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*THE BACHELOR AS A PLATFORM FOR FORMAT SUBVERSION:
AUTHORIAL INTENT AND AUDIENCE REACTION*

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
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August 2021

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

It is quite clear while watching any iteration of *The Bachelor* franchise that there is a formulaic design that each season follows with the rare delineation here and there, and much of this can be attributed to the show's intended audience demographic that it is trying to reach. The audience for *The Bachelor* is relatively stagnant, as there is little change amongst the show's viewership and, until recently, very little change on the side of the show's producers to alter the audience that it brings in. Because the primary demographic that *The Bachelor* reaches consists of mainly women, a number of Feminist opinions and critiques have been raised in relation to the show, as the format that it follows is largely reliant on patriarchal standards of what a relationship should be. This dependence on the format then raises questions about who specifically and exactly the show is catering to and opens itself to critique for consistently presenting a strictly traditional, and more often than not heterosexual and patriarchal-driven, relationship as the societal norm. The show is repeating sexist norms for women, and for a mostly female audience. By looking at the audience, we can see the way those norms are received and contested or negotiated.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

ABC's *The Bachelor* is one of the most popular reality shows that appear on television today, and it has been part of the cultural zeitgeist since 2002. The show is presented as a competition for heterosexual love, as each of the twenty-five seasons of the reality competition has featured a male lead pursued by a large group of women, usually ranging between about 25-30 contestants. This number dwindles with the release of each episode that airs week to week, and the final woman standing is traditionally rewarded with a proposal in the season finale. In this process, *The Bachelor* is recycling and repeating gendered norms for a primarily female audience, making one wonder how well this is received by those watching at home. From this formula that is repeated each season, we can see that the presented intention of the show is to offer a pathway to love for each of the women that appear, albeit in a highly edited and heavily influenced manner. That said, while these may seem to be the intentions of the show's producers from the outside looking in, it is also clear that both they and the contestants that appear on the show are able to benefit from the experience in ways other than presenting or achieving the traditional romantic narrative that the show puts forth. By looking at the audience of *The Bachelor* franchise, we can see how the expectations and roles that need to be filled that are interspersed with a narrative of a journey for love are received, contested, and negotiated by those at home. In combination with scholarship on reality television, it can be inferred that The shows in *The Bachelor* franchise are training audiences in how to negotiate the systems of relationships that the show produces and how they are marketed

and economized. This audience analysis then gives answers to who the show is catering itself to as well as identifies those that compete on the show, as the majority of the contestants that participate are pulled from the show's audience.

Forming a Narrative

The narrative of *The Bachelor* puts forth a storyline that places love at the center of the universe and ensures that the contestants that appear on the show are fully aware of this incredible importance. The show also makes clear to audiences that this portrayal of romantic love is the most crucial aspect of life in the manner that it is edited and produced as “editing convincingly establishes that the women consider this opportunity more important than anything else in their lives. Their degrees, careers, and loved ones are marginalized for their chance to accomplish what is being touted as womens’ primary objective, marriage” (Gray 264). By making this level of importance evident, the actions of the women that appear on *The Bachelor* are placed under a microscope, as every decision that they make on camera could be their ticket to love or the ultimate reason that they are sent home. Viewers at home are then able to take in and consider every move that a contestant makes, and judge them accordingly while also theorizing how they would act in the same situation and decide whether or not they would have done things differently from contestant to contestant. The audience then has one of the most essential roles in the production of *The Bachelor*, as they are obviously the ones being catered to in the production of the show. Their feedback not only on the women themselves but the actions that the show takes each season is key to its success. Robert Mills, an executive at ABC, said in an interview that “The audience has become a silent producer, ... They help

decide who the leads should be, the kind of dates they want to see; it really makes them feel they are on the journey together” (Poggi). The fanbase is given the opportunity to provide feedback to the showrunners of *The Bachelor*, and they are occasionally listened to as there have been several changes in recent years to the show in response to complaints or suggestions from fans. For example, one of the changes made prior to the 11th season of *The Bachelorette* was elaborated on by Mike Fleiss, one of the primary producers of the franchise, as he laid out that “If it wasn't for social media, we maybe wouldn't have made the decision to reduce the number of cliffhangers, ... I would have just looked at Nielsen [ratings]" (Poggi). While this change is relatively small, especially in relation to some of the more significant problems with the show, such as multicultural representation, it shows that *The Bachelor* is aimed at pleasing audiences and that changes to the show can be made in order to respond to criticism or suggestions without changing the primary format of the show. Viewers of *The Bachelor* are vital to the success of the show, as their feedback ultimately results in a more contoured version of the show. At the same time, they also make up the majority of the contestants on the show, taking the feedback that they were giving on the contestants’ actions on a previous season and applying them to their own life and eventually applying to the show itself.

While watching any iteration of *The Bachelor* franchise, it is quite apparent that there is a formulaic design that each season follows with the rare deviation here and there, and much of this can be attributed to the show’s intended audience demographic that it is trying to reach. The audience for *The Bachelor* is relatively stagnant, as there is little change amongst the show’s viewership and, until recently, very little change on the

side of the show's producers to alter the audience that it brings in. Because the primary demographic that *The Bachelor* reaches consists of mainly white women, a number of feminist critiques have been raised concerning the show, as the format that it follows is largely reliant on patriarchal standards of what a romantic relationship should be. This dependence on the structure then raises questions about who specifically and strictly the show is catering to and opens itself to critique for consistently presenting a strictly traditional, and more often than not heterosexual and patriarchal-driven, relationship as the societal norm. Shows like *The Bachelor* are intended for specific audiences, which Lynn Spigel makes clear in her article "Theorizing the Bachelorette" as she points out that, "Unlike the older three-network broadcast system, the new multichannel, multinational television system is based on 'narrowcasting' (programming designed for niche tastes and demographics)" (1212). Though *The Bachelor* franchise does appear on a major network in ABC, it is still clear that the show is intended for a specific audience. In looking at Feminist film theory, Spigel clarifies that there is an industrial locus of control that these types of reality shows made for highly specified audiences fit under. Questions then are raised about the intent both in producing and appearing on shows like *The Bachelor* by feminist television critics as "[They] want to take women's genres seriously, they also maintain[] a negative critique of patriarchy and the female isolation/alienation that popular culture often maintains and encourages" (1210). These critiques are imperative in understanding the motivations behind taking part in *The Bachelor* without solely relying on the presented intentions of the producers of the reality show.

Understanding the Audience

Each season of *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* features a competition for a highly heteronormative, traditional marriage, and each season features a cast of competitors and a lead that are traditionally from very similar racial backgrounds. The lead is historically a white man or woman, other than three instances in a total of 41 seasons between *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* where the lead was African American, with a group of about 25-30 primarily white men or women. In addition to very little representation of persons of color on the franchise, there also has been little to no representation of non-hetero relationships. There have only been two actual instances of the show acknowledging relationships or sexualities that go against the “traditional” norm: 1. Demi Burnett was in a same-sex coupling on the spin-off *Bachelor in Paradise* and 2. More recently, Colton Underwood, the lead from season 23 of *The Bachelor*, came out as gay on *Good Morning America* in April of 2021. Both of these instances occurred after Burnett and Underwood had appeared on the original iterations of the franchise, where they both pursued *The Bachelor/ette*’s conventional heterosexual format. The franchise is actively presenting a weeks-long heterosexual courtship between primarily white men and women, meaning that the viewers that the show brings in are most likely white, cis-gendered, and heterosexual and that the show is actively targeting this type of audience.

In a viewership study conducted in November of 2020, Linley Sanders found that “Bachelor Nation skews toward women (77%) over men (23%). This ratio implies that *The Bachelor* franchise’s majority audience is female and that the show is likely

contoured in its production toward a female demographic. Its audience is also heavily white: three-quarters (75%) of those who have tuned into the reality show over the last year are Caucasian” (YouGov). What is especially interesting here is that this study was conducted during the airing of Tayshia Adams’ season of *The Bachelorette*. Adams was only the second Black Bachelorette in the show’s history, despite her season being the show’s sixteenth installation. This ratio of one person of color as the series lead for every eight seasons likely led to the show’s viewership numbers consisting of “About one in eight [viewers being] Hispanic (12%) and 7% [being] Black,” meaning that the franchise’s aversion to change from season to season likely leads to little change in the demographics that the show pulls in. This disinclination concerning change is likely due to the fact that the show is catering itself towards white female audiences and then draws from the viewers of the show to become contestants on subsequent seasons.

CHAPTER TWO

DRAMA AS A KEY TO THE FRANCHISE'S SUCCESS

Ensuring that each season of *The Bachelor* is filled with a surplus of dramatic instances that affect how contestants interact with each other and the lead is key to the show's success. By manufacturing situations that create tension amongst the cast, such as competitive group dates wherein the winner is awarded more time with the lead, it is almost definite that there will be noticeable internal and external strife that will come up in conversations with other contestants and the lead or in talking-head segments. Allowing audiences to see firsthand the conflict that appears in reality television adds to the voyeuristic quality of *The Bachelor*. It enables audiences to form seemingly unadulterated opinions about contestants that are actually being placed in highly manufactured situations. This opportunity to look into intimate interactions between real people is a significant reason for the draw that *The Bachelor* has for bringing in an audience. Still, the format also opens itself up to reproof. In referring to critiques that Fox's *Temptation Island* received as it was first being released, Mark Andrejevic points out that the reason for the show's criticism is based on, "Precisely the fact that it concerned not professional actors and models reading from a script but the 'real' relationships of 'real' people" (174-75). While much of the backlash that *Temptation Island* received was based on the aspect of infidelity ingrained into the show's format, this statement can explain the appeal that *The Bachelor* has for audiences. Even though the show producers almost entirely decide dates and group outings, the fact that there is no script driving the dialogue or actions of contestants makes *The Bachelor* seem like a

glimpse into the usually unseen facets and characteristics that go into the making of “normal” romantic relationships. Andrejevic also gives reasoning as to why contestants on *Temptation Island* would put themselves in a situation to have their actions constantly surveyed and judged by audiences as he points out, “Members of three out of the four couples went on record saying they decided to participate in the show as a means of giving their respective acting and modeling careers a boost (175). Like *Temptation Island*, *The Bachelor* offers an opportunity for contestants to receive name recognition and television experience at the cost of constant observation and even scrutiny from audiences at home.

Spinoffs and Success After *The Bachelor*

From the rise of popularity of *The Bachelor*, spin-offs and other iterations of the franchise began to appear, starting with *The Bachelorette* and later on the formation of *Bachelor in Paradise* and the short-lived *Bachelor Pad*. These new programs under *The Bachelor* franchise’s umbrella offered new incentives for appearing on the show, as each of these iterations pulled contestants from past seasons, allowing them to have another chance at love. While having another chance at love, the contestants also have another opportunity to be back in the public spotlight and are given a chance to have name recognition that they can hopefully profit from in one form or another. These opportunities meant that women that appeared on *The Bachelor* could spin their appearance into a chance to become the next Bachelorette or appear on *Bachelor in Paradise* or *Bachelor Pad* which allow for the traditional patriarchal power structure of *The Bachelor* to be circumvented, as they are given the power of choice that is not

afforded to them on the original iteration of the franchise. This circumvention is only possible for contestants if they perform the initial narrative of the show on *The Bachelor*, as they are able to succeed in later iterations by playing the game that projects and recycles sexist norms. *Bachelor in Paradise* affords even more opportunities to previous contestants of both *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* as a selection of fan favorites, villains, and even men and women that received virtually no screen time on their original appearance are placed in a lavish beach resort in Mexico to mingle with each other over the span of a few weeks and hopefully end the season with a coveted proposal. There is less of a narrative about empowerment and even finding love embedded in the spinoff, as the show itself advertises that “Love is possible, but drama is guaranteed,” in the trailer for the fifth season (“*Bachelor in Paradise* Season 5”). The prescribed goal of the show is still for a proposal at the end of each season, but the cast that is selected to go to Paradise is supposed to provide more dramatic entertainment value than *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette*, as storylines vary from arguments between contestants to men and women bouncing from suitor to suitor. There is less attention paid to the previous narratives of these contestants from past iterations of the franchise, and in place, they are able to form new identities from those that they developed on *The Bachelor* or *Bachelorette*. In the end, it appears that there is more success that comes from this diversion from their portrayal on past iterations of the franchise as, “The show is on its way to a better success rate than the franchise's other shows. ‘*The Bachelor*,’... typically ends in engagements, although the couples tend to break up quickly” (Bonos). After six seasons of *Bachelor in Paradise*, there has been at least one engagement at the end of each season, and a good

majority of these couples are still together. By shedding the narratives that were placed on them during their time on *The Bachelor* or *Bachelorette*, the contestants were able to rewrite their perceptions in an environment with less pressure and more options. For example, in the second season of *Bachelor in Paradise*, Jade Roper, a woman removed from the final four of her season of *The Bachelor* by the staunchly conservative Christian lead for being in an issue of *Playboy*, and Tanner Tolbert, a contestant that was portrayed as dull and given very little screen time on *The Bachelorette*, were able to shed these narratives on *Paradise*, get engaged, and are still a couple today years after the show's production. Neither of these contestants was regarded as a viable option in their presentation on their respective appearances on previous iterations, but with the original format of the show being thrown out, Tolbert and Roper were able to thrive in a new set of circumstances. The couple became one that audiences and fellow members of the show alike could root for, and the franchise as a whole was able to gain a new success story as, "In 2016, they were married in a televised wedding extravaganza commemorating 20 years of the Bachelor franchise, and many Bachelor franchise alums were in attendance" (Bonos). With the introduction of *Bachelor in Paradise*, there was a new incentive for appearing on *The Bachelor* or *Bachelorette*, as if they weren't able to find love on the original iteration, they were afforded the opportunity on the spinoff to spin their original appearance into a, much more likely, chance at love.

Devoted fans and viewers of *The Bachelor* may often find themselves comparing their lives to those of the contestants on the reality show, and some happen to pick up habits that they have learned while watching and implicate them into their own lives. In

her article “The Real Effects of Reality TV,” Micki Fahner discusses these habits and cites an expert on the topic, Dr. Brad Gorham, saying:

All TV shows, not just reality shows, help construct scenarios that demonstrate how some behaviors will be rewarded or punished, ... The concern is that frequent viewers of these shows will learn these behaviors, see them as desirable and then model them in the actual world. (104)

This sort of occurrence is common for viewers of reality television, but it is much more visible for shows like *The Bachelor*, as the show pulls from its audience for contestants each season. New contestants repeating the actions of those who came before the show’s format is quite profitable for *The Bachelor* franchise, as they are almost ensured to have the same type of cast each year, which leads to them filling the roles that the format of the show has perfected such as the villain. While it may seem odd to replicate the villain’s actions on *The Bachelor* because they rarely end up winning the show, it can still be profitable for the contestant, as the villain is often awarded the most screen time during the first half of the season. This replication is predicated on the stereotypes that appear and are repeated each season, and it leads to a specific type of casting by the producers as “It seems that reality show directors and producers are not looking to cast whole, complete people. They’re casting types, and that leads to stereotyping” (Fahner 105). Fulfilling these types of roles leads to minimal variance from *The Bachelor*’s traditional format, as audiences continue to judge contestants’ actions while also acknowledging that mirroring these actions is much more likely to result in an appearance on the show if they are applying.

Navigating *The Bachelor* as a Contestant

The presentation of women on *The Bachelor* is highly gendered, and there are vastly different expectations placed on the women that appear on the franchise in comparison to the men. While these expectations are somewhat modified on *The Bachelorette* or *Bachelor in Paradise/Pad*, they still make themselves incredibly apparent. Since there is generally no way to appear on the other iterations without first appearing on *The Bachelor*, the contestants must pay their dues on the original iteration. Rachel Dubrofsky's essay, "*The Bachelorette's* Postfeminist Therapy: *Transforming Women for Love*," analyzes the narrative that is formed around the women that first appear on *The Bachelor* and later become the lead of *The Bachelorette*. Dubrofsky explains how the women have a different set of expectations thrust upon them than the men that appear on the franchise, and this difference is especially noticeable when it comes to the women's careers. She elaborates that "On the shows, a woman's embrace of the experience of being on the series becomes proof of her desire for love, of her willingness to take the necessary risk to find love, and, ultimately, of her worthiness of being loved," even if that embrace comes at the sacrifice of their careers (192). The women that appear on the show are expected to throw caution to the wind with nearly every aspect of their lives for a slim chance of winning the competition and *hopefully* be proposed to. In using the personal experience of Jillian Harris, Ali Fedotowsky, and Ashely Hebert, the leads of seasons 5, 6, and 7 of *The Bachelorette*, Dubrofsky maps the gendered narrative of those pursuing love refusing to leave their careers for love during their appearances on *The Bachelor* being a gross negative. This narrative is stretched over to their role as the lead on the next

iteration as, “By the time the women reappear as stars on *The Bachelorette*, they realize that part of their mistake on *The Bachelor* (why they didn’t win the guy) was their inability to prioritize finding love (over career),” essentially meaning that they owe *The Bachelor* franchise for this revelation (197). That said, there is still ample opportunity for financial gain that can come from appearing on the show. While it goes against the narrative the show is attempting to put forth, many contestants can achieve more than just finding love through their presence on the reality show.

Making an appearance on *The Bachelor* is relatively beneficial for the women that compete on the show and significantly more so for the producers that push forward the product. Essentially, the women become commodities for the franchise during their time on the show, as they are exploited and heavily edited in order to present easily digestible caricatures for audiences at home, meaning that a healthy amount of viewers will be pulled in each week to continue watching these women’s journeys. Laurie Oulette’s essay, “*America’s Next Top Model: Neoliberal Labor*” can help explain this industrialized cultural influence that these popular reality shows have. She points out that “*ANTM* demystifies the process whereby women are objectified, put on display, and fetishized for profit-making purposes. The female contestants not only resemble the commodity form—they literally are commodities,” meaning that the women simply appearing on these types of reality shows ensures that the network producing the show sees an exponential profit (176). While *America’s Next Top Model* is a bit of a more obvious example seeing as the women are competing to model literal products and clothing, the popularity of the format is primarily due to the interactions between contestants and the drama that ensues from

them, which is a primary staple of *The Bachelor* franchise's popularity. The women who compete on ANTM hope that their appearance on the show can market themselves after the show concludes, even if they did not win the competition. Oulette mentions that "In an insecure labor market, the self becomes 'a flexible commodity to be molded, packaged, managed and sold,'" meaning that an appearance on reality television can become profitable for the contestant even after the show is completed (178). This mentality is quite similar to the recent rise in influence that women competing on *The Bachelor* can achieve through their appearance on the reality show, as many contestants become full-time social media influencers after their time on the show is done. The desire to become a contestant on *The Bachelor* then becomes a bit muddled from the initial intention that the show attempts to deliver to audiences as it becomes less clear that the primary goal for appearing on the franchise is to find love.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AUDIENCE'S ROLE

Seeing as though the franchise has produced 25 seasons of *The Bachelor* in comparison to 16 seasons of *The Bachelorette*, it is reasonable to imply that the early intention was to draw interest from viewers, women, to apply to compete on the show, as each season has multiple cuts before commercial break asking for applications to appear on the show. That said, even though the women that compete are primarily viewers of the show, that does not hold them back from judgment from audiences at home. In her essay, “‘Must Marry TV’: The Role of the Heterosexual Imaginary in *The Bachelor*”, Andrea McClanahan points out that the initial reaction to those competing on the first season of the show appeared negative as, “To a television audience and critics, the women appeared fairly desperate and willing to do just about anything to obtain the feeling of well-being that comes with being in a romantic heterosexual relationship” (262). This mentality has continued throughout the near-twenty years that *The Bachelor* franchise has been on television as audiences at home judge contestants for their perceived extreme desire to find fulfillment in a heterosexual relationship along with any other positive or negative interactions that occur on the show. One then must ask themselves what the purpose of appearing on *The Bachelor* does for those that apply to the show, as they open themselves up to a surplus of biased judgment from audiences at home while competing for about a 1/25 chance of ending up with the series lead at the end of the season. What can be inferred is that there are alternate reasons for appearing on the franchise, as McClanahan points out: “We’ll never know if the bachelorettes are in it for the man or

his money, the 15 minutes of fame or a lifetime of commercial endorsements” (271). Since *The Bachelor* franchise pulls from its viewership, it is reasonable to believe that the contestants going in are fully aware of these pitfalls, but engaging in this heterosexualized courtship competition leads to name recognition and the opportunity to further their career as television stars through spin-offs of the show such as *The Bachelorette* or *Bachelor in Paradise* or through careers as influencers on social media outlets. *The Bachelor* franchise produces a narrative of heterosexual courtship that is easily digestible by audiences at home, but also one that shows its viewers that there are benefits to appearing on the show beyond winning the competition, essentially ensuring that there will continue to be a surplus of applicants for each season, albeit primarily ones that look and act almost identically to those on the previous seasons.

The participatory nature of *The Bachelor* franchise is one of the precise reasons why the show has remained as popular as it has despite being on the air for twenty years. This participation can be both in response to liking the show, as well as disidentifying with the franchise and acknowledging when contestants or producers are doing something that they shouldn't. Audiences identify areas in the show where contestants or the show itself did wrong and get feedback from other fans, whether they are in person or online as, “Reality dating programmes, with this type of [emotional] decision making among cast members, may particularly generate viewer-frustrated interactivity on social media platforms” (Church et al. 26). The ability to interact with other fans of the franchise and hear feedback and opinions similar to their own allows audiences to feel a sense of community while watching *The Bachelor*. There is also a difference in the types

of communities that consume *The Bachelor*, as some watch it genuinely for the dramatic and love-centered aspects of the show, while others view it with more of a critical eye. Those on the latter side tend to essentially “hate-watch” the show due to the fact that they can disidentify with the contestants and judge their actions as:

Ultimately, the Critical Consumers believed that *The Bachelor* demeaned its contestants and promoted unrealistic and unethical behaviours. In fact, they often felt that they were either better than the show contestants or better than the non-Critical Consumers who watched the show for its drama. (Church et. al 33)

These sorts of issues with the show are common but further add to the sense of community among audiences, even if they are divided in many senses, as they are able to identify and confirm problems with the show that they can then discuss with like-minded viewers. The controversial nature of *The Bachelor* then draws in a much more consistent viewership, and while the show advertises itself as a quest for love, they can ensure higher ratings and more discussion around the franchise by displaying and highlighting the more problematic tendencies of the format.

The swarm of applications that comes from *The Bachelor*'s audience every year is highly influenced by the experience that audiences have at home while watching the show. One of the primary reasons that reality television is as popular in modern society is the role of identification that audiences engage in when watching these shows. The audience at home often places themselves in the situations of those that are competing on *The Bachelor*, as fan favorites on the series are often women that audiences feel that they can identify with and see themselves acting in similar ways. Conversely, audiences also

look for opportunities to see the exact opposite of themselves in the contestants, as many look for opportunities to disidentify with contestants that are making the perceived wrong choices or acting out negatively publicly, feeling assured that if they were in the same situation, they would act differently. This role of identity is at the crux of Dana Cloud's argument in her essay "The Irony Bribe and Reality Television: Investment and Detachment in *The Bachelor*" as she argues, "The Bachelor invites two kinds of investment simultaneously: the pleasure of the romantic fantasy and the pleasure of irony in recognizing the fantasy's folly" (414). This sort of investment then acts as a main draw for the reality show, as audiences are able to take pleasure and cheer for contestants that they feel act in a similar manner to themselves while also enjoying and rooting for the downfall of those contestants that they think are mishandling the situation that they are in. This opportunity for self-reflection and identification then opens the door for a sense of community when watching the show, as like-minded individuals and friends will often come together each week for watch parties to cheer on and jeer at contestants that they relate to or can't find any similarities at all to. Communities online are also quite prevalent when it comes to the show and the discussion is often based on reflection and identification as "devotion and distanced reflection occur in more or less equal measure in online conversations. Fans on the boards move easily among identification with the 'reality' of the women's situation, to internal critique of [the Bachelor's] behavior, to ironic and reflexive commentary recognizing the show's fictive quality, and back again" (Cloud 429). *The Bachelor* franchise is entirely aware of the communal aspect of the show and caters its product to these groups, even showcasing live watch parties

interspersed throughout episodes of the show itself. In killing two birds with one stone, *The Bachelor* franchise pulls from its audience and encourages them to apply to be on the show while also catering to and showcasing the nature of communal viewing as an act of praise for the fans at home.

CHAPTER FOUR

ARIE'S SEASON: "MOST DRAMATIC SEASON IN FRANCHISE HISTORY"

In order to truly understand the roles that are assigned by producers and subsequently by audiences, I look to a recent season of *The Bachelor* from 2018, the 22nd season of the franchise featuring Arie Luyendyk as the series lead. Luyendyk was a bit of an abnormal pick for the role of the Bachelor, as he first appeared six years earlier on Emily Maynard's season of *The Bachelorette*. Most Bachelors are selected from the previous iteration of *The Bachelorette*, but the show's producers surprised audiences when they selected the runner-up from Maynard's season from more than half a decade earlier. Luyendyk's primary draw was that he showed a large amount of vulnerability during his time on *The Bachelorette*, bucking the traditional patriarchal roles that the show propagates and this led to a positive audience reaction at the time. That said, audiences were quite surprised when he was chosen to be the lead in 2018, as he was older than most of the previous bachelors since his time on the show, and he had been away from the franchise for the entire time in between. This absence from the public eye and lack of name recognition led to questions from fans almost immediately after his selection as the lead in 2018 as, "The timing did not feel so apt for some fans of the "Bachelor" franchise who wondered -- where did this come from?" (Haigney). Though many fans were left questioning the decision, the show continued on with the same format that had brought its immense popularity, and even the selection of a less well-known or beloved lead did not halt the show's success. Luyendyk's season featured several memorable contestants that fit into the traditional roles of the franchise, while

also featuring one of the most shocking endings to the show ever, as he picked a winner in the final episode and months later recanted his proposal in order to pursue the runner-up from his season. Each and every season host Chris Harrison mentions the phrase “most dramatic season of *The Bachelor* ever” and this moniker was accurate for Luyendyk’s. However, while the ending surprised many, the general format of the show was still followed, and the gender roles and character roles that are consistent throughout the franchise were still primarily adhered to.

Disappointment with the Lead

In addition to the surprise in Luyendyk’s selection, there was a large amount of disappointment from audiences, and later it would be revealed that a number of contestants that appeared on Luyendyk’s season felt the same way, that Peter Kraus, the fan-favorite and runner up from the previous season of *The Bachelorette*, was not chosen as the Bachelor for the show’s 22nd season. Many of the women who applied to be on this season of *The Bachelor* were optimistic that Kraus would be the lead, and when Luyendyk was chosen, these women who applied remained on the show despite their disappointment. While many fans at home were upset with the decision to cast Arie as the lead over Kraus from the get-go, it was not until later that reports came out during filming that there was unrest among the contestants on the 22nd season. Robert Mills, a *Bachelor* insider, made clear that there was tension during the filming of the show as, “He elaborated on how [one of] the group date[s] diverged from the typical ‘drama’ and explained, ‘It starts to get angry. There was a little bit of anger. One of the women, I think, went really below the belt and referred to him as 'Hashtag not Peter'” (Dobin). The

question arises after a comment like this on why this woman would compete on *The Bachelor* if the man she was hoping would be the lead was not cast for the season. The answer to this question is relatively obvious, as while it goes against the presented intention of *The Bachelor*, the women who applied for the 22nd season in hopes of Peter as the Bachelor were still offered the opportunity for name recognition and the opportunity to turn their appearance on the show into a chance at being on the next season of *Bachelor in Paradise* or even become the next Bachelorette. Making this sort of comment on film almost ensured that the contestant, who has never been publicly identified, would not end the season with a proposal from Luyendyk, but would likely still gain some positive feedback from fans as Dobin points out, “making fun of Luyendyk for taking the lead role over the guy pretty much every fan wanted to see on the show is not the best way to win him over”. Though the contestant did not achieve the show’s goal of “finding love”, she still identified and attempted to take advantage of the social and economic positives that come with appearing on *The Bachelor*. While the disappointment in Arie being chosen as the Bachelor was quite apparent from both audiences and contestants alike, there was not a stark difference in women competing or audience viewership, meaning that the formula of the show itself set itself up for success even in the face of a letdown.

Arie’s season is one of the clearest examples of contestants appearing on the show not to achieve the storybook ending that *The Bachelor* advertises but rather to use the franchise as a platform to achieve success financially and receive recognition. Shows like *The Bachelor* “teach contestants (and, vicariously, TV viewers) to envision themselves as

human capital, so that the line between playing a role for television, navigating the conditions of work, and creating oneself as a marketable product is inextricably blurred” (Oulette 178). This line of thinking led to a stark difference in contestants compared to previous seasons and iterations of the franchise. One of the most telling signs that most contestants competing on Arie’s season were not necessarily there to find love with him was the stark difference in ages between himself and most of the women. Luyendyk was 36 when the season started filming, and the majority of the women on his season were in their 20’s, which is not unheard of. Still, the majority of the previous seasons of *The Bachelor* had a much more consistent and smaller age gap. For example, one of the contestants that made it quite far in the competition, much to the chagrin of the other contestants who were closer to Arie’s age, was Bekah Martinez, a 22-year-old. There was an obvious connection, at least initially, between Luyendyk and Martinez, and she made it to the top five of the contestants before Luyendyk finally decided, after much internal strife and deliberation, that the age gap between the two was simply too much for him. While on camera, it appeared that Martinez was distraught after being sent home and felt that she really had a future with Luyendyk; she later commented that she was one of the women that were under the impression that Peter Kraus would be the Bachelor when she applied. In an interview with Jimmy Kimmel, Martinez stated, “Well, I was hoping it would be Peter [Kraus] and it ended it up being Arie,” showing that while she appeared to be enamored with Luyendyk while on camera, she was disappointed at least initially when he was announced as the Bachelor (Mizoguchi). Here we can see part of the motivation for contestants like Martinez to appear on *The Bachelor* even if they are not

particularly fond of the lead. While she did not end up appearing on any of the other iterations of the franchise, interviews like the one she did with Kimmel show that Martinez was rewarded for her appearance with name recognition and recognizability that she was able to turn into a profitable platform for herself. She is now a happily married social media influencer who has been able to live largely off of the success that her appearance on the show brought her. By using *The Bachelor* as a platform, Martinez was able to find sustained success while also adding a popular and widely followed narrative to the show during its airing, showing that her appearance was mutually beneficial despite her initial feelings about Luyendyk as the lead.

Krystal: America's Favorite Villain

For fans, becoming invested in the irony that appears in each season of *The Bachelor* is often most obvious when it comes to the most controversial or disliked contestant. Every season has a villain that causes an immense amount of controversy during the show's run, and they are often the center of attention for a collection of episodes in the middle of the season. The villain is a main draw for audiences at home to tune in each week, as most of the previews during each episode and after it airs are centered around the trouble that the villain is causing either with other contestants or the lead themselves. Dana Cloud points out that the formula for the show is primarily driven by the narrative that "good women, defined by their passivity and commitment to real love on patriarchal terms, are pitted against 'bad girls' who seem to be in the game out of self-interest or who do not display the proper docility," meaning that the villain has a key role in drawing in audiences (422). For Luyendyk's season, the woman who carried the

villain's moniker was Krystal Nielson, a fitness coach from Montana. In an interview, when asked whether she regretted the way she acted on *The Bachelor*, Nielson responded, "No. I'm not embarrassed because in those moments I really felt that way. I came in and poured myself into this process," showing that being portrayed as the villain does not necessarily mean they have knowingly villainous qualities (Radloff). Krystal received one of the first one-on-one dates of the season, and Luyendyk took her to Phoenix, Arizona, to see his childhood home and meet his family, which is usually a date reserved for when the competition is down to the final two women. This date understandably gave a significant boost of confidence to Nielson. This confidence showed in her interactions with the other contestants, which caused a large amount of strife and an 'us against her' mentality in the *Bachelor* mansion. After the date, "Krystal wasn't shy about playing up her special treatment. Naturally, the date created a pretty strong bond between the two from the get-go, and *immediately* stirred up some jealous feelings in the house" (Gould). This reaction after a date is not out of the ordinary, and the jealousy that permeated the other contestants is a natural reaction as well, leading one to ask whether Nielson was really to blame for being portrayed as the villain or if it was really the fault of Arie or the producers for setting up the date at all. Regardless, the damage was done, and Krystal was officially cast as the villain of the season, as each episode essentially centered around Nielson and her faults, leading all the way to her dismissal from the show on the season's two-on-one date.

Audiences had very similar feelings to the contestants on Arie's season regarding Krystal, but the manner in which she was edited, like most all *Bachelor* villains,

influenced their opinion even moreso. It is clear almost from the get-go that the producers of the show were attempting to present Krystal as a contestant that was not on the show for the “right reasons,” which forced an adverse reaction by fans as:

Contestants and fans believe that you must come on the show ‘for the right reasons’, and those ‘right reasons’ are that you seek a pure love uncontaminated by capitalism and without selfish motive. Thus the most hated villains on the show are those who are ‘not there for the right reasons’, as we say in Bachelor-ese. (Feuer 59)

By ensuring that Krystal was getting the worst edit possible, the producers were building up to audiences’ most anticipated moment of the season: the two-on-one date. The two-on-one date consists of the villain of the season and another contestant, usually one that the villain has butted heads with continuously. After the date, the Bachelor must choose one of the women to remain on the show, and the other must go home packing.

Traditionally, the result of the two-on-one date is that the villain is sent home directly after, which was Krystal’s case on Arie’s season. The goal of this date is for the Bachelor to finally see the “true self” of the villain that only the other contestants, and audiences, later on, have seen. This realization fulfills the narrative of *The Bachelor* and is meant to represent how seriously the Bachelor is taking the process, as Arie is letting go of a woman that he had a quick connection with to ensure to himself, the remaining contestants, and audiences at home that he is aware of the red flags and that they are unacceptable during his journey for love. Luynedyk’s perception of Nielson is then changed almost entirely as Rachel Dubrofsky points out that “The women’s initial

attractiveness to the men seems to mark their later behaviors as particularly repugnant—repugnant because such alluring and attractive women have become so unattractive to them” (“Fallen Women” 363). Nielson’s “villainous” ways are fully revealed to Arie on the two-on-one date, and Krystal is cemented as the villain for the rest of the season, despite the initial happiness that was seen between herself and Arie. By taking the moniker of the villain in Arie’s season, though, Nielson ensured that she was a key feature to the season, allowing for her to find success in other ventures due to the name recognition she received.

While Krystal did appear to be getting the villain treatment from editors and producers, she also seemed to lean into the role, as she put on a persona that did not reflect the way that she presented herself after the show was filmed. One of the clearest examples of Nielson putting on a show throughout the season was the voice that she used. Krystal talked with a fairly high-pitched voice that was mocked by other contestants, audiences, and even members of the entertainment industry. One such instance was when Jimmy Kimmel “Show[ed] an edited compilation of Krystal’s affected, breathy baby vocals on his late night show, [and] noted that the contestant’s voice is ‘like the song the mermaids sing that make you want to crash into a pile of rocks’,” adding credence to the notion that the villain of each season receives a massive amount of publicity (Bond). While her voice was probably the most defining factor of Nielson’s appearance on *The Bachelor*, when she appeared on “The Women Tell-All,” a live show that allows for the eliminated contestants of each season to confront each other and the Bachelor himself, her signature voice had vanished. After being asked why her voice sounded differently by

one of the women, Krystal said that she had lost her voice prior to coming onto the show. Chris Harrison incredulously responded, saying, “Hold on, you were on the show for six weeks,” and asked if she could replicate her voice for the audience, which she did after much convincing (“Women Tell All” 31:50). It is doubtful that Nielson had actually lost her voice for such an extended period of time, so it would seem that she donned the voice specifically for Arie’s season. Seeing as though it was the most defining trait of her villain-hood, it stands to reason that she used it seemingly to create a character that would fill the mold of the villain for the season. Krystal altered herself in a manner that would allow for her to commodify her appearance on the show, similar to how contestants on *America’s Next Top Model* as, “Games like *ANTM* teach contestants (and, vicariously, TV viewers) to envision themselves as human capital, so that the line between playing a role for television, navigating the conditions of work, and creating oneself as a marketable product is inextricably blurred” (Oulette 178). By creating a persona with defining characteristics, Krystal was able to become the most talked-about storyline of the season for the majority of the time the show aired. By commodifying her voice, she opened herself up for success down the line while also leaving behind the defining characteristic of her villain-hood, allowing for a transformation.

Though she was portrayed as the villain on Arie’s season of *The Bachelor*, Krystal was able to find redemption a few months later as she appeared on the 5th season of *Bachelor in Paradise*. Nielson was all but a shoe-in to appear on the spin-off, as the villains are always the most anticipated participants by fans to make an appearance. Still, she was able to shed the critiques that she received on the initial iteration of the franchise

and looked and sounded like a new person during her stint in *Paradise*. It also became evident why she may have appeared as the villain on Arie's season as, after the show aired, she revealed in an interview that "I thought [the Bachelor] was going to be Peter. I found out a week and a half before [it wasn't]. I gave up my whole life, my career that I love so much thinking it was [going to be] someone else" (Radloff). Like the situation that Bekah Martinez and many of the other women faced in applying for the 22nd season of *The Bachelor*, Krystal followed through with appearing on the show despite her disappointment in the chosen lead. Despite this disappointment, Nielson was able to profit from her stint as the villain, as she gained a significant amount of name and face recognition while also parlaying her appearance into an opportunity to be on *Bachelor in Paradise*. In *Paradise*, Krystal was able to find a new chance at love in Chris Randone, who surprisingly enough was the villain on Becca Krufin's season of *The Bachelorette*, and the couple was one of the few on the season to get engaged in the season finale. In reflecting on her experience on both iterations of the franchise, Krystal said, "Everything I went through on *The Bachelor* and *Bachelor in Paradise* led me to develop and grow into my own as a person and eventually, it led me to Chris" (Corinthios). Though she is one of the most criticized contestants to ever appear on the franchise, her narrative was able to take a completely different turn in her stint on *Paradise*, showing the benefit to appearing on *The Bachelor* in the first place, even if the lead is not their first choice or they are given a seemingly detrimental label. Krystal was not the only contestant from Arie's season to profit from a negative narrative on the show, as the actual winner faced similar challenges that led to a comparable payoff.

Being proposed to at the end of the season in *The Bachelor* is not necessarily the most valuable prize that contestants are awarded when they appear on the show. Both *The Bachelorette* and *Bachelor in Paradise* serve as opportunities for the contestants who did not win *The Bachelor* to profit from any screen time that allowed for them to become well known to audiences in an environment that is not quite as catered to the patriarchal nature of the original iteration of the franchise. These variations of the show allow the women that competed on *The Bachelor* to have much more power and choice than they did originally, as they are presented with a number of options of who or whom not to court rather than just one. Most times, the Bachelorette is chosen from one of the finalists from the previous season of *The Bachelor*, who gained a large following of viewers during the airing of the season. The selected woman is then given the opportunity to switch roles with the Bachelor and choose from her own selection of 25-30 men. The format for *The Bachelorette* is almost identical to that of *The Bachelor* but, “The Bachelorette market[s] [itself] according to a postfeminist logic that embraces femininity and “girliness” in the name of enlightenment and female empowerment,” as opposed to the apparent patriarchal structure that makes up *The Bachelor* (Spigel 1212). While this is how the show is marketed, the new lead of *The Bachelorette* is often presented as a woman that was very popular on the previous season of *The Bachelor*, but also as one that must overcome their shortcomings on the last iteration that led to them not being chosen by the Bachelor. In going into the season, the new Bachelorette’s journey for love is defined by the failure of the last love presented on *The Bachelor* as Rachel Dubrofsky makes clear that “Each woman who stars on *The Bachelorette* is presented as transformed

from the previous experience of heartbreak on *The Bachelor*,” meaning that the empowerment that they are awarded as the lead on *The Bachelorette* is directly proportional to their perceived flaws that were made evident on the previous season (“*The Bachelorette’s Postfeminist Therapy*” 198). Whether it be for being too career oriented or for not being vulnerable enough with the previous lead, the constant seems to be a willingness to give up independence when in pursuit of love, despite the narrative of female empowerment that is largely headlining each season of *The Bachelorette*.

Becca’s Rise, Fall, and Rise Again

The Finale of Arie’s season is unlike any other in the franchise, both in its end result and how it was filmed, edited, and presented to audiences. Luyendyk’s season finale featured his final two women, Becca Kufirin and Lauren Burnham. While he showed some difficulty with making the decision on camera, Arie eventually proposed to the former in what most would assume was the show’s ending. That said, Chris Harrison had been teasing that the finale of Arie’s season would be incredibly monumental, even going on to say, “I know I’ve said this before, but this truly is the most dramatic ending in *Bachelor* history. You don’t want to be the only person in America that doesn’t see how this goes,” during his sign off on the “Women Tell All” episode so audiences knew that there would be more to come after this seemingly innocuous finale (“Women Tell All” 1:23:32). On the “After the Final Rose” segment after the finale, it was revealed that Arie had broken up with Kufirin after their first few months of engagement and a change of heart that made him want to return to the runner-up Burnham. Despite the breakup occurring after the filming of the 22nd season, the camera crew returned to watch Arie

awkwardly meet with Becca and inform her that he was not really in love with her and regretted picking her over Burnham. The manner in which this encounter was filmed is unlike any other scene that has appeared in the history of *The Bachelor*, as all of the footage was kept, and it was filled with cuts and multi-screen shots of the aftermath, making the breakup almost appear as a scene in a blockbuster movie. As “Cameras followed the pair [and Arie] confessed to Becca that she was not his true love after all. This scene was repeated so often on the show and the after-show and in the media that it became iconic,” the amount of effort that producers put into presenting the breakup as the most dramatic that the franchise had ever seen was incredibly evident (Feur 52). The scene featured several uncomfortable silences, and Kufirin asked multiple times for Arie and the camera crew to leave, but both proceeded to poke and prod, trying to get more reaction and answers out of an understandably disheveled Becca. During the strained interaction, Luyendyk assured Becca that “I wanted to tell you in person, and I wanted it because I felt like it would be good for us to talk about this now and not have to face going on *After the Final Rose*,” making the interaction appear to be more intimate than it actually was, as it still remained a significant feature of the finale (“Episode 10” 1:42:24) One might question why producers would want to include such an awkward and difficult scene, but in an interview, after the finale aired, Robert Mills assured that it was for the fans’ benefit and that it added even more reality to reality tv, as he points out:

The stuff you see here is stuff that we’ve all done and we’ve all been through.

There’s heartbreak and there is hope, but it is riveting and it’s why we watch “The Bachelor” because when good or bad things happen, we all want to relate that

these things happen to other people. When the show really does that, it's when it's at it's best. (Wagmeister)

This line of reasoning fits in with Dana Cloud's notion of the ironic tendencies in the franchise that seeks to advertise a romantic fantasy while giving more attention to the exact opposite for Becca, as Cloud points out that "Clearly, the crises and dramas of these characters are inexpensive fodder for ongoing investment in the series and its outcomes in the short and long term" (432-33). By putting these very raw emotions on display, *The Bachelor* was able to appear more realistic to fans, even if it came at the cost of Luyendyk's reputation and Kufrin's self-esteem.

The intended result of filming the breakup in such a manner was clearly to get a reaction out of audiences by taking advantage of a situation that had only happened once in the show's history. Jason Mesnick had a similar change of heart at the end of the 13th season of *The Bachelor*, but there was not nearly as much attention paid to the production value of the breakup as there was with Arie and Becca's. The reasoning behind this change in presentation seemed to be Luyendyk, and fans reacted against him as such, as, "[*Bachelor*] Nation was livid that bachelor Ari[e] allowed the break-up to happen on camera, thus 'blindsiding' Becca, but he claimed that this would allow her to become the next bachelorette" (Feuer 52). This statement appears to be true, at least in how matters worked out for Kufrin, as she was named the lead for the next season of *The Bachelorette* minutes after the breakup aired during the finale. Luyendyk even seemed to be setting Kufrin up for the role by speaking in platitudes seemingly to justify his actions, but also highlight Becca's take on love as he said, "And I know—you always said, 'Guard your

heart. Figure out where your heart is.’ And I know this last week has been really tough for you. I have to follow my heart” (“Episode 10” 1:37:34). Can it be said then that Robert Mills’ claims about showing the breakup in its entirety added to the realness of the show if the primary reason Luyendyk agreed to filmed interaction was to ensure that Kufirin would receive the lead role on the following iteration? I would argue that by making the parting of ways look entirely authentic, with no jump-cuts or shaving down footage, *The Bachelor* simultaneously accomplishes producing an aesthetically realistic breakup while also ensuring that the most dramatic possible ending occurs that will feed into the next season/iteration of the franchise, making fans hungry for more, while also doing some service for Kufirin by offering Becca the role as the Bachelorette and allowing Arie to save face. Dana Cloud clarifies that audiences are primarily aware of this occurrence, saying, “viewers are capable of sustaining both faith in the romantic narrative and ironic awareness of the economic and personal motives for participating simultaneously” (427). Audiences were aware that Kufirin’s experience after her appearance on *The Bachelor*, specifically the cinematic breakup that occurred after the season was filmed, led to her selection as the next Bachelorette. By showcasing Arie and Becca’s breakup in such a brutally realistic manner, *The Bachelor*’s showrunners were able to present a seemingly authentic experience of the trials and tribulations that come with romantic relationships while also setting up a narrative that drew in audiences to the next season of *The Bachelorette*.

The aftermath of Arie and Becca’s breakup came to a head on “After the Final Rose”, the live show after the finale of *The Bachelor*, in which the show’s host Chris

Harrison promised that “All [] questions [from the previous night’s finale] will be answered” (“After the Final Rose” 0:37). The purpose of the live show is to establish a closer connection to audiences as Jeanine Poggi points out by quoting Jill Gershman, a marketing executive at ABC. She elaborates. “In this DVR, digital world, we still like people to view live or within three days, so marketing it as a live event helps us to do that,” showing that “After the Final Rose” offers an opportunity to view the climax of the season and the discussion that follows alongside those that went through it like Becca. During this two-hour special, contestants from the season are usually brought into a hot seat and asked questions about how the season ended. Due to how Arie and Becca’s relationship ended, the questions were geared mainly towards the dramatic ending that had appeared in the finale the night before. The episode began showing footage similar to that of the breakup between Luyendyk and Kufrin, but now Arie has shown up to Lauren Burnham’s, the season’s runner-up, house to attempt to mend their relationship. Unlike the confrontation with Kufrin, this conversation is edited as the show usually is and it is eventually revealed that Lauren has taken Arie back. The difference between the presentation of these two interactions is immediately apparent, as the showrunners obviously gave a good bit more attention to the breakup and its aftermath than the “happy ending” for the season’s Bachelor and the initial runner-up. *The Bachelor*’s producers acknowledge that audiences are much more interested in the drama that comes along with the show than the happy endings that it produces and appears to be the show’s goal as a whole. While still giving the reconciliation screen time, it is clear that the women on Arie’s season like Kufrin and Burnham are essentially modeled as being at his beck and

call, and that the conversations that end in heartbreak are much more likely to engross audiences. This mentality fits in line with Dana Cloud's reasoning that "Chris [Harrison], and all the women are laborers in the manufacture of a highly profitable cultural product. That product is the construction of a compelling social 'reality' in which smart, beautiful women become helpless objects at the mercy of another's choices" (430). This helplessness is continued through the episode as "highlights" from the breakup are shown throughout the start of the episode until Kufirin is finally brought on stage to reflect and give her side of the story. She is offered the chance to confront Arie in front of the live studio audience, and Luyendyk is showered with jeers when he gives an answer that is not to their liking. That said, only minutes later, Lauren Burnham is brought out to talk with Arie and Chris Harrison, which culminates in Luyendyk proposing to Lauren in front of that same audience, this time to a chorus of cheers. Viewers of *The Bachelor* may then seem fickle-minded, but this mentality too fits in with Cloud's notion of irony within the show as "'savvy' viewers of The Bachelor may recognize the fantasy as artificial, archaic and implausible*not to mention -oppressive- but react by embracing it with tongue in cheek" (431). *The Bachelor's* audience is able to consume a romantic fantasy while also realizing the dramatic twists and turns that occurred during the end of Arie's season were not necessarily organic and uninfluenced by the showrunners and adjust how they watch the show as such.

Kufirin's role as the next Bachelorette was finally announced after showing the highlights of her breakup with Luyendyk, her first confrontation with him since, and Arie's subsequent proposal to Lauren. Because she had suffered through these moments,

and only by suffering through these moments, she was awarded the opportunity to be the next lead, effectively giving her the power that had been denied on Arie's season of *The Bachelor*. In explaining the reasoning for her selection to Becca, Chris Harrison elaborates, "... The outpouring of love and support [from fans] for you and to see how you have moved on and turned that corner, it was an easy choice for us," showing that her negative experience on *The Bachelor* largely factored into her selection and that only by going through these types of negative experiences can one be named the Bachelorette ("After the Final Rose" 1:06:02). Becca had filled the role of the woman left in heartbreak that can only turn back to the franchise in order to attain the true love that had eluded her on the show's previous iteration. That said, while this seems like a happy ending for Kufirin, and that her experience on *The Bachelorette* would surely be different from that of her time on *The Bachelor*, the show's predictable format made this impossible. Jane Feur points out that "[When Googling 'Becca Crying'] An entire page of images of Becca crying comes up if you click on 'images'... Some of these come from her Bachelor appearance and others from her ensuing season as The Bachelorette. Becca was perhaps the best crier of any bachelorette," showing that Kufirin's experience on *The Bachelorette* did not differ much from her previous appearance (51). In order to keep with the show's dramatic tendencies, Becca had to navigate her role as the Bachelorette in a similar fashion to the way she did on *The Bachelor*. While the opportunity to be the Bachelorette was presented as a chance to achieve what Becca hadn't on *The Bachelor*, the show reverted to its standard go-to of intense melodrama to keep audiences tuned in.

CONCLUSION

The Bachelor franchise counts on dramatic tension in order to maintain its popularity among audiences, and this is a process that relies on a knowing participation from both its contestants and the viewers of the show. Navigating *The Bachelor* in a manner that profits the contestant and the reality show itself is the goal for almost every contestant that appears on the show. By adhering to this structure, they can be rewarded for their part through name recognition or further appearances on the franchise. Contestants like Krystal are expected to fill the role of the villain, driving much of the drama on the show. In turn, they are rewarded with recognition and opportunities to further their appearance while leaving behind the role they filled on *Bachelor*. Women like Becca are awarded a similar opportunity with higher stakes. They must have their heartbreak put on display for all to see to achieve the reward of becoming the next Bachelorette. Finally, audiences are almost expected to acknowledge that the storylines surrounding contestants like Nielson and Kufirin are not exactly organic in return for an engaging storyline. In tandem with each other, these factors make *The Bachelor* a recursive format that sees relatively little change, both in the way it presents itself and the popularity that it receives.

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