.

The women are critical of Chris' remarks. They often make fun of his "dramatic" tone. For example, STEPHANIE makes fun of Chris Harrison when he announces that that night's episode will be "the most romantic episode ever!" Upon hearing this, she exclaims, "He always says this!" The other women laugh in response to her exclamation. The criticism does not stop here. In episode one when he is explaining the "rules" of this season's show, HEATHER and LYNNE reject Chris' argument that the women choosing the bachelor will give them a sense of "empowerment." Instead, HEATHER states, "they are usually just victims"—not empowered.

Chris is not the only male target of criticism. Byron is often criticized—mostly the participants mention that something must be wrong with him because he is on this program. For example, HEATHER after hearing what a "great" guy Byron is, asks, "Why isn't he married yet?" (observation one). Further, the women often compare Byron to previous bachelors. JENNY mentions that the season four bachelor, Bob Guiney, was "slime" and states that she is not sure what to make of Bryon this early into the season. Her friends agree with her based upon their responses.

The participants also make comments about the women's behaviors. They use strong, often crude language to describe them. For example, in observation six, BERTHA discusses participant Jayne's "psycho" behavior from the previous episode. Conversations often focus on the show's participants clothing as well as their overall appearance. "She's old!" (GRETA regarding Cyndi; observation four); "She needs to cut that ratty hair!" (ASHLIE regarding Cyndi; observation four); "She looks like a pug!"

(LINDA regarding Krysta; observation two); and "These girls are psycho!" (LILA; observation eight).

These participants are unrelenting in their criticism of the women for their sexual behavior with Byron. Often they mention that the women were drunk and, as a result, were more likely to be sexual with Byron. In response to this sexual behavior, the women are called derogatory names—for example, when Cyndi is shown drunk, she is called a "whore" by BERTHA (observation six). Moreover, comparing participants Cyndi to Cheresse (who was cut), LINDSAY respects Cheresse's decision not to spend the night with Byron: "No, you are so right—say I didn't spread my legs for the jerk!" (observation six). Similarly, BIANCA (observation seven) calls Cyndi a "drunk ass slut." The criticism of the women did not stop there. During observation two, when participant Krysta is featured wearing an apron and a thong bikini, KATHERINE screams out, "She's sick!" and similarly, LINDA yells out, "Oh my God!"

By making such comments, the participants are directly interacting with the program—talking back to the women and men in the show about their behaviors on screen, as well as interacting with one another directly. The participants are critical of most women and maintain distance between how they view them and how they view themselves. However, there are a few women that participants compliment as showing "appropriate behavior." They are able to draw upon their own experiences and make these sorts of judgments about the women. Hence, these participants form identifications with the women on the screen as they relate to them in both positive and negative ways.

These comments were common throughout all of my observations. Often the blame for the overt sexual behavior on the program was placed squarely on the women's

shoulders—not Byron's. Though Byron received some criticism for cutting Cheresse (who did not spend the night with him), he appeared to regain some of the respect that he lost among audience members in previous episodes as the season progressed.

It should be noted, however, that not all of the comments about the women are negative. Each group had their "favorites" that they wanted to see "win" the competition. In observation two, LINDA mentions that participant Wende is her favorite and she is visibly upset when this woman is cut during the rose ceremony. Further, SAMMANTHA comments that Cheresse is "the really pretty one." Such comments were often based on a woman's physical characteristics—rarely, if ever, were other types of comments made about them.

However, these interactions are not always sustained. Often if the events on the screen are not attention-grabbing, these women will not watch as closely. This was the case in observation four where at the beginning of the observation, the women talked extensively about an episode of *Oprah* and let about twenty minutes of time pass before they started watching the program intently. Similar instances occurred at other points in these observations as some of the women grew increasingly frustrated with events unfolding slowly on screen—especially the rose ceremony which most women felt was too slow to unfold on the screen (observation one).

Regardless of the unevenness of their attention throughout the episode, participants usually do tune into the rose ceremony. At this point, each of the participants predicts who Byron will choose. Upon hearing the field of women will be narrowed from eight women to six women at this elimination rose ceremony, each woman places her "bet"—GRETA (observation four) argues that Cheresse and the "black girl" (Elizabeth)

will be the ones to leave. It should be noted that this last comment is the only comment that I heard related to ethnicity of the women. Nevertheless, instead of GRETA calling Elizabeth by her actual name, she refers to her by her ethnicity only, as if that is the only thing that is memorable about her.

Upon seeing who is chosen, the participants are either elated—they cheer—or outraged—they yell—with Byron's choices. For example, they are happy when Mary was chosen as she and another chosen participant, Tanya, were considered the "two normal ones" (EDNA; observation four). They become outraged when Jayne was chosen. ASHLIE exclaims, "Why the hell did he do that?" (observation four).

However, not every participant I observed agreed with their friends' opinions, thus, some of the conversations and debates became spirited between women. While most of them did not appear to have hurt feelings when they were questioned about their opinions, they, nevertheless, managed to hold their ground in debates. Most of the debates centered on disagreements about the participants' favorites.

Despite the criticism that most participants made toward the women and men on *The Bachelor*, most of them classify themselves as fans of the show. As their participation in group viewing situations demonstrates, they are loyal to the program. In fact, as ANNA states, she never misses an episode and tapes the ones she is watching: "I tape it so I will be able to watch it. And I will tape it even if I am watching it I guess because like somebody will call in the middle of it, and you know, it's important to watch." Similarly, JEAN mentions, "You didn't want to miss a beat! Yeah, it was pretty important and even now, I'll definitely try to watch it unless I get back late or something or I'm doing something…It's pretty important, you want to catch it, you don't want to

miss a show!" KIT takes her viewing to more of an extreme than these other women, "I make it a point to watch every week. I have no life!"

Moreover, most of the participants felt that other women were attracted to the program because of its "cattiness" (e.g., GRETA, RENEE, and AMY), the attractiveness of the show's participants (e.g., AMY), and for its entertainment value (e.g., STEPHANIE). In addition, the love story appeals to them: "I like the idea and I am romantic and women want to see, you know, some good love story and they want to see someone meet like this in this fairy tale type thing and I guess maybe it could happen…it's an interesting study of human behavior."

Beyond just watching the program, these participants also participated in other activities related to *The Bachelor*. For instance, DANA mentions that she will actively look for articles and magazines that pertain to the program after its finale has aired because of her "curiosity because you know you have been watching it, you have been watching these people." Similarly, KATRINA states that she is more inclined to read a magazine if it has an article pertaining to *The Bachelor* in it.

However, some of these women took their participation to a different level. As part of a larger group (observation two), KATHERINE, mentioned that she and her friends participate in a bachelor pool. Like the NCAA basketball tournament, these women pay $2 to participate and pick round by round (beginning this particular season when the competition is down to eight women) those who they think will be chosen. At the end, the woman with the most correct choices wins the pot of money. To monitor the contest, there is a scorekeeper (KATHERINE) who keeps track of the group's individual

scores week by week. As ELIZABETH states, the pool makes the viewing experience "a little more interesting when you have a game involved, much more fun."

My Role as an Observer

As an observer, I was fortunate to be allowed to enter these special gatherings. However, with that opportunity came a great deal of speculation and uncomfortable feelings on my part. I asked myself, do these women feel comfortable being themselves knowing that I am in the room with them recording their interactions with one another?; Am I observing what I should be observing?; Am I qualified to analyze these interactions? I noticed that the level of my previous knowledge of observation participants impacted how comfortable I felt in the situation (e.g., I knew the women in observation five very well; I did not know the women well in observation eight).

The participants were all welcoming to me, but I could tell that some of them were a little uncomfortable with my presence in their groups. For example, in observation two, SAMMANTHA asked, "Are you typing all of this?" At this point, KATHERINE responds, "Pretend like she is not here." Similarly, during observation six, LINDSAY's intoxicated roommate entered the room about half way into the observation and questioned what I was doing there. Both instances made me a little uncomfortable. But, nevertheless, the observations went on as planned.

My comfort level in these settings also affected how active my participation was in the group setting. For example, observation five, a group of women I knew well, provided me with an opportunity to interact with some of the participants directly by speaking with them about my research and their feelings, among other topics. At the same time, I also felt qualified to interpret their interactions a little more credibly.

However, in other cases (observations six and eight), I did not even know what the women looked like that I would be observing, so I was not able to connect a name with a face until I officially met them at the observation. Hence, I had a more difficult time interpreting their interactions with one another, so I made it a point to watch them more closely and found myself taking notes specifically addressing how I perceived their personalities (e.g., who commanded most of the conversation, who was more reserved in their interactions, etc.).

Nevertheless, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue, "The validity of participant observation derives from the researchers' *having been there*" (p. 135; emphasis in original). Since, I was *there*, I can describe the interaction that occurred in each observation and draw some implications about how women watch *The Bachelor* together. At the conclusion of each observation, I was left to make sense of all of this, something that is still difficult for me to do at this point. Nevertheless, there are some important themes that emerged.

Hence, for these participants, *The Bachelor* is not only a social, but also a personal experience. They not only connect with their friends by watching the show each week, but they also connect with the characters on the screen. As the women are shown more, these participants are able to discuss the type of women on the program more concretely—e.g., their character-types.

Moreover, for these participants, *The Bachelor* is a unique, social experience. Each of these groups has their own rituals for their "girls' night out" as the group from observation two calls the experience. The participants watch it together without their significant others and live vicariously through the participants' experiences, however

critical they may be of some of their actions. Further, their conversations are for the most part centered on the program itself and the characters on it. Little discussion occurs that is not related to *The Bachelor*. Most of the time, they watch closely and get involved in the program—yelling at one another or the television set at various points in the observations. As such, the viewing experience for these women is interactive—these women become indirectly involved with the action on the screen. Also, they speak of the show's participants in ways similar to how they talk about people they know.

In their conversations, participants are harsh with the show's characters, though they are noticeably less critical toward the males. The female characters are the scapegoats for inappropriate behavior on the program. Rarely, if ever, did the participants mention the men—particularly, the bachelor himself—were to blame. The participants I observed often seemed to be appalled by such behavior and called the women "whores" and other derogatory names suggesting that this behavior is unacceptable to them. The men, though they were viewed negatively at times, were not considered "at fault."

Watching *The Bachelor* serves as a social experience for these participants. They relate to both one another and to the women on the program—all the while making identifications with the text. Hence, while it is useful to examine the text of the program and an individual's consumption of it, I also find it necessary to analyze why the program is viewed and consumed in a group setting. In doing so, I can flesh out how these participants negotiate messages from the text and analyze how others in the group may influence these activities.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Using a combination of narrative theory, semiology, and discourse analysis, this dissertation sought to understand the complexities associated with *The Bachelor* from both the audience and the text standpoints. A central argument for this study is that the text and audience are both powerful—one does not overpower the other. As such, it is necessary to study both in order to effectively engage with issues of media consumption and representation.

For this study, I used *The Circuit of Culture* (du Gay et al., 1997), probing specifically the moments of representation, consumption, identity, and regulation. The circuit is useful to this dissertation because it does not privilege any one moment over another; rather, it looks at each moment as part of a cyclical process of communication. The circuit is a more complex way to look at communication which moves us beyond linear models.

The Text and the Audience

> *Though I do not want to privilege the fairy tale as "cultural institution," it is uncanny how much we turn to this genre in all of its forms to pursue our identities and the happy fulfillment of our goals, sometimes resisting and sometimes conforming to the rules of the culture industry. We use fairy tales as markers to determine where we are on our journey. The fairy tale becomes a broad arena for presenting and representing our wishes and desires. It frequently takes the form of a mammoth discourse in which we carry on struggles over family, sexuality, gender roles, rituals, values, and sociopolitical power (Zipes, 1997, p. 9).*

The Bachelor is a scripted fairy tale. The basic components of a fairy tale are present in the text: Byron is Prince Charming, the competition is comparable to a formal

"ball," and the women all want to be chosen as his Cinderella. The surroundings are lavish and life is carefree.

A major component of this fairy tale is the presence of melodrama. While melodrama is usually associated with soap operas, *The Bachelor* takes advantage of the wide appeal that emotions have when used as spectacles. Therefore, the inclusion of melodrama helps the genre reach new audiences. However, the melodramatic structure of *The Bachelor* is different from the soap opera's. On soap operas, the cliffhanger promises that a particular conflict will be resolved in the next episode. On a reality program, there is no resolution until the season finale episode, i.e., when Byron chooses his future wife.

Study participants recognize the scripted fairy tale and the program's use of melodrama. In fact, it is a primary reason why they watch the program. In fact, the fairy tale is "rewritten" by the participants as their narratives (each of which are revealed through interviews and observations) are linked together. By the end of the season Byron becomes Prince Charming—the man of not only the women's fantasies, but also the participants' fantasies. As such, they want him to find his Cinderella and they vicariously "help" him along the way by trying to identify who will be chosen as "Cinderella." Hence, the "game" aspect of the group viewing situation is evidenced through the participants' involvement in pools and discussions, where they speculate who will "win" Byron's heart.

The participants seem to use specific criteria to decide which woman is the "ideal" mate for Byron. Here, Meehan's (1983) typologies are useful in describing the characters. For these participants, the "chosen one" must be attractive, passive, and sexy, but cannot be a "slut." With such specifications, Mary serves as the "complete" woman,

defined in part by Byron and also by the study participants. Mary has it all and exhibits aspects of the Virgin:Whore dichotomy. The "Virgin" is the perfect mother and a pristine paragon in the home. Mary is this character when she expresses her desire of being a mother and homemaker for her future family. The "Whore" is the complete opposite of this passive, domestic character, exhibiting a great deal of sexuality and passion. She still caters to the needs of her husband, but also expresses her desires to live a life of passion. Mary embodies aspects of this character in her sexual encounters with Byron when she speaks suggestively to him and acts on her passions with him.

Hence, the way we define gender roles and the "ideal" woman is complex. There are a great deal of contradictions and complexities associated with expectations of female gender role behavior. While the participants picked up on some of the complexities, they also embraced the patriarchal messages as they spoke of their desires to see the fairy tale ending with Byron choosing the "right" woman.

As such, the text is profoundly patriarchal. Hence, several binary oppositions in addition to the Virgin:Whore dichotomy exist in the text. First, *The Bachelor* is underpinned by a Men:Women opposition. There are marked differences in how women and men are represented. The study participants picked up on these disparities. Men are active, dominant, and given voice. The women, on the other hand, are passive, subservient, and denied voice (unless they are given the opportunity to talk about Byron). A masculine point of view dominates the text. Chris and Byron each embody roles as narrators, though Byron serves as the main, masculine narrator (Bal, 1999). As the "teller" in Toolan's (2001) terms, Byron's words dictate the direction of the show. He

relays to us as members of the audience what we "need" to know in his role as a focalizor (Bal, 1999). Here the legitimate voice is undoubtedly male.

Along with the Men:Women opposition, there is a Rational:Emotional dichotomy. Byron remains in control of his feelings throughout the competition—after all, he is the one choosing. He has nothing to lose and can be himself. On the other hand, the women are shown as being completely emotional, "unstable" (Jayne), and always crying (Andrea). Since they have no control over whether or not they will be selected by Byron, the women will do whatever it takes to "win," often taking desperate actions to do so, including making themselves into the "perfect" wife. Hence, the competition between the women is fierce and results in stereotypical "catty" and "bitchy" behaviors. Through the use of such oppositions, this program sends a strong patriarchal message about heterosexual relationships—a woman's place is to serve in a subordinate (and emotional) position to her husband.

Another aspect of patriarchy in the text is female body objectification. The women are beautiful and physically fit—in fact, they ***must*** be in order to participate on this program. This requisite is not exclusive to *The Bachelor*, it is the norm in media products that reinforce dominant ideas of how women are valued based solely on their physical appearance. Here the Virgin:Whore dichotomy resurfaces—the "complete" woman must cater to the patriarchal, "male gaze" (and be the "Whore") (Mulvey, 1975, p. 445). The idealized woman then is a "trophy wife"—she should look good, but not speak her mind.

The participants recognize this gaze, but they do not critique it because it has become naturalized in our media-saturated society. Hence, voyeurism and surveillance

are present in the text, but not critiqued by participants. On one level, we "see" the bachelor watching the women where he "sizes them up." On another level, the audience—"the addressee" (Toolan, 2001)—watches the men and women on the program. As a result, surveillance and voyeurism become further naturalized in the text where "We, as audience members, witness the openness to surveillance, normalize it, and in turn, open ourselves to such a possibility" (Murray & Ouellette, 2004, p. 6).

Patriarchy is also reinforced through the presence of the domestication of women in the program. The "ideal" woman serves as wife and mother. She is a "tamed," "domesticated" animal who knows how to behave. Women who do not fall into that category are cut from the competition early on (e.g., Krysta). Only those who understand their domestic responsibilities succeed in the competition (e.g., Mary) and the study participants do not resist this outcome. This further reinforces women's assignment to the private sphere.

On a related note, other ideological messages in the text are concerned with age and heterosexuality. The women featured on the program are young, heterosexual, and appear to be of the "prime" marrying age. As such, the show appears to be sending a message to viewers about heterosexuality and age. On the program, a love match is constructed as a young, heterosexual couple. Here a strong message is sent to women (and men) who watch the program.

Nevertheless, for the audience, the fairy tale appeal of *The Bachelor* is stronger than its troubling gender representations. But, study participants also watch the program because it has become a way for them to spend time with their friends. During their gatherings, the participants make fun of the "catty" exchanges between women. They

enjoy the fights that occur between women and they each take sides in the fight. Further, they ridicule women for their "psycho" behaviors. All the while, they identify with their favorites and distance themselves from those women they despise.

The Bachelor is not just a program; it is a way for these participants to understand themselves and their own relationships. By relating to messages from the program, participants engage with socially-prescribed expectations of gender roles and figure out what it means to be a "woman," among other things. Further, the allure of the fairy tale ending serves as a way for participants to relate the "reality" on screen to their individual "realities." They do so by identifying similarities and differences between themselves and the show's characters.

The show is also a source of pleasure for the participants even when they recognize the patriarchal underpinnings at play in the text. Much like Radway's (1984a; 1984b) study of romance readers who actively consumed and made meaning from romance novels, these women find pleasure in consuming a text that is "feminine" and patriarchal. In doing so, they open up spaces for identification (with characters) and for meaning-making. Further, they can live vicariously through the character's experiences. Hence, consumption is a productive activity (deCerteau, 2002) for these readers. As such, "The pleasure here is not in resisting ideology, nor in challenging it with a 'better' one, but in evading it, in liberating oneself from it. The more powerfully the text proposes the reading subject as the possessing male, the greater is the pleasure of rejecting that position, of rejecting the sense of the images" (Fiske, 1987, p. 260).

Hence, texts are embedded in cultural formations and therefore, are connected to power relations. *The Bachelor* speaks to the power of patriarchy as an organizing

principle that even today is so naturalized, women can enjoy media content that clearly subordinates them.

Limitations of Research and Suggested Future Research

Reflecting on the limitations and possible expansions of a study is a key epistemological process. My study is limited by the characteristics of the group that participated in it—women from northeast Georgia and central North Carolina. The sample did not provide for much variety in ethnic and economic backgrounds. While there are noticeable differences among the various social, ethnic, and economic groups in these areas, my dissertation does not illuminate such differences. As mentioned, all but one participant are white. Further, all participants appear to be from similar economic levels, ranging from middle to upper middle class—none of them I would consider to be extremely wealthy or extremely poor.

There are advantages and disadvantages in such a homogeneous pool. While I was able to achieve redundancy in responses because the participants were similar (an advantage), the lack of diversity in responses did not provide for any other new or different themes to emerge beyond what these participants mentioned in the interviews and observations (a disadvantage). To provide for more diversity in the study, it would be useful to conduct this research in other geographic areas of the country with women from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

From an audience study perspective, future research should further explore pleasures derived from watching programs that are deemed “trashy” or “inappropriate.” From a textual perspective, conducting a genre analysis will introduce intertexuality as a key element to flesh out the codes and structure of reality television programming.

Production is an often neglected are in media studies. Research on the moment of production would complement the study in important ways. In-depth interviews with the show's production team could illuminate the commercial pressures and how these impact the footage aired on *The Bachelor*.

Regarding the moment of regulation, this dissertation only scratches the surface of its study. Future research could include the examination of media coverage regarding shows like *The Bachelor*, and analysis of the development of reality television dating shows like *The Bachelor*, and their ratings through the season.

This dissertation is a contribution to mass media studies concerned with the interaction between the text and audience. It acknowledges the importance of the text, but also recognizes that "if we are concerned with the meaning and significance of popular culture in contemporary society, with how cultural forms work ideologically or politically, then we need to understand cultural products (or "texts") *as they are understood by audiences*" (Lewis, 1991, p. 47, emphasis in original). Hence, this study calls for more research concerned not only with the structure and meaning of media texts, but also with the fascinating exchanges between texts and audiences, and the role that pleasure plays in those interactions. Mass communication research—as its best—explores, discovers, and analyzes the links between media, culture, and society, and fleshes out the contradictions and paradoxes inherent to the communication process. As the final rose is presented to its elated recipient, women watch intently and evoke the fairy tales that have been part of their lives since childhood. Meanwhile, we—as researchers—are reminded that the communication process is never simple, nor neutral.

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APPENDIX A

SHOW CHARACTERS

THE MEN:[14]

Chris Harrison is the show's host. He is a white male with brown hair. His age is not available.

Jay is a white male with brown hair, originally from New Jersey who currently resides in New York City. He is an entrepreneur. He is also one of the two bachelors the women choose from in episode one. His age is not available.

Byron, the other male whom the women choose as the bachelor, is a white male with blond hair who is originally from Southern California. He is a professional bass fisherman and currently resides in Lake Mead, Nevada. His age is also not available (though later I found out he is 40-years-old).

THE WOMEN:

Cheresse is a 31-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is from St. Louis, Missouri where she is an advertising director.

Cyndi is a 37-year-old white woman with blond hair from Hermosa Beach, California. She is the director of a charity.

Amanda is a 27-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a cosmetics buyer from New York City. It should be noted that she strongly resembles the woman (Estella) selected by season four's bachelor, Bob Guiney.

Carolyn is a 36-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a financial advisor from Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Amy is a 27-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a marketing consultant from San Diego, California.

Wende is a 28-year-old white woman with red hair. She is a model from Austin, Texas.

Lisa is a 33-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a teacher from West Palm Beach, Florida.

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[14] It should be noted that only the women's ages are mentioned in the program. The men's ages are never mentioned.

Kristie is a 32-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a bar owner from Windsor, Canada.

Andrea is a 33-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a dental hygienist from Denver, Colorado.

Nicole is a 28-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a headhunter from Libertyville, Illinois.

Kerry is a 31-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a nurse from San Francisco, California.

Jayne is a 37-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a dog groomer from Key Largo, Florida.

Krysta is a 28-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a financial analyst from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Leina is a 28-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is an advertising associate from Chula Vista, California.

Tanya is a 31-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a special education teacher from Plano, Texas.

Elizabeth is a 28-year-old African American woman with brown hair (she is the only non-white woman in the group). She is a pharmaceutical salesperson from Chicago, Illinois.

Alma is a 35-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a café owner from Astoria, Oregon.

Kristin is a 27-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is an office manager from Pensacola, Florida.

Jennifer is 31-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is an account executive from Seattle, Washington.

Abby is a 29-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is an acrobat from Henderson, Nevada.

Natalie is a 34-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a writer from Santa Monica, California.

Melinda is a 39-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a photographer from Nashville, Tennessee.

Susie is a 32-year-old white (perhaps Asian) woman with brown hair. She is an insurance broker from Hollywood, California.

Ashley is a 31-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is a teacher from Santa Barbara, California.

Kelly is a 34-year-old white woman with blond hair. She is an actress from Beverly Hills, California.

Mary is a 36-year-old light-skinned, Hispanic woman with brown hair. She is in real estate sales and is from Tampa, Florida. She was a participant on the fourth season of *The Bachelor*.

Heather is a 32-year-old white woman with brown hair. She is a flight attendant from Watauga, Texas.

APPENDIX B

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

LYNNE is 34-year-old African America woman. She is a graduate student at a public university in northeast Georgia. LYNNE was interviewed at her apartment which she shares with her young son. She is currently going through a divorce and was part of observation one.

KATRINA is a 27-year-old white woman. She lives in a mid-sized city in central North Carolina and works for an insurance company. KATRINA is also mother of a one-year-old girl. She was interviewed by phone and is currently single.

ANNA is a 27-year-old white woman. She lives in a mid-sized city in central North Carolina and works for an investment company. ANNA was interviewed by phone and is currently single.

AMY is a 20-year-old white woman. She is an undergraduate student at a public university in northeast Georgia where she is a member of a sorority. AMY was interviewed in my office at the University. She is currently single.

BONNIE is a 25-year-old white woman. She is a graduate student at a public university in northeast Georgia. BONNIE was interviewed in a classroom at the University. She is currently in a heterosexual relationship.

KIT is a 53-year-old white woman. She is an office manager in an optician's office. KIT lives in a mid-sized town in southeastern North Carolina. She was interviewed by phone. KIT is divorced and is currently not involved in a relationship. She is also the mother of two grown children.

GRETA is a 22-year-old white woman. She is an undergraduate student at a public university in northeast Georgia where she is a member of a sorority. KIT was interviewed in my office at the University. She also agreed to be observed with her friends (observation four). I am not aware of her relationship status.

AMANDA is a 30-year-old white woman. She is the development director for a non-profit organization in a large city in south-central North Carolina. AMANDA was interviewed by phone. She is also married.

MARY is a 24-year-old white woman. She is an executive assistant in a large city in south-central North Carolina. MARY was interviewed by phone. She is currently involved in a heterosexual relationship and is part of the group the second group I observed.

KATHERINE is a 23-year-old white woman. She is an after school director in a large city in south-central North Carolina. KATHERINE was interviewed by phone. She is engaged and will be married sometime in the next year. KATHERINE was a part of observation 2 (the observation was held at her mother CINDY's house).

SAMMANTHA is a 23-year-old white woman. She works in marketing in a large city in south-central North Carolina. SAMMANTHA was interviewed by phone. She is married and was a part of my second and fifth observations.

LINDA is a 23-year-old white woman. She is a rental locator in a large city in south-central North Carolina. LINDA is single and was part of my second and fifth observations (observation five was held at STEPHANIE'S apartment). LINDA was interviewed by phone.

BIANCA is a 21-year-old white woman. She is an undergraduate student at a public university in northeast Georgia and is also a member of a sorority. BIANCA is involved in a heterosexual relationship and was interviewed in my office at the University. She was also part of my fifth observation.

RENEE is a 29-year-old white woman. She is a fitness technician at a health club in a mid-sized city in central Georgia. RENEE was interviewed by phone and is married.

DANA is 23-year-old white woman. She is a newspaper reporter for a paper in a mid-sized city in central Georgia. DANA was interviewed in her office on a Sunday afternoon. She is currently single and was a participant in observation three.

ANTOINETTE is a 24-year-old white woman. She is a healthcare consultant in a large city in north central Georgia. ANTOINETTE was interviewed by phone. Her current relationship status is unknown.

STEPHANIE is a 23-year-old white woman. She is a receptionist in a doctor's office in a large city in south-central North Carolina. STEPHANIE was interviewed by phone. She is currently in a heterosexual relationship and was also part of observations two and nine.

ERICA is a 25-year-old white woman. She is a payroll manager in a large city in south-central North Carolina. ERICA was interviewed by phone. She was a participant in observation two and her relationship status is unknown.

JEAN is a 24-year-old white woman. She works in insurance in a large city in south-central North Carolina. JEAN was interviewed by phone. Her current relationship status is unknown.

ELIZABETH is a 23-year-old white woman. She works as a PR Specialist in a large city in south-central North Carolina. EMILY was interviewed by phone. Her current relationship status is unknown.

CARMEN is a 24-year-old white woman. She works as an analyst in a large city in north central Georgia. CARMEN was interviewed by phone. Her current relationship status is unknown.

JULIE is a 29-year-old white woman. She works as a high school teacher near a major city in Maryland. JULIE was interviewed by phone and is married.

STACEY is a 27-year-old white woman. She works as an executive assistant in a large city in south-central North Carolina. STACEY was interviewed by phone and was part of observations five. She is currently single.

KATHY is a 23-year-old white woman. She is a graduate student at a large public university in northeast Georgia. KATHY was interviewed in my office at the University. She is currently involved in a heterosexual relationship.

MARJANE is a 55-year-old white woman. She is a nurse in a large medical center in southeastern North Carolina. MARJANE was interviewed in her house (in her office specifically). MARJANE is the mother of two and is married.

HEATHER is a white woman who participated in observation one at LYNNE's apartment in a mid-sized town in northeast Georgia. She is the mother of a young boy.

CINDY is a white woman who is KATHERINE's mother. Observation two (which took place at a large city in south-central North Carolina) was held at her house.

KIM is a white woman. She was a participant in observation two.

JENNY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation two.

KALI is a white woman. She was a participant in observation three which took place in a mid-sized city in central Georgia at her apartment.

WENDY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation four which took place in a town in northeast Georgia at an apartment.

EDNA is a white woman. She was a participant in observation four.

ASHLIE is a white woman. She was a participant in observation four.
MELANIE is a White woman. She was a participant in observation five which was held at her house in south-central North Carolina.

SALLY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation five.

LISA is a white woman. She was a participant in observation five.

TINA is a white woman. She was a participant in observation five.

LENA is a white woman. She was a participant in observation five.

LINDSAY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation six which took place in a mid-sized town at an apartment.

BERTHA is a white woman. She was a participant in observation six.

MINDY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation seven which was held at BIANCA'S apartment.

JENNY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation seven.

KIMBERLY is a white woman. She was a participant in observation eight which was held in a mid-sized town in northeast Georgia at her apartment she shares with LILA.

LILA is a white woman. She was a participant in observation eight.

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

I _____ agree to participate in the research project, Women's Perceptions of the ABC Reality Television Program, *The Bachelor*, being conducted by Amanda Hall, Department of Advertising/Public Relations, University of Georgia, (706) 369-8776; Faculty Advisor: Dr. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Department of Advertising/Public Relations, University of Georgia, (706) 542-5680. I understand that my participation is my choice and I can stop and choose not to continue to participate at time without any punishment or penalty and have the results of my participation returned to me, removed from the research project, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1) The purpose of this interview is to explore female viewers' feelings and attitudes toward reality television shows, especially those dealing with romance and relationships.

2) The interview will be taped on an audiocassette recorder for data transcription and analysis.

3) I will be given the opportunity to discuss my feelings and attitudes toward reality television shows and contribute to future research in this area of television studies.

4) If I volunteer to take part in the study, the procedures are as follows:

    a. The interview will be set up by phone at a location and time convenient to me.
    b. I will read and be asked to sign an informed consent form.
    c. The interview should last one hour.
    d. □ I agree to being observed as I am watching an episode of a reality show. Please check the box on the left if you agree to participate in the observation. If you do not, please leave the box blank.
    e. I am willing to share artifacts related to these reality shows such as articles from the trade press (magazines, newspapers), videotapes of episodes, memorabilia related to these shows, etc.

5) No discomforts or stresses are expected.

6) No risks are expected.

7) The results of my participation are confidential and will not be released in any way will say who I am without receiving my permission first, unless otherwise required by law. For the purposes of confidentiality, tapes and written transcripts will be labeled with pseudonyms (names that will stand for my name, but in no way will reveal my name). All audiotapes will be destroyed August 2005.

8) My signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 706-369-8776 or email ahall@uga.edu.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Amanda Hall
Telephone: 706-369-8776
Email: ahall@uga.edu

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant Signature Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

For questions or problems about your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; Email Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Number: _____

Dissertation—Interview Guide

Date & Time of Interview:

Name of Participant:

Location:

Consent Form Signed?

Set-up of Interview Location (describe/sketch out briefly):

Introduction (ME):
I'm going to ask you today about reality television programs, in particular, *The Bachelor*. The questions I will ask will be focused on the show itself, but I begin by asking you general questions about reality television, particularly those programs that focus on interpersonal relationships, dating, etc.

Theme 1: How do participants define Reality Television programs dealing with romance, relationships, etc.?; Why are participants watching (e.g., *The Bachelor*)?

1. How would you define reality television programs, especially those which deal with romance and relationships?

2. Which reality television programs do you watch in addition to *The Bachelor*?

3. When did you start watching *The Bachelor*? Why?

4. How does *The Bachelor* deal with relationships as compared to other reality (e.g., documentaries, etc.) and non-reality programs (sitcoms, dramas, etc.)? Does *The Bachelor* treat relationships differently than these other programs?

5. How do you watch *The Bachelor*?
(Additional questions which I want addressed in this question)

a. How important is it for you to watch the show?

b. Why do you think other people (esp. women) watch the program?

c. Would you consider yourself to be a fan of the show? Why or why not?

d. Tell me about your participation with the show.

i. Do you tape or Tivo any of episodes of this programs? If so, do you have a time conflict which prevents you from watching the program?

ii. Tell me about any artifacts (memorabilia, newspaper or magazine articles, etc.) that you have collected from the show.

6. How would you describe the program to someone else who was not familiar with it?

7. Has the format of *The Bachelor* changed over time? If so, how.

8. How "unique" is the program in relation to other reality programs?

<u>Theme 2:</u> Audience's attitudes towards of participants on these shows

1. Now that we have discussed why you watch these shows, describe the "typical" reality show participant on *The Bachelor*.

a. What are some common characteristics most participants (male and female) share?

b. What are your general perceptions/attitudes/opinions towards the participants?

c. Is there anything you would want to change about the composition of the show's participants?

d. How would you describe participants' general behavior?

a. women with other women?

b. women with *The Bachelor* himself?

c. *The Bachelor* himself with women?

e. How are women featured in relation to men? Do women play dominant or supportive roles to men? How does this affect how women are viewed in your opinion on the show?

f. How "realistic" are the portrayals of men and women on *The Bachelor*?

g. Who do you know that has tried out or appeared on the show?

2. How do you feel about the participants' search for love, romance and relationships? (is it genuine?, lasting?, etc.). How has this show affected your views on love, romance and relationships?

3. How "realistic" are the show's relationships?

4. What is the show's overall message(s) that it give to its audiences? Would you say that you "buy into" these messages? Why or why not?

5. How does real life on *The Bachelor* compare to your own life?

6. What do you perceive to be the future of *The Bachelor*?

Other questions/information:

1. Demographic information about participant:

a. age

b. gender

c. socioeconomic status (not to be asked directly of the participants, preferably)

d. occupation

2. How important is TV to you in your own life? How would you describe your loyalty toward television viewing?

3. Other television shows watched
   a. on a regular basis

   b. occasionally

4. Anything else to add?