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## **Breaking The Fourth Wall**

A case study of racial representations in The Bachelor franchise

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# Abstract

In 2002, ABC aired the first season of its new reality TV dating show, *The Bachelor*. Almost 20 years later, *The Bachelor* franchise has become a cultural phenomenon that is integral to the popular culture zeitgeist. With that popularity came a lot of criticism about many elements of the franchise but one stood out more than others and that is the lack of diversity in casting and the under/misrepresentation of racial minorities.

This thesis will explore *The Bachelor* franchise with an emphasis on racial representations by looking at how racial minorities are represented on the show but also how those representations are received by the audience. This study of how race is constructed and represented on reality TV will also show how those representations contribute to the modern social imaginary.

This analysis will be carried out using a multimethod approach focused on multiple aspects of the franchise by looking at the episodes and audience reception through social media and a *Bachelor* themed Podcast. Throughout this analysis there will also be an emphasis on the production angle of reality TV and the context surrounding it. Ultimately, this thesis will demonstrate the different ways in which racial minorities are used as a means to an end while whiteness is continuously privileged. All this in the name of manufacturing a fairytale romance. While the franchise wants its critics to believe that they are in fact improving on the diversity and racial representations, the findings will demonstrate that this in fact a strategy to change the narrative that the franchise privileges whiteness and minorities are used as token representations.

Finally, the audience study will show the complex ways in which fans engage with the franchise and cope with knowing that reality TV is in fact manufactured all the while believing in the love stories portrayed on screen. It will also explore the imagined community that is *Bachelor Nation* built among fans through the viewing experience.

**Keywords:** *Reality TV, The Bachelor, race, representation, diversity, stereotype, whiteness, Other, social imaginary, irony bribe, engagement, audience reception, Podcast*

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# 1. Introduction

« *Reality TV is caught up in what is happening now* » (Hill 2015: 1), some have also said that the media serves as a reflection of the state of our current society. This premise served as one of the building blocks of this research because while reality TV has been studied in the past, issues of diversity and representation have dominated the conversation over the last few years. As fans have become more vocal about racial minorities being under/misrepresented, especially in dating reality TV shows. The Bachelor franchise has been at the center of this debate for a few seasons, as the conversation was sparked once again when they passed over Mike Johnson for the coveted Bachelor position in the latest season which aired in January of this year. Johnson could have become the franchise's first black Bachelor but when Pete Webber was announced in his place fans took to social media to express their outrage. This particular situation served as the inspiration for this research as fans expressed their disapproval but still planned on watching despite it all. This made me wonder-- why do they still watch the show if they disapprove of it so much? Why is The Bachelor and its sister show The Bachelorette at the center of this conversation? And why do people care?

The Bachelor <sup>1</sup> is one of the longest running dating reality TV shows, it started in the early 2000s and has maintained its popularity throughout by evolving with the genre as a way to maintain relevance. Reality TV is an ever changing genre that, like The Bachelor, has transformed greatly since its inception. As a result, it led to a lot of media research on the topic including a wide range of studies on representation with an emphasis on racial representations.

One of the principal issues concerning racial representation within reality TV has been that they were not representative of the groups they concerned but also that racial minorities were boxed in specific roles with no room to develop into complex characters. Historically, reality TV has been known to use race and racial conflicts as dramatic devices for storylines, so much so that it became one of the recurring tropes of the genre (Bell-Jordan: 2008). Furthermore, reality TV has

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity I will be using the general term The Bachelor to refer to the franchise as a whole unless specified otherwise.

grown to be a site of struggle over meanings, especially as it relates to race because of the genre's habit to equate it to reductive typologies such as stereotypes and myths (Ibid).

While it may be easy to dismiss the significance of representations, particularly as it relates to *The Bachelor*, one needs to remember the importance of those representations in the process of meaning making, as these will affect the way people relate to each other and construct their identity. Additionally, it is clear that reality TV has had an undeniable influence on media and cultural studies in a way that has shaped television studies as a whole (Kidd 2016: 91).

An important element to keep in mind throughout this thesis is the cultural relevance of *The Bachelor* franchise within popular culture that these numbers should bring to light. The finale of the latest season of *The Bachelor* (season 24) which aired in March of this year amassed 8.5 million viewers, its largest number since the season 20 finale back in 2016 (Thorne: 2020). The franchise made 187.3 million dollars in advertising revenue between 2014 and 2015 only and as of 2016 there were a total of 23 books written by *Bachelor* alums (Yuan: 2015). To which will be added Colton Underwood's (season 23 *Bachelor*) latest book that was released on March 31st of this year. But perhaps the most impressive statistic is that there are versions of *The Bachelor* in 37 countries and 13 versions of *The Bachelorette* and a total of 7 spin-offs, 2 of which were set to start this year (Angelo: 2018, Schremph: 2020). All this to say that *The Bachelor* franchise is more than a reality TV dating show, it is a cultural phenomenon that has changed the way we view reality TV and continues to shape popular culture season after season. Therefore, with all this in mind *The Bachelor* became the ideal case study for a research on racial representations in reality TV.

The objective of this research is to take an indepth look at how racial representations are constructed on *The Bachelor* in terms of the narratives created, or lack thereof, the amount of airtime given to racial minorities. As well as how racial minorities have to adapt their performances in order to fit the ideals of the franchise. Moreover, to understand those racial representations further one must understand how they are received by the audience within the larger cultural context. All the while taking the time to consider that reality TV audiences have a complicated relationship with the genre that is sometimes described as a love-hate relationship.



Additionally, Bachelor fans stand out due to the emphasis put on the idea of community that brings them together through social media. So much so that they are now referred to as Bachelor Nation.

By the same token, it was important to look at the problematic of this dissertation not only from the perspective of the episodes but also by looking at the production side. The Bachelor is a format style reality TV programme that has mostly remained the same over the last 18 years, making it that much more relevant to how the franchise is produced. Furthermore, this research will establish how those representations are a reflection of the modern social imaginary and the role that they play in maintaining it. In fact the ways in which the franchise views racial minorities and the manufactured fantasy created around romance are deeply rooted in the modern social imaginary so we must start with the premise that anything in this society can be taken into consideration for its economic value. Subsequently, this led me to the following research questions that will be the guiding light of this thesis:

*(1) How are racial minorities represented on The Bachelor/ette?*

*(2) How do racial representations contribute to the construction of modern social imaginary?*

*(3) How are racial representations received by the audience?*

These three questions will be investigated using a multimethod approach that will look at the representational practices established on The Bachelor from different angles because this dissertation was designed with previous research on the topic in mind with the aim to add my own contribution to the field. I will explore racial representations through a qualitative content analysis and a genre analysis of the episodes and an audience reception study by carrying out a qualitative textual analysis of social media comments. This will also be enriched by an analysis of a Podcast dedicated to recapping The Bachelor, adding another layer to the audience reception study as the two hosts have a particular interest in representation within the franchise, being two black women themselves.

## 2. Literature Review

### 1. Reality TV

#### Inception of the genre

The inception of the reality TV genre can be separated in different eras-- in the early 1990s and 2000s popular factual entertainment put an emphasis on truth claims as it was necessary for audience engagement with the participants (Hill 2015: 59), following the British academic approach that studied the genre in relation to documentary films and realism (Kavka 2012: 3). This first wave of scholars put emphasis on how all the lines were blurred between “*information and entertainment, documentary and drama, public and private*”, making claims to truth and reality that much more relevant by positioning reality TV as “*documentary lit.*” (Ibid.) However, in the early 2000s the genre went from being inspired by observational documentary to surveillance based reality TV with shows like *Big Brother* and *Survivor* gaining popularity which inspired the second wave of scholars. The success of fabricated competitive environment TV shows led to discussions surrounding the surveillance culture of the genre as well as the infiltration of television in everyday life, but like the British school they also had an interest in the public and private spheres (Ibid.). This new wave, also known as the American approach, elevated the genre to being a major trend of the millennium (Andrejevic 2003: 2-3) and eventually to what it is today. However, the terrorist attack of 9/11 threatened the continuity of the genre as reporters expected the brutality of those events to lead audiences to want less reality which ultimately was not true as it had the opposite effect and instead rejuvenated the genre in unexpected ways (Andrejevic 2003: 4). As a matter of fact, viewers were able to see reality TV for the form of escapist entertainment that it was and not an immersion in brute reality (Ibid). While the distinction between these two waves is an important one to make, this research will primarily focus on the American approach.

In her book, Misha Kavka takes on the task to provide a historical overview of the genre, using Foucault's genealogy to divide it along three different generations with its own characteristics within their national contexts. The first generation, known as the camcorder generation in the US, in the early 1990s or the 'docusoap' era in the UK in the second half of the decade (2012: 9). The second generation coincides with the American academic approach that started with Big Brother, beyond the competitive-based surveillance aspect it also opened the door for interventionist formats in which participants had a shot at self-transformation (Kavka 2012: 9). While the third generation does not have one format to embody it, it does refer to the emphasis put on the production of celebrity and it also marks a complete departure from the genre's original roots in the real and documentaries to instead embrace the self-commodification of participants and self-legitimation that characterises celebrity culture as we know it (Ibid).

It is this early success that made reality TV an area of interest for many scholars because it has had an undeniable influence on media and cultural studies in the past and still to this day. Some even went as far as to say that it altered the direction of television studies as a whole despite the complicated relationship the genre has with its audience (Kidd 2016: 91). While most have a common sense definition of reality TV it is not an easy genre to define especially if we debate the inclusion and exclusion of certain sub-genres. It is also worth mentioning that the genre's claim to 'reality' is debatable while the television mention is limiting considering the current landscape (Ibid). However, if we had to settle on one broad definition this could be the one: "*So, reality TV is actuality-based; factual, unscripted, about real people being observed by cameras, and by extension, viewers.*", it is also necessary to consider the commercial dimension that the genre has not been afraid to embrace and its popularity amongst a wide range of audiences that really differentiates it from other truth claims based programming such as the news or documentaries (Kidd 2016: 91-92).

Despite its popularity and wide circulation the term 'reality TV' is still heavily contested for many reasons, one being that programmers, viewers and commentators use the term assuming that it will be understood regardless of the context (Kavka 2012: 2). Another reason being that there is legitimate confusion around the delimitations of the term, partly because reality TV is a hybrid format but also due to its ever changing nature in programming (Ibid). Additionally, the

“low cultural value” attributed to the genre sets it apart, as it is seen as low-brow entertainment by fans and detractors alike. Many consider it to be a dumbed-down format that anyone can participate in-- low entry threshold, therefore, not making it elite enough (Kavka 2012: 145, Kidd 2016:105)

### Characteristics of the genre

In his book *Reality TV The work of being watched* Andrejevic takes on the task of providing a critical analysis of the significance of the genre, one of his main claims being about the democratic aspect of reality TV which Hill described as lulling viewers into the work of being watched (2015: 65). The democratic nature of reality TV refers to the lottery-like chances of turning an ordinary person into a celebrity overnight regardless of talent (Andrejevic 2003: 4), however, it is worth noting that this might not be the case anymore as the genre now privileges influencers with an established popularity as opposed to ‘nobodys’. While this might seem like a positive, in a more cynical reading of this characteristic-- producers are using the illusion of power sharing as an incentive to participate in the production of very cheap but profitable entertainment (Ibid: 6). However, it is possible to look at this phenomenon in less negative terms where reality TV producers, participants and audiences are co-creating a cultural experience (Hill 2015: 7-8).

Furthermore, looking at co-creation within the genre as it relates to under/misrepresented groups, one can see it as having a direct impact on how they are being portrayed on television (Orbe 2008: 349). As they are no longer limited to negative imaging that were created through top-down representations, instead they moved away from simply being passive viewers, illustrating one of the early promises of the genre which was to give power to the many instead of the privileged few (Andrejevic 2003: 3). This was echoed by Hill who points out that reality TV gave participants the opportunity to be the generators of an argument instead of the subject of the argument of another as it usually is the case in scripted content (2015: 54).

While early research focused on defining the genre, the ever-expanding variety of reality TV and its appeal to audiences (Orbe 2008: 348) only a few have begun to look at issues of race. Furthermore, reality TV is entering a new phase where social media is taking a more relevant

space in its development through the casting of contestants but also in the way the shared viewing experience has evolved. As a matter of fact it went from being confined to fan forums to now happening in real time on platforms like Twitter. This fact alone has changed the way the ‘money shot’ also needs to translate well on social media. Moreover, the audience is in this unique position where they are able to express their opinions directly to the production of their favorite reality TV show. This makes it that much more important to examine the social media conversation around reality TV in order to get the full picture of how it is being received by the audience and particularly in areas of contestation like racial representation .

Another element that differentiates reality TV from other genres is the constant debate between authenticity and performance as contestants are opening themselves to the scrutiny of audiences who are reluctant to accept reality TV as ‘real’ and instead will be analysing the texts to see who is too aware and ‘putting it on’ for the cameras (Kidd 2016: 99). This also carries over to the contestants who are constantly trying to pinpoint who does not have the right intentions and explicitly talk about how they will come off to the audience or will be represented by editing (Ibid). However, it has become clear that “*we might crave authenticity in reality TV; but we expect performances of all kinds*”(Ibid).

### Cultural citizenship

Reality TV stands out amongst other genres because it has become an integral part of the popular culture discourse whether it is by hating it or loving it, it is still part of the ongoing conversation. Additionally, the genre has been a source of contention due to the stigma that comes with it. It is simultaneously able to be extremely popular with new shows being developed every year while also looked at as a waste of time (Hill 2007: 97). However, like most popular culture texts it creates a sense of belonging for audiences as they are able to relate to it more than other media texts and it can even seem more real than issues of governance (Hermes 2005: 1). Reality TV and therefore popular culture has this ability to make audiences feel secure in the knowledge that there are others like them who “*share a sense of elation, outrage, happiness, or concern; that they are familiar with the arguments we want to use and the examples we refer to.*”(Ibid), subsequently serving as the first citizenship quality of popular culture. A second aspect is the

fascination that popular culture texts generate as they allow those who participate in it to fantasize about ideals and hopes but also examine the fears they have for our society (Hermes 2005: 3). This is particularly present in reality TV as some view it as a democratic pathway to fame while others view it as the demise of our society. Thirdly, it is able to blur the line between the public and the private better than any other institution or practice for people regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity (Ibid). In many ways this is the core of this research as one of the main claims of reality TV is to provide the same access to people regardless of race or ethnicity. However, this does not always translate in practice.

Hermes's definition of cultural citizenship as it relates to popular culture will therefore be one of the building blocks of this research-- "*cultural citizenship can be defined as the process of bonding and community building, and reflection on that bonding that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture*" (2005: 10)

While cultural citizenship bonds together a specific community over a specific *thing*, the social imaginary on the other hand refers to how individuals see their social existence within the larger group, where one fits in with others and the "*deeper normative notions and images*" that are at the basis of their expectations for them and others (Taylor 2004: 23). The concept of the social imaginary can be confused with the idea of a social theory, however, three clear distinctions can be made. The first one being the use of the term imaginary because it relates to how 'ordinary' people imagine their social world which can come about through images, stories or even legends (Ibid). A second notable point is that theories tend to apply to a specific minority whereas the social imaginary is shared by a large community or society (Ibid). And finally the social imaginary is what legitimizes common practices which is fostered by one common understanding (Ibid).

In simple terms, a social imaginary is created when a theory gets adopted by a small elite and ultimately infiltrates the social imaginary enough that it becomes part of the social order of a society (Taylor 2004: 24). However, the reality is that the social imaginary is complex as it incorporates the expectations we have for each other that construct our collective practices (Ibid). This common understanding is simultaneously factual and normative, in the sense that

individuals have an idea how they want things to be which is also coupled with them knowing how things need to be and any change in that order would render the practice invalid (Ibid).

On the other hand it is worth mentioning that the social imaginary is not absolute and therefore can be false, in the way that we want to think ourselves as equal citizens in a democratic state, seeing it as an ultimate principle fully realized (Ibid: 183). In order to deal with it individuals will be adopting a strategy of avoidance of excluded and disempowered groups convincing themselves that they are responsible for their situation. This means that there will be times where the modern social imaginaries are “*no longer defined as ideal types but as actually lived by this or that population, are full of ideological and false consciousness*” (Ibid). While the social imaginary is meant to be built on common understanding it is also dependent on the human imagination which can be “*full of self-serving fiction and suppression*”(Ibid).

## 2. Representation

Culture can be understood as a set of *things* such as TV programmes, novels and more but also a process and a set of practices that lead to the production and exchanging of meanings between members of a group or society (Hall 1997: 4). It is through cultural practices that individuals are able to ascribe meaning and represent objects, people, or events-- as *things* on their own do not have one single, fixed, unchanging meaning (Ibid). Furthermore, Hall established that members of a same culture must share a set of concepts to interpret the world in similar ways, “*creating systems of representation in which our concepts, images and emotions ‘stand for’ or represent, in our mental life, things which are or may be ‘out there’ in the world*” (1997: 4). Showing the beginnings of why Hall refers to representation as one of the central practices in the production of culture and a key moment in the ‘circuit of culture’ (1997: 1).

Communication studies have always found an interest in the study of representation for many reasons, one being the limited range of medium to produce those representations coupled with the fact that those representations are never neutral because the people who create them have an agenda and their own set of subjectivities due to values, attitudes, and identities (Kidd 2016: 3).

Kidd joins Stuart Hall in putting emphasis on the role of representation in the process of meaning making and how those meanings can become common sense in the media as a result of representations which are worth investigating because they do not always mirror reality but instead “*help to re-present, or even create it anew*”(2016: 3-4). However, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that meaning is not stable and that it is also dependent on many factors including culture, geography, language, heritage, and education (Ibid). But instead are constructive and help frame our understanding of the world around us-- framing our position within it (Ibid: 26). According to Couldry, social order is not a given but instead is practically constructed through symbolic representations and media representation which are eventually reproduced in social life enacting said social order (Kidd 2016: 36). While this implies that the social order is constructed in accordance with the fabric of our society, it is not actually the case as certain groups are often the ones deciding what is relevant and what is not. As a matter of fact, in our current western context “*there has been a privileging of white, middle-class, hetero-normative and often male, perspectives within the media and broader cultural output*” (Ibid), which ultimately perpetuates the current social order as it is shaped by those perspectives.

### Representation in media

Before understanding representation within reality TV it is necessary to first look at the larger field and the media industry as a whole which has its beginning during slavery and colonialism where representations of non-white characters were guided by a Western perspective that would portray them as “*irrational, animalistic, lazy, uncivilised, childlike and, depending on the context, either dependent slaves or savage natives*” as a way to justify racial exploitation (Hodkinson 2011: 197). These negative perceptions proved themselves to permeate our culture for years to come and contributed to the dichotomy of human beings as internally homogeneous but externally different to justify the ‘superiority’ of one group and the ‘inferiority’ of another based on race (Ibid). While things may have improved in terms of the amount of minority representations, it has led to a different issue concerning the quality of those representations as now they tend to be pushed to stereotypical roles creating narrow and generalized representations of those groups which “*renders uniform everyone associated with a particular feature*”



(Pickering 2001: 4; Hodkinson 2011: 201). Stereotypical representations have been a part of media content since the early days through stereotypes such as *Uncle Tom*, *Coon* or even the *Mammy* (Ibid). However, those overt representations of black inferiority and white superiority started to subside around the twentieth century which ultimately limited the amount of black representation for the following decades (Ibid).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s created a shift in the media industry and played a clear role in expanding the variety of roles for African Americans and by the 1990s the role of the President of the United States was played by Morgan Freeman in the movie *Deep Impact* (Ibid: 202). While the improvement of African American representation has been gradual over different media forms the same cannot be said about other minority groups such as South Americans or even identical in every industry, as African American are often still limited to R&B and Hip-Hop music dominated by ideas of gang culture and oversexualisation of women (Ibid).

While it may be difficult to establish clearly the impact of negative and stereotypical representations, theorists have agreed that those representations play a role in race relations, the first one being that such representations may “*affect the way in which minority populations are viewed and treated by the dominant majority*”(Ibid: 203). What this means is that it might be more difficult for minorities to achieve certain goals such employment or housing and would be more at risk of being searched by the police (Ibid). Secondly, “*stereotypes may have an impact on the self-esteem, ambition and attitude to society of members of the stereotypes group themselves*” (Ibid). Furthermore, if one is constantly exposed to media content showing their peers displaying certain characteristics they are often more likely to reproduce them whether they view them as positive or negative (Ibid).

In her exploration of diversity within the news media industry, Metykova established that gender and race identities are socially constructed, implicitly and unconsciously, in a way that is perpetuated by media organisations, through the roles that are deemed appropriate based on gender and race (2016: 112). On the one hand, women will be expected to perform femininity according to a stereotyped ideal to gain approval and maintain it; on the other hand racial

minorities will be limited to covering minority related topics serving as a bridge between the majority and minority populations (Metykova: 2016).

In the case of gender, there are two types of segregation within media industries-- horizontal segregation meaning roles are separated following gender lines with women concentrated in low-ranking positions; and secondly vertical segregation where in one general field women will be low in the hierarchy while men will often be in senior positions (Ibid). This translates in the way that the female gender will be seen as a negative capital that they will need to compensate for through other types of capital such as professional, social, economic or cultural whereas the male gender will automatically be viewed as positive capital (Ibid). This ultimately leads to an obvious inequality in gender representation within media industries as men will participate in gendering practices that are in line with stereotyped ideals of masculinity which will “*create social closure and oppression*” (Metykova 2016: 113).

Meanwhile, when it comes to race and ethnicity the situation is just as grim as ethnic minorities face similar marginalisation than women as race becomes a factor in income and access to positions of power (Ibid: 115). Furthermore, studies on ethnic minorities in news industries argue that the norms and values in place within the field are contributing to this marginalisation, in the way that they are representative of the power structures and therefore misrepresent minorities. Moreover, Pritchard and Stonbely have argued that race is an influential factor in the way topics are assigned to journalists where whiteness would be a non-factor in story assignment as race is only discussed when it is in relation to minority reporters or minority related topics consequently rendering whiteness invisible (Ibid: 118).

While the marginalisation of women and racial minorities in the media industries have been laid out in several points it is important to mention that not everyone has the ability to think of gender and race as two separate entities that never intersect. As a matter of fact, based on the previous paragraphs it is clear that women of colour find themselves in a situation where they are marginalized based on both of those identities. This idea is what is rooted in the debate about intersectionality within feminist theories which McCall defined as “*the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations*” (2005: 1771). In fact, intersectionality is ideal to explore the ways in which the different categories of race, class

and gender are linked and constructed in tandem, therefore bringing up questions such as “*how is race ‘gendered’ and how is gender ‘racialised’*”, as well as how those two questions affect the formation of social class (Davis 2008: 71). The reality is that the interaction of these different categories will not only result in varying degrees of power but also of media representations, making it an important element to keep in mind throughout this research.

### Why does racial representation matter?

Despite certain claims that the study of representations is outdated or even lacks impact, it is worth remembering that we should want to live in a society where creative creators are “*politically engaged, astute, ethical, and enlightened*” to the possible impact of their work in the ‘real world’, especially as it relates to decisions on production and circulation of cultural texts (Kidd 2016: 8). Furthermore, Branson and Stafford argue that media have the ability to normalize certain stories, images, situations by re-presenting over and over again, in doing so they have the power to marginalize some images rendering them unfamiliar and therefore threatening (2010: 106; Kidd 2016: 8). Following their argument, representation in media of any kind can shape what we deem familiar and safe and what is seen as foreign, therefore demonstrating why they matter so much however subtle they may seem.

It is by looking into the origins of our images of the world and where those are forged that we will be able to understand them (Kidd 2016: 8) and eventually reverse those who negatively affect under/misrepresented groups. Some scholars have also argued that as it relates to social identities media representations play a major role in providing frameworks and creating reference groups (Deery 2015: 99). This ultimately provides another reason for attempting to understand why some representations are put forward over others in order to pinpoint why our understanding of the world is distorted in favor of the privileged (Kidd 2016: 8). Adding a dimension of power as some groups of people might be rendered invisible while others are represented so often that they are seen as the norm which brings up questions about who decides which representations are normalized.

Representation has been an area of interest for many media scholars and specifically on television, as the question evolved from asking how much African American representation can

you find in America's commercial image culture to questioning the quality of those representations (Gray 2005: 1). This raises questions about why those representations matter and the answer can be divided in four points-- (1) it promotes social cohesion through exposing viewers to groups different from them (2) the broadcast should address all types of audiences (3) as they all contribute the same amount of money in taxes for public service television and should see themselves represented (4) and finally minority groups want to see themselves represented (Bignell 2004: 233).

The importance of looking at representation of race and ethnicity cannot be denied because throughout history racial minorities were either represented as Other in museum and galleries or there were areas where they were underrepresented such a TV except when it was in relation to news stories about crime-- in that case they were over-represented (Kidd 2016: 37). Furthermore, unlike gender, racial representations matters that much more because those media representations may be their only glimpse into the lives of racial groups they know nothing about; on the other hand those represented may respond to how they are being perceived by either internalizing and/or resisting those images (Deery 2015: 117). As representations have become "*battlegrounds for struggles over meaning within society over what is deemed acceptable, what is unsayable, what is punishable*" (Ibid). While it is necessary to look at representations of all kinds throughout a wide range of media texts, this research will take a deeper look at racial representations within reality TV.

### Representation and race in reality TV

The study of representations surrounds politics of gender, sexuality, race, age, disability, class and any other social aspect of an individual making reality TV the perfect site of analysis being a pathway to widening or diversifying televisual representation (Kidd 2016: 104). Furthermore, the ubiquity of the genre, in terms of its presence on most TV channels made it a difficult one to avoid (Squires 2013: 264). Additionally, the continuous claims to be 'real', regardless of the obvious nods to editing makes reality TV an ideal site of investigation for how racial realities are shaped within mass media (Ibid). Grindstaff argues that the role of factual programs such as the news or reality TV is to mediate the experiences of everyday people, however, it has now

become apparent that following the continuity of events has been sacrificed in favor of perpetuating larger myths of what can be considered ‘real’ which ultimately shows the power of reality TV in constructing race and racism in everyday life (Bell-Jordan 2008: 357). In addition, there is a certain self-consciousness that comes with ethnic, racial and gender identities that can come into play in the way that those identities are performed, especially considering that performance is a contributing factor to their construction (Deery 2015: 99). As a result identities often find themselves on display-- “*stretched, examined, created, altered, broken down, or mocked*” (Ibid: 100). However, one recurring trope of the genre is when there is an obvious difference between the self-identity of a participant and how they are socially perceived, as viewers enjoy watching the drama that results from a clear difference between how some participants see themselves and how they are seen by others (Ibid).

An essential point to remember is that to carry out an accurate assessment of representation, there are important elements to consider starting with viewer interpretation, followed by the conventions of the genre as well as the intended target audience (Deery 2015: 116). When it comes to reality TV, genre conventions are very important to note, an example of that being the way that participants are expected to perform as naturally as possible in an obviously unnatural environment which is an expectation that will disproportionately affect racial minorities.

The discourse surrounding race on television and reality TV specifically has always been implicit as conservatives will say that America is colour blind because of the amount of black representation on television, however, a talent show like *The Voice* was created partly to remove racial biases by taking a colour blind approach as it is assumed that racial identification is primarily visual (Gray 2005; Squires 2013). Further proving that post-racial America is not as representative of the population otherwise there would not be any need for this kind talent show. This also serves as an example for the emergence of post-racial discourses in popular media which have been described as a form of “new racism” that can be observed on most reality TV programming where racial discussions will not be talked about openly eventhough it is shaping production and content under the surface (Drew 2011; Squires 2013). Furthermore, we can see that post-racial logics coupled with representations are just furthering the gap between racial identity and the reality of racism, as it is easy to dismiss the role of institutional racism in favor

of individual choices (Squires 2013: 266). Squires described racial representations in reality TV as a conundrum because it forces the audience to face issues they are not ready to address in this current post-racial society, meaning coming face to face with how 'real' issues of race are and how those impact their everyday life (2013: 264). In addition, the post-racial discourse in American media is so that they think they have benefited enough from the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement and therefore no longer need any institutional changes to achieve racial equality-- viewing themselves as an already established multicultural nation (Ibid).

Many scholars have established that in reality TV, race is used as a textual device aimed at driving the narrative creating a point of contention and dramatic scenarios that ultimately only lead to reinforcing pre-existing racial stereotypes (Bell-Jordan 2008: 353). The *Real World* was one of the early adopters of this way of thinking, as multiracial people were often used as a way to bridge the gap between white and black participants to foster 'acceptance' and give an illusion of a racist free utopia (Squires 2013: 271). This later became one of the show's staple narratives, (1) as the house would always feature contestants from opposite ends of the spectrum; (2) promote conflict around racial issues; (3) perpetuate representations that emphasize violence and anger; (4) personalize racism making it an individual issue and not institutional; (5) leave conflict and contradiction unresolved (Bell-Jordan 2008: 357). This illustrates one of the many problems with representation in reality TV-- racial minorities are being pushed into the position of being narrative devices instead of developing well-rounded characters.

The other side of the coin is the integration of racial minorities through either the inclusion of one person of colour in a primarily white cast; or inclusion through 'mirror' shows where the only thing that changes is the identity of the cast that will be all black, gay, Persian, etc. which can be seen in the *Real Housewives* franchise for example (Squires 2013: 268). While this type of integration increases the diversity of representations on screen it is still limiting as it either puts one minority in a 'token' position or leads to a segregation of television programs, neither of which is a positive alternative to a complete lack of representation. Furthermore, it does not leave much room for the multiple dimensions of race, identity and representation which allow us to understand the complex nature of those identities as it is often too easy to just see it as a binary concept (Bell-Jordan 2008: 355).

In her essay about how race is used as a textual device on reality TV by analysing *Survivor, The Real World and Black.white*, Katrina Bell-Jordan established that media texts are sites of struggles over meaning especially when it comes to race within reality TV as the genre forces us to see uncomfortable truths that we need to keep at the forefront in order to combat racial ideologies of discord and division (2008: 369).

While race is the primary focus of this research it would, it would be incomplete if it did not take gender identities into consideration especially as it relates to the dating reality TV format that tends to be patriarchal and follow traditional gender narratives making the search for love primarily transactional as men can exchange their wealth and status for love (Deery 2015: 106). Furthermore, according to Jonathan Gray, gender performances, particularly, on dating shows are so exaggerated that they are caricatures that are less likely to have an impact on the 'real world' (Ibid). However, women will have to deal with certain double standards such as being shamed for being too focused on their career while men will not be judged in the same way (Ibid). These examples are an indication of the role gender identity plays in representation in the genre which can also be coupled with racial identification as those two identities are not independent from each other.

### 3. The Bachelor

Different reality TV scholars have carried out research on The Bachelor/ette but few have become experts on the franchise as much as Rachel Dubrofsky, who found interest in how race is constructed within the show as her earlier research looked at how whiteness is an implicit prerequisite for finding a romantic mate while people of colour are relegated to helping frame the narrative instead of being at the center of it (2006: 40). She took her analysis one step further by using the traditional eastern Harem as an analogy for the way many women would make themselves available for one man to choose among them. Moreover, she detailed the different ways in which The Bachelor/ette is raced, demonstrating that the habitus of the show is so that women of colour do exist in it but are irrelevant to the dominant narrative; or are used as ways to

explain the journey of the white contestants; or a point of comparison with the other women (Dubrofsky 2006: 42).

While Dubrofsky's research is important to understanding The Bachelor/ette from an academic perspective, it is also wise to remember that the franchise has evolved since then therefore these analyses need to be taken with a grain of salt. Taking all of this into consideration, this is where Monk-Payton positioned her work by providing an analysis of the discourse around Rachel Lindsay's season of The Bachelorette being the first black Bachelorette, looking at the intersection of race, gender and cultural politics of desire (2018: 248).

At the time of Dubrofsky's research, having a person of colour as the lead seemed like a far-fetched dream that was only able to become a reality through the convergence of multiple factors at the level of the network and the franchise (Ibid: 254). Monk-Payton cites the success of multiple TV shows featuring black women as the main characters, specifically Shonda Rhimes shows, as a contributing factor to Lindsay getting picked to become the Bachelorette. As a matter of fact, Rhimes proved through her casting that black women can be positioned at the forefront of a TV drama on the same network as The Bachelorette and be extremely successful (Ibid). Furthermore, Lindsay's resemblance to Olivia Pope, the main character of *Scandal*, coupled with the fact that both women represented the idea of an affluent 'StrongBlackWoman' are additional factors that 'qualified' her for leading The Bachelorette (Ibid). While having the first black Bachelorette was mostly celebrated it also showed that Lindsay was in fact chosen because of "*her socioeconomic class, her education, her looks-- she needs to be above board in all those things*" but also needed to be able to assimilate to the predominantly white culture of The Bachelorette (Ibid). Further exemplifying that representations of black people on television either needs to fit the standards of middle-class whiteness or used to frame the actions of white people-- as a form of difference (Dubrofsky and Hardy 2008: 386). Dubrofsky also used Stuart Hall's idea of inferential racism to describe the representation of black people on The Bachelor as the racist representations are not overt or explicit and have become so naturalized which makes it difficult to bring to the surface the racist premise upon which they are based (2006: 43).

As previously mentioned, The Bachelor has a habit of placing whiteness at the center of the narrative, forcing people of colour to become side characters which inevitably affects the way in



which race is constructed in the show and the reality TV genre as a whole. This was demonstrated in a comparative analysis of *The Bachelor* and *Flavor of Love*, both of which are reality based dating shows, however, one is white-centered while the other is black-centered leading to clear differences in the way race is constructed and identities are allowed to be expressed. In their analysis, Dubrofsky and Hardy are able to demonstrate the ways in which whiteness is seen as the norm, the absence of race-- devoid of any explicit signifiers (Dubrofsky and Hardy 2008: 378), a sentiment echoed by Monk-Payton in relation to why Rachel Lindsay was picked to become the Bachelorette whose “*refinement of her black femininity met the standards of whiteness for the program*” (2018: 255).

Multiple scholars agree that the franchise attempts to appear colour blind and make race irrelevant despite a survey that clearly shows the majority of contestants are in fact white and representative of an educated, middle-class background (Dubrofsky and Hardy, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Monk-Payton, 2018). Lindsay, herself had to deal with conflicts brought on by racial tensions among the contestants, it was still left mostly unaddressed (Monk-Payton 2018: 256). However, race stayed an underlying problematic narrative of the season despite Rachel claiming it was only a small portion of her journey for love (Ibid).

Authenticity is an inherent aspect of the reality TV genre and *The Bachelor* does not escape that premise as the rule of the game is “*to properly reveal one’s authentic nature under surveillance*” (Dubrofsky and Hardy 2008: 379), appear as natural and normal in the most unnatural of circumstances. However, it is more nuanced for contestants of colour for whom issues of authenticity are intrinsically linked to issues of performance and identity as they are more likely to make it further on the show by ‘acting white’ forcing them to perform in a certain way and not being able to present their authentic self (Dubrofsky and Hardy 2008: 379). Moreover, because whiteness is assumed and black identity needs to be claimed this process works counterintuitively for contestants of colour on white-centered reality TV like *The Bachelor* (Ibid). As it is associated with performing which goes against the original premise-- appear as if one is not performing (Ibid). Ultimately, this further shows that as much as the franchise will want to make race irrelevant, people of colour and white people do not start off from an equal playing field in one of the most fundamental aspects of reality TV-- authenticity.

To conclude this section, while representation has been extensively studied in the media industry as a whole and reality TV specifically, this research will take it one step further by focusing primarily on The Bachelor franchise, including both *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. Furthermore, through a triangulation of methods establish how racial minorities are represented on the show while simultaneously looking at how those representations are received by the audience by looking at the social media conversation and a Podcast-- setting this research apart from previous ones. The choice of method will set this research apart from previous ones by not only looking at the episodes themselves but also analysing the franchise from a production perspective. As a matter of fact, an emphasis on the contextual background will allow to deconstruct the franchise and its format to uncover bigger societal issues. As a result of already existing research on The Bachelor, it was essential that this thesis pushed that work even further by taking into account the current shift the franchise is experiencing due to social media, influencer culture and the growing self-awareness of fans of the genre.

## 3. Methodology

### Social constructionist approach

This research will take a social constructionist approach because it puts an emphasis on culture and historical context to make sense of how individuals understand “*the world, categories and concepts we use*” (Burr 2003: 4), which is appropriate for a study of the representations of race as those are constructed through sociocultural practices. Social constructionists believe that understanding and knowledge are historically and culturally dependent (Ibid) in the same way that representations vary from one culture and historical context to the next. Furthermore, in a social constructionist approach, knowledge cannot be a direct perception of reality but instead a representation of the reality of a particular culture or society, meaning that most things are a product of social processes with no room for the determined nature of the world or people (Ibid: 9).

This research will take a macro social constructionist approach specifically because it notes the power of language without putting aside the relation it has with “*material or social structures, social relations and institutionalized practices*”, putting power relations at the center of this approach (Ibid: 25). Therefore, making this the right fit for an analysis of social inequality as well as challenging discriminatory and oppressive practices around race and gender which is the primary focus of this research (Ibid: 26).

### Case study

In *Making Social Sciences Matter*, Flyvbjerg makes a strong argument for the power of the case study as a research method despite some thinking that it cannot provide sufficient information about a broader phenomena. He believes that the “*detailed examination of a single example*” is in fact more than a pilot method and can be used in theory building (2001: 66). He further rejects the idea that generalizations cannot be derived from a single case study or even lead to scientific

development as long as it is coupled with other methods which will be the case for this research (Flybjerg 2001: 77) which is why The Bachelor franchise will serve as a case study for this research but will be supported by qualitative textual analysis. Furthermore, “*this approach will allow for exploring the phenomena firsthand instead of reading maps of them*” and therefore uncovering the backstage of the practice (Ibid: 85).

The Bachelor franchise serves as a good case study due to its extreme nature making it more likely to reveal more information because of its ability to involve more actors but also clarify the deeper causes and consequences behind the representation of racial minorities on reality TV (Ibid: 78). However, because two strategies for sample selection are not mutually exclusive this case also serves as a critical one due to its strategic importance in the analysis of racial representations in the genre, as *The Bachelor* is known for statistically having a primarily white cast it is the least likely to represent racial minorities therefore making it the most appropriate to test a verification (Flybjerg: 2001).

## Methods

Before taking an indepth look at the different methods used in this research, it is worth mentioning the reasoning behind this research design that consists of a multimethod approach for a few reasons, the first one being wanting this research to set itself apart from previous ones on the topic. The Bachelor franchise has been studied in the past from different perspectives but none took a wider approach that included the episodes themselves as well as audience reception through a podcast analysis. Using this multimethod approach guaranteed that this research looked at representational practices from different angles as each method has a particular focus. The textual analysis focused primarily on Twitter while the podcast analysis allowed for gaining a deeper perspective from two women of colour who are also fans of the show. On the other hand, the qualitative content analysis focused on the episodes themselves by giving a better understanding of how racial representations are constructed within the episodes. Finally, the genre analysis was an opportunity to study representation from the production side. Furthermore,

this triangulation approach meant ensuring the validity of the methods by confirming the conclusions all the while taking into account the evolution of the franchise by including a new media, Podcast, which has risen in popularity. Therefore, guaranteeing that the four methods complement each other.

## 1. Purpose of sample

Considering that The Bachelor and The Bachelorette have both been on the air for many years and each iteration respectively has 24 seasons and 15 seasons, there was consequently a wide range of episodes to pick from. However, having prior knowledge of the franchise made it possible to narrow down to the last 2 seasons of each as they were the most representative of the latest evolution of the show, within the episodes as well as on social media. As the latest season of The Bachelor was still airing at the beginning of the research, it was excluded from the sample as it would make it difficult to establish conclusions from that data before the season was even over. The sample was limited to three episodes because they would be supported by more data from the textual analysis as well the Podcast episodes and including more episodes would run the risk of drowning in the data instead of adding to it.

### 1. The Bachelorette Season 14 Episode 4

This episode was chosen for the sample for few reasons, the first one being that Wills, one of the African American contestants, was chosen for a 1-on-1 date<sup>2</sup> meaning he got a significant amount of airtime within the episode. Moreover, another contestant from Asian origins, John, was given airtime for the first time in the season which led to him becoming a fan favorite. This episode also stood out because of an incident with another African American contestant, Jean-Blanc. Furthermore, the description of the episode of the podcast indicated that the hosts were going to discuss the news that came out on social media surrounding Lincoln and Garrett who were both involved in their own respective scandals, giving a good overview of The Bachelor universe from three different perspectives.

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<sup>2</sup> There are three types of dates on The Bachelor/ette: group dates, 1-on-1 date and 2-on-1 dates. 1-on-1 dates are between the lead and 1 contestant therefore the most coveted by the contestants.

## 2. The Bachelorette Season 14 Episode 5

This particular episode was not originally supposed to be in the sample until the previous episode was analysed. As the preview teased a heated argument involving Wills and another white contestant-- making it an interesting one to include to see how that particular argument would be framed by the edit. Furthermore, the episode also had a 2-on-1 date<sup>3</sup> which only happens once every season and is usually a 'dramatic' episode. In addition, John who was the only Asian man left was sent home in this episode which created an interesting conversation on the Podcast making it worth including in the sample.

## 3. The Bachelor Season 23 Episode 5

This episode was included because one of the main storyline was about two contestants of minority groups, Onyeka of Nigerian origins and Nicole of Cuban origins, who got into an altercation which was the culmination of several disagreements between the two women throughout the episode. This made it an interesting episode to investigate further in order to look at how both women were portrayed as two racial minorities and how the audience received the episode. Furthermore, Kirpa who was the only contestant with an Asian background was discussed a lot on Twitter because of the clear lack of airtime she was given making this a relevant episode to look at considering the research questions at hand.

# 2. Representation

## Qualitative Content analysis

The first method used for this thesis was a content analysis, for multiple reasons, one being that while it may be a primarily quantitative method it does require various qualitative procedures that allow to give a more holistic view of The Bachelor as a cultural phenomenon (Rose 2016: 87). As previously mentioned, context is essential to understanding The Bachelor franchise and

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<sup>3</sup> During 2-on-1 dates, two contestants go on one date with the lead but only one comes back and the other is sent home. Usually between two contestants who do not like each other for dramatic purposes.

the elements surrounding it which is why a content analysis was crucial to this research as it allows for an “*understanding of the symbolic qualities of texts*” to uncover the wider cultural context (Ibid).

The sample of episodes had previously been established in relation to the research questions at hand, making questions about the representativeness of the sample less relevant. The coding process and establishment of the codes and categories was the most important part of the analysis as the codes needed to be apparently objective and only regard what was actually present in the text (Rose 2016: 92). Three main categories were established keeping in mind the theoretical concerns of the research to make the interpretation and subsequent analysis smooth (Ibid)-- racial representations, format of the show, social imaginary. The more specific codes within each category were developed with concerns for exhaustiveness, exclusivity and enlightenment (Ibid)-- every element of the episodes, from the music to editing, were included in the codes. The primary aim of the content analysis was to establish a link between the text and the broader cultural context, each code was developed thinking of the theories discussed in the literature review, the aims and objectives of the research, as well as keeping in mind previous knowledge of The Bachelor franchise and the structure of the episodes.

Ultimately, for the pilot study there were a total of 27 codes spread over 3 main categories previously mentioned. The pilot study was carried out to guarantee that they were not ambiguous or left too much to interpretation (Rose 2016: 96), a time for reflection on the pilot study was taken and eventually some codes were altered based on it. The final version of codes had a total of 26 codes that were then applied to the remaining two episodes. Once every episode was coded, they were input in a spreadsheet and the average for each code was calculated to get a general overview as well an individual one for each episode.<sup>4</sup>

## Genre analysis

While qualitative textual analysis and the content analysis are the two primary research methods, one cannot ignore the role played by reality TV as a genre in this thesis, as Mittell argues that television genres matter and are a form of cultural category (2004: 11). Beyond serving as

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix section 2.3 for code spreadsheet

cultural categories, genres are indispensable to audiences in multiple ways-- helping establish fan practices but also play an important role in framing conversations and discourses as well as viewing practices (Ibid). All of which are elements that will be significant to this research to look at audience reception of racial representations, furthermore, there are formatting elements of reality TV that are so specific to the genre that need to be taken into account. Genres need to be thought of as systems of categorization that transcends the media texts themselves and instead move across “*the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts*” (Ibid: 12), therefore making a strong argument for the analysis of multiple sites using Annette Hill’s genre model (2019)<sup>5</sup>.

This particular method was chosen as the model gives the opportunity to emphasize particularly relevant elements over others which proved to be useful in this research as the genre analysis was a complementary method. Therefore, certain elements of the model--context, values and engagement were privileged over the other remaining elements as investigating each of them in depth would take away from the primary focus of this thesis. The analysis helped establish the context of The Bachelor from an industry perspective as well as gaining an in depth understanding of how audiences engage with The Bachelor which was supported by the textual analysis of the tweets-- giving a holistic view of an important element that makes The Bachelor such a standout within the genre.

### 3. Audience reception

#### Qualitative textual analysis

This research will adopt a qualitative approach to data analysis because it lends itself most effectively to using a case study as this approach is fundamentally case-oriented in analysing multiple instances of a phenomena (Bazely 2013: 5). This will enable the research to focus on the ways in which the different elements are interrelated and why, therefore giving more agency

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix section 2.2 for genre model



to the cases as opposed to the variables (Ibid). This approach fits this particular research most appropriately because “*cases of the same type will be similar enough to be seen as examples of the same phenomenon, yet with distinction that enable comparison*” (Ibid). This is why The Bachelor franchise will be the primary case study while analysing episodes across seasons to compare the instances of racial representations with multiple contestants and similarly for the analysis of social media comments.

The qualitative textual analysis was chosen as one of the primary research methods because it will enable the research to focus on meaning-- simultaneously as “*an object of study and as an explanatory concept*” (Jensen 2012: 266). Furthermore, a qualitative approach means putting an emphasis on the context of the phenomena being studied (Ibid) which is why this textual analysis will take a hermeneutical approach as Kuckartz agrees that cultural products are developed and understood within context (2014: 18). Additionally, one of the building blocks of this approach is that a text can only be understood as the sum of its parts and those parts can only be understood if one understands the whole text which is fitting for the research at hand (Ibid: 19).

The textual analysis will allow for a deconstruction of the text, pulling out the different ways in which they work together to “*present us with a particular vision of the world*” (Burr 2003: 21). This will be essential to this research as representation on television contributes to constituting the discourses through which we experience the world and for the sake of this research-- race. In this context, discourse refers to what Foucault described as “*socially constructed knowledge*” (Hansen and Machin: 159) therefore, taking notes of the connotation of certain words or even how they are said will help establish those discourses. Hence the need for deconstruction through textual analysis.

## Sample

Twitter was chosen as the social media platform for this analysis because while the characters are limited to 280 per post, it has been an integral part of the Bachelor viewing experience as nearly every episode has made it to the top of Nielsen’s Twitter ratings (Poggi: 2015), making it the right platform for this analysis. Also the hashtags allow the ability to filter out Bachelor

related tweets which made it more convenient to gather the data. The sample for the tweets used was established in three ways, firstly based on the initial sample of the episodes by selecting tweets for each of the episodes chosen for the content analysis. Secondly, only picking tweets with the official hashtags #TheBachelor and #TheBachelorette as those are the ones promoted by the official Bachelor franchise Twitter accounts guaranteeing a wider range of tweets to choose from. Thirdly, a choice was made to filter the tweets in order to only include the ones that had a minimum of 5 likes as this would establish that the opinions in the tweets were shared by other fans of the show and were not just individual opinions.

This was the main sampling strategy, from that point on tweets were selected to include everything that had to do with representation, racial or otherwise, as well as putting an emphasis on the ones about racial minority contestants as this was the main purpose of the social media analysis. However, it was also necessary to include tweets about the format of the show and ones regarding important storylines of each episode. The final selection ranged from 40 to 45 tweets per episode.

## Coding

The first round of coding of the data was a loose open coding, where the tweets were conceptualized to define main categories (Kuckartz 2014: 24) keeping in mind the research questions. The second round of coding consisted of going over the material to start establishing more specific subcategories as well as refining some thematic categories to more analytical ones. The final round was a selective coding process to integrate the analytical work by making connections between the main categories and subcategories as a way of uncovering patterns within the data (Ibid: 25). All the while keeping in mind that the main focus was to build an '*analysis story*' (Ibid: 26). The final coding consisted of 5 main categories-- engagement, representation, format, authenticity and real life space-- each with their own subcategories<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix section 2.1 for the final coding chart

## Podcast analysis framework

Podcast is a fairly new media form, as a result finding the appropriate analysis method was a difficult task but eventually chose the PodCred framework that established a series of indicators for analysis that was originally designed to predict listeners preferences for podcasts but was adapted to fit the purpose of this research (Tsagkias, Larson and de Rijke: 2010). The framework focused on 4 main indicators-- podcast content, the podcasters, the podcast context, and the technical execution. This framework was helpful in carrying out a systematic analysis of 2 Black Girls 1 Rose. In addition to this framework, a transcript of each podcast episode was made by emphasising the occurrence of conversations surrounding representation and later read over to highlight elements that fit concepts and theories discovered through the qualitative textual analysis and qualitative content analysis. As this was also a good way to confirm the validity of the other two methods.

## Reflection on methods

While it is true that to guarantee the unambiguity of the codes in a qualitative content analysis it is recommended to have two different coders to establish whether they reach the same results for the same episode (Rose 2016: 96) but the time allocated and the resources at my disposal did not allow this to happen. However, after the pilot study it was important for me as a researcher to take a step back and reflect on the codes and whether or not the process was in fact smooth and did not leave too much room for personal interpretation. After this process, some codes were in fact altered to be reworded while others deleted.

In addition, the qualitative textual analysis did have some limits in terms of not having any background on the authors of the tweets whether it be their level of investment in The Bachelor or their racial/ethnic background which could have added to the analysis. However, this was compensated by the Podcast which gave the perspective of long-term fans who also happen to be racial minorities.

Considering the time frame allocated for this thesis and the research methods chosen to execute it, there were limitations on the amount of episodes that could be included in the sample which limited the range of representations to analyse. This was only exacerbated by the fact that the main object of this thesis was an analysis of what is absent-- diverse racial representations. Therefore, it would have been beneficial, if manageable, to include multiple episodes from the most recent seasons or even look at how racial representations have evolved over the seasons. More importantly, my prior knowledge of The Bachelor franchise was an element that needed to be navigated and kept at the forefront of the decisions made as a researcher because while in some cases it was helpful to know the show very well, at times it could lead to making conclusions that were not solely motivated by the data gathered. Furthermore, it is necessary to reflect on my own position as a black woman carrying out research on racial representations, making it simultaneously an advantage as I was aware of subtle negative representations that would not be as obvious to a non-minority researcher. However, it also made me personally invested in some of the issues discussed which is also why a multimethod approach helped guarantee that my own subjectivities were not a hindrance to the research.

## 4. Analysis

This analysis will be structured along the three main research questions guiding this research, each question will be answered using empirical evidence from all four methods included in this research-- qualitative textual analysis, qualitative content analysis, genre analysis as well as the podcast analysis framework. The first section will look directly at how racial representations are constructed on The Bachelor, the second section will explore how those representations contribute to the construction of the social imaginary and the final section will demonstrate how audiences receive the racial representations constructed by the franchise.

### 1. How are racial minorities represented on The Bachelor/ette?

#### Limited access to the narrative

In this analysis of racial representations within The Bachelor franchise, several elements were discovered through a triangulation of methods, one of the first elements established was that racial minorities have a limited access to the narrative compared to the other contestants. This translates within episodes in different ways, one of them being the limited time in confessionals. In reality TV, confessionals are crucial to building the narrative of a show as it is the only moment contestants are directly addressing the camera on their own, to tell the audience about their feelings towards the lead, other cast members and the different situations occurring in the group. The importance of confessionals can also be linked to Foucault's work on sexuality in which he contends that confessions became the "*most highly valued techniques for producing truths*"-- an essential element of the genre because of the importance for contestants to display their most 'real' selves (1978: 59) while under surveillance. The qualitative content analysis did reveal that white contestants had a disproportionately higher number of confessionals compared to the racial minorities who had half that amount if not less. In any instance of confession there will be a discourse between a subject and the person demanding the confession who will decide

to “judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile” as the ritual “produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it” (Foucault 1978: 62). In the case of *The Bachelor* the interlocutor will simultaneously be the producers and the editors of the show as well as the audience who will choose how to feel about the confessionals and whose truths they are willing to believe. Because within the franchise, “narratives are built around how well or poorly participants confess themselves under surveillance” (Dubrofsky 2011: 98). Consequently, showing that a limited access to such a valuable tool means granting less agency to racial minorities to shape their own narrative compared to some of their white counterparts. Moreover, this will prove itself to be detrimental to how they will be perceived by the audience. This is in clear contradiction with one of the promises of the genre which was to finally give power to the many instead of the privileged few (Andrejevic 2003: 3), as racial minorities still find themselves limited in their power.

In addition, within the romantic sub-genre, affect and the expression of feelings are valuable currencies used to convey authenticity and ‘prove’ to the audience they are there for the right reasons making being able to express their feelings openly a significant element of a contestant's narrative. However, this is another point where contestants of minority groups are not given the same chances as the others, as a matter of fact white contestants on average have more opportunities to share their own feelings with the audience and the lead. This, in turn creates a disconnect between the audience and those contestants as their connection with the lead is never shown. Kirpa, who is of Indian origins, was victim of that as viewers continuously wondered why she had not been sent home yet considering they never saw her having a meaningful conversation with Colton, the Bachelor:

*“If Kirpa has the confidence to still show up to group dates even though none of us know who she is you can have confidence in yourself for at least 5 min. #TheBachelor”-*  
(Twitter)

This disconnect is also a result of the lack of airtime Kirpa was given which multiple racial minorities had to deal with including Katie, another African American contestant on the same season and John during season 13 of *The Bachelorette*, which has become an integral part of the

portrayal of racial minorities often called out on the podcast. This also serves as a perfect illustration of the habitus of the Bachelor franchise where women of colour are allowed to exist on the show but will remain irrelevant to the dominant narrative if they do not serve another purpose (Dubrofsky 2006: 42).

*Justine: "Kirpa they don't even show her and Sydney is only in the credits what are we supposed to do?"*

*Natasha: "She's like Venmo John where he was only popping up in the after credit part." - (2 Black Girls 1 Rose, episode 6 Fighting like 2 Bodega Cats)*

Fans were especially surprised and annoyed when Kirpa was shown wearing a prominent bandage on her chin but the edit never explained what had happened to her.

*"Kirpa...wait for it.....wait for it.....busted her chin and sprained her wrist while trying to take a selfie on a rock. I for one am DUMBFOUNDED as to why this wasn't a major story line of #TheBachelor this week." - (Twitter)*

Limiting her airtime to lighthearted interactions with Colton instead of actual discussions about relationship history or even where she stood in her feelings for him led some viewers to think she was kept around as the token brown girl of the season which is an issue that has been raised by critics of the franchise in the past. As she was the only woman of Indian origin in a primarily white cast which gave The Bachelor an opportunity to maintain an impression of inclusivity (Hodkinson 2011: 208). The burden of being forced into the role of the token minority can be hard to bear as there is the risk that audiences will associate any traits or storylines to their ethnicity as opposed to their individual character (Ibid.)

*"Is Kirpa the token brown girl on #thebachelor??? Bc homegirl messes up her chin and we don't know how??? I've never seen her kiss him and it's been 5 whole weeks???? Then the only interaction this week was her flossing his teeth???? Wild" - (Twitter)*

## Re-centering whiteness

In reality TV and the Bachelor specifically, contestants and the lead are the main narrators of each episode, so storylines and narratives will be constructed through their sound bites about each other, the dates, etc. In her study of *The Bachelor*, Dubrofsky established that people of colour are used as a way to frame the narrative for the white contestants (2006: 40). However, this analysis revealed that in reality there were more instances of white contestants talking about a fellow contestant as opposed to racial minorities which can be interpreted as a contradiction to Dubrofsky's claim. Nonetheless, it does illustrate that regardless of how you look at it, white contestants are the main driving force of the narrative and racial minorities are relegated to the background.

Moreover, season 23 episode 5 stood out among the other episodes analysed because it featured an argument between Onyeka and Nicole who were two of the remaining racial minorities in the cast, with Onyeka being of Nigerian origins and Nicole being of Cuban origins. Their argument was the culmination of a lot of foreshadowing and teasing of one big head-to-head moment which resulted in both women getting sent home in the following episode. Thus illustrating Dubrofsky's claim that people of colour are in fact facilitators of the coupling of white people (2006: 39). While Nicole and Onyeka were arguing back and forth, the other girls were shown looking uncomfortable and shocked, dissociating themselves from their fight. As illustrated by this quote from Caelynn "*Onyeka vs Nicole part 2, WTF, I thought we were over this!*" Furthermore, leading up to the big confrontation, Colton was seen talking to the other women one on one as his voiceover was heard saying that he wanted to end the cocktail party<sup>7</sup> on a high note and eventually said: "*My wife is here, I know it.*", establishing in that moment that Onyeka and Nicole were sticking out for all the wrong reasons and used to "*verify the behaviour of white women and thus re-center whiteness*" (Dubrofsky 2006: 43). In addition, the dramatization of

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<sup>7</sup> The Cocktail Party is the last moment for the contestants to talk to the lead before the Rose Ceremony were contestants are eliminated



this storyline is another example of how minority contestants can be portrayed as outsiders in contrast to their white counterparts.

This particular episode was dominated by the building tension between Onyeka and Nicole but there were a few indicators that showed the editing leaning more in favor of Nicole over Onyeka as Nicole was seen in her confessional in tears about potentially ruining her chances at love with Colton:

*Nicole: "I never thought in a million years I would have to defend my character. I have been nothing but honest and real this entire process. I have no idea where I stand with Colton"*- (The Bachelor Season 23, episode 5)

This scene of Nicole in tears was immediately followed by a scene of Onyeka in her own confessional holding a cocktail and showing no remorse for her actions even after it was established that the things she had said about Nicole were not true.

*Onyeka: "Colton definitely appreciated me being honest and open with him and I cannot feel for someone who cries every single day. Nicole cries every single day, I'm so unphased by her tears like I literally cannot deal."* - (Season 23, episode 5)

The editing of these two scenes highlighted the contrast between the two women where one came out looking like a 'victim' while the other was painted as the 'villain'. As stated above Onyeka and Nicole are both racial minorities on the show. However, Nicole's Cuban origins made her minority status less physically obvious than Onyeka who is of a darker complexion. Furthermore, Nicole was rarely shown claiming her Cuban ethnicity with the exception of the first night where she spoke to Colton in Spanish; the combination of these elements made it possible for her to blend in within this primarily white environment. Ultimately, the contrast in both of their behaviours, with Nicole in tears and Onyeka's confrontational attitude combined with comments from the other women positioned Nicole as the 'victim' and Onyeka as the 'aggressor.' Furthering existing stereotypes of the angry black woman.

Sydney: *“I don't think Onyeka is going to take that very well (...) You should have seen Onyeka's eyes, she looked like she was coming for blood.”* - (Season 23, episode 5)

### The digestible Other

In the two altercations that Nicole and Onyeka had in this episode, many of the girls were seen commenting on the situation but one comment stood out as it came from Tayshia, another contestant of colour.

*“With the whole Onyeka and Nicole thing I'm just so over it, they just keep going around and around in circles why would Colton waste his time with this kind of petty drama”*- (Season 23, episode 5)

Tayshia's response was notable because she was originally the first one to come to Nicole's defense and confirm that Onyeka's comments were in fact lies. However, in this instance she is seen criticizing both women to actively differentiate herself from them by being very open about her disagreement with the way they are acting as she deemed it to be unsuitable behaviour for Colton. In many ways, this can be seen as Tayshia making sure that within her black femininity she still met the whiteness standards of the franchise, in the same way that Rachel Lindsay, the first black Bachelorette, was seen as *“black, but not too black, neutralizing acts of racialization to fit seamlessly into the imagined romance space of the series and to remain easily digestible—and desirable”*(Monk-Payton 2018: 255). This display of self awareness in regards to her performance was a response to being in an environment where contestants know they are constantly being watched, and have to learn how to self-regulate to fit *“the demands and parameters of the context”* (Dubrofsky 2011: 99). This ultimately served her well as she was the only contestant of colour who got a 'front runner' edit. Most seasons of the Bachelor have contestants who will emerge as the 'front runners' through editing, as previously mentioned, Tayshia was the only racial minority to get that edit over the course of 3 episodes as opposed to 7 different instances for white contestants making it an average of 0.7 times for racial minorities<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix section 2.3

This furthers the claim that racial minorities are only used as dramatic devices within a white narrative (Bell-Jordan 2008: 358).

During season 14, Wills who was another contestant of colour was involved in a similar situation where the threat of a fight between him and Chris, a white contestant, was used as a dramatic device to build up the tension in the second half of the episode. The incident stemmed from Wills not giving enough time to Chris with Becca after he had been interrupted. While having time with the lead is a crucial element of the show and it is customary for contestants to interrupt each other, Chris had already had his time with Becca making it inappropriate for him to interrupt a second time. The incident was laced with musical cues, sound effects, and editing techniques implying some kind of physical altercation. Up until this point, Wills had not been given much airtime, making this particularly detrimental to him as Chris later tried to position himself as the victim:

*Chris: "I mean you got mad at me bro, I didn't disrespect you. I didn't know how long you were out there for. I feel like everyone is gonna start attacking me for something".*

*Wills: "I'm not attacking you, I have no problem with you talking to her but you have to understand I was talking to her for maybe 1 min and half. I never said you disrespected me, I never got upset, I even left."- (The Bachelorette Season 14, episode 5)*

Chris using words like 'mad' or 'attacking' is dangerous when talking about black men as those words have been used throughout history to paint them as aggressive therefore Chris's vocabulary contributed to furthering deeply rooted stereotypes and showed that the construction of race on reality TV is still heavily reliant on them (Bell-Jordan 2008: 163). This incident and the way it was framed by the edit illustrate Stuart Hall's idea of inferential racism where events relating to a racial minority are permeated by racist premises that go unquestioned because they have become so naturalised (Hall 2004: 91).

To summarise, it has been observed that minorities are usually casted in The Bachelor as an afterthought and used by the production as a tool to give an illusion of diversity to a show that is predominantly white.

Secondly, the minorities portrayed in the show often play a secondary role as they are given less screen time through editing, making it difficult to build real storyline and thus appeal to the audience or become “fan favorite”. As a result, racial minorities are largely underrepresented on The Bachelor when they are not actively misrepresented to be used as dramatic devices for the development of storylines.

Lastly, the lack of representation of minorities in The Bachelor makes it even more important to assess how they are indeed portrayed. Minority contestants are often shown through the prism of stereotypes like the angry/violent black person as illustrated by the case Onyeka and Wills. Because within the already limited storylines, choosing to show interactions fueling already established stereotypes contributes to a misrepresentation or generalization of minorities behaviour and, as it was observed, The Bachelor is no exception. Racial representation in the media plays an important role in the racial biases within society and this is the ground for the next research question.

## 2. How do racial representations contribute to the construction of the modern social imaginary?

### Commodifying racial representation

The Bachelor franchise is entering a new phase in its evolution where the real life space is colliding with the manufactured space making it the perfect site for discourses within and outside television culture to merge in “*an unstable conjunction*” (Bignell 2005: 171; Hill 2019: 142). Twitter is the perfect illustration of this merging of spaces where scandals surrounding contestants outside of the show became an integral part of the online discussion. Both Lincoln and Garrett from season 14 were involved in situations that created discourses outside the confines of the show. Garrett who was a front runner from the beginning and was ultimately chosen by Becca came under fire after the first episode when it was revealed that he had liked multiple inappropriate and bigoted Instagram posts against the trans community, immigrants and more (Guglielmi: 2018). This discovery tainted the viewing experience for the audience as they

were expected to get invested in this love story all season long while knowing about Garrett's right-wing affiliations. Not long after that it was discovered that Lincoln, another contestant on the season, had been convicted of indecent assault and battery just days before the premiere of the season (Corinthios: 2018) which raised a lot of questions about the vetting process for contestants-- transcending the made for television space and instead addressing the real life space.

*"I don't understand how #theBachelorette continues to have vetting issues. Your target demographic is millennial women. Give us 30 minutes + a dude's last initial and we've got a home address for his first kiss. Maybe let us try next time?" - (Twitter)*

Audience members were rightfully frustrated with the franchise, for one because it was not the first time they had issues with contestants and their social media activity, as Rachel Lindsay was forced to deal with a known racist on her season as the first black Bachelorette. Secondly, these scandals were left unaddressed by the production of the show until the finale after Garrett and Becca's engagement and the Lincoln situation was only addressed in a press release and then completely pushed to the wayside. The franchise's response was a reminder that the manufactured fantasy comes before anything else and addressing these issues before the final episode would interfere with that as well as forcing them to acknowledge political and racial issues which they continually attempt erase.

Natasha and Justine who had previously interviewed past contestants of colour, implied that the vetting process is not always as rigorous for contestants of colour especially when the production feels that the cast is lacking in diversity. Demonstrating that racial representations have in fact become a commodity for the network to garner as many fragments of audience to then sell to advertisers (Torres 2005: 405). Especially for a franchise like The Bachelor that has been actively criticized for its lack of diversity.

*"As we've seen with some of our interviews with some of the black people they kinda move quickly through the process. Look we're at the end stages we need a couple black*

*people, let's just push them through. Because they're so desperate for people" - (2 Black Girls 1 Rose, episode 5 Let me tell you about men who write poetry)*

Chris Harrison, who has been the host of the franchise since 2002, did admit that diversifying the cast over the last few years has been an attempt to change the narrative as this is an area in which they struggled during the early seasons (Jones: 2019). Harrison took it one step further by implying that while he wants everyone to feel represented it would not be a good financial decision for the franchise: *"While I would love to only make great social statements and really change the world, I can't just do that because we have to stay on the air"* (Jones: 2019). This confirmed what a lot of fans already knew-- the primary fanbase is white and therefore has no interest in seeing a lead of colour. As evidenced by Mike Fleiss describing the clear dip in ratings during Rachel Lindsay's season as *"disturbing in Trump-ish kinda way"* (Mohdin: 2018). Ultimately, the attempt at increasing racial representations is a strategy to appease audiences of colour while not completely alienating their primary audience.

This type of discourse is a reminder that the franchise is built on the commodification of the ideal love story making each episode an opportunity for the franchise to increase their revenue. At the end of episode 5, Becca announced that they were all headed to Richmond, Virginia because *"Virginia is for Lovers"*; it was later revealed that the Virginia Tourism Authority paid over \$536,000 to be heavily featured in the episode and including their slogan among other things (Ivie: 2019). Another important element of the Bachelor franchise's business model are the numerous spinoffs that will see past contestants come back to pursue love, Bachelor in Paradise is the most successful one and the franchise has become very good at cross promoting those three shows. So much so, that viewers have become good at predicting who will end up on the spinoff after their elimination, as they will often bring back people who got into an argument like Nicole and Onyeka and David and Jordan, hoping that their drama will carry over.

*"\$20 says Nicole and Onyeka are both in Paradise because drama. #Thebachelor"*-  
(Twitter)

These examples are further evidence of the shift in the modern social imaginary that has come to see our society as an economy where activities are motivated by production, exchange and consumption (Charles 2004: 76). As *The Bachelor* has proven its willingness to use the production of the ideal love story in exchange for monetary benefits from advertisers and businesses by way of product placements for example, on average five per episode<sup>9</sup>. And more importantly diverse castings are used to counteract the growing criticism of the franchise that threatens to interfere with their revenue as a result of reality TV making it acceptable to privilege the commercial agenda behind things (Deery 2015: 79). Moreover, in this new social imaginary we have come “to see the most important purpose and agenda of society as economic collaboration and exchange” (Ibid), making the improvements to racial representation no longer a benevolent choice but a means to economic benefits as racial minorities are an important segment of the wider audience that can improve or hurt their ratings.

### Heterosexual imaginary

The foundation of *The Bachelor* is built on one key element-- the belief that love and marriage are the end all be all and achieving this goal means having a successful life or at least that is the idea that producers want the viewers to believe because to quote Chris Harrison « *This is no ordinary relationship show. This is about something real, something permanent— you know, the whole till’-death-do-us-part thing* » (Galicia and Merskin 2007: 261). This ideal will be insisted upon through the multiple mentions of marriage and finding a partner throughout the episodes-- on average four times per episode<sup>10</sup>. More often than not it will be from one of the white contestants who are given more opportunities to establish their desire for marriage like Garrett after his first 1 on 1 date with Becca.

*Garret: “Today has been the best day of my life, this is the first time I felt that kind of love between someone and it feels so uncontrollably good. I’m falling for her hard and I can*

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix, section 2.3

<sup>10</sup> See appendix, section 2.3

*see myself getting down on one knee and proposing to her, making her my everyday” -*  
(The Bachelorette Season 14, episode 4 )

However, looking at the track record of the show for long lasting relationships it would seem that this is not the right environment for it, judging from this data: out of the first 28 seasons of The Bachelor and The Bachelorette only 2/3 ended in proposals and only 5 of those ended in marriage (Zhao: 2007; Mumhoreze: 2019). With such a low success rate, this begs the question why do contestants still submit themselves to this process if they are there for a long term relationship? (Mumhoreze: 2019) The answer-- contestants know that by being on the show they will be able to monetize their appearance through social media and brand endorsements, rendering the debate about their intentions that much more relevant.

*“Can we please get rid of the right reasons thing? Good god, no one's there for the "right reasons" #TheBachelor” -* (Twitter)

While audiences want to take pleasure in rejecting the ideological fantasy perpetuated by The Bachelor, they simultaneously want to believe in the fidelity of the affect even if it is at the cost of empirical truths (Cloud 2010: 418). However, as a result of that there is a constant emphasis on intentions and wanting to separate contestants there for the ‘right reasons’ and shaming those who are not. Jean-Blanc and Heather are two examples of contestants who were called out for being there for the ‘wrong reasons’; Jean-Blanc because he lied about his feelings in order to make it further and Heather for claiming to be ready for marriage at 23 years old while having never been kissed.

*“Can someone tell me how one could possibly be ready for MARRIAGE when they haven't even had their first kiss in 23 years? Comeeee onnnnn; I think not #TheBachelor #ShouldBePopularOpinion” -* (Twitter)

This debate has become an important one for the franchise as it is bringing to light the intergeneric space of The Bachelor in more overt ways than ever before as accusing a contestant



of not being there for the right reasons is the ultimate critique because the franchise is built on the heterosexual imaginary. A concept that Galicia and Merskin defined as « *the belief that to achieve a sense of well-being in life, one must be involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship* » (2007: 264). As a result of this, contestants will constantly attempt to prove their commitment to this belief out of fear of being judged as inadequate by the lead, other contestants and the audience which is what happened to Nicole who was accused of this by Onyeka.

*Colton: "Our relationship has grown and I want that to continue and I want that to last forever. I think that there is a great future for us. I can confidently say I'm falling in love with Becca" - (The Bachelorette Season 14 episode 5)*

While it is clear that The Bachelor is a created for television environment where contestants are 'competing' for the love and affection of the Bachelor/rette, it is also rooted in the real life space; sometimes intentionally like during hometown visits where the Bachelor/rette meets the family of the contestants and at times unintentionally. For example when a contestant is accusing another of not being there for the right reasons the way Onyeka accused Nicole, they are allowing the real life space to seep through forcing the audience to face the reality that contestants come on the show to gain Instagram followers and become an influencer which shows the genre's ability to balance the construction of entertainment, as this became an important storyline, with the real world space (Hill 2019: 140).

*Onyeka: "She basically told me that Nicole said that she's here so she can find an opportunity to leave Miami and I was honestly really upset hearing that (...)"*

*Colton: "That's one of my greatest fears in all of this, if somebody is not here for me fully. So that's tough to hear." - (The Bachelor season 23, episode 5)*

### Strategic whiteness

A response to the emergence of the post-racial discourses in America has been the use of strategic whiteness to render race invisible, therefore making it the norm and pretending that it

has no relevance to how individuals are treated (Dubrofsky, Hardy: 2008). This idea of strategic whiteness translates to *The Bachelor* by avoiding ever discussing race openly or even the realities of interracial relationships as well as acting as though contestants have access to all the same perks (Dubrofsky and Hardy: 2008). However, the reality is quite different because most contestants of a different race or ethnicity are known for not making it very far on a season and even less likely to become the Bachelor/ette despite how liked they are:

*“1. I’m pretty sure this is the furthest an Asian dude has made it on #TheBachelorette*

*2. HE. IS. ADORABLE.”* - (Twitter)

*“I know it’s unlikely but Tayshia for Bachelorette. #TheBachelor”* - (Twitter)

In fact, in an article looking at how long black contestants, specifically, lasted in the franchise it was established that by 2016 no black contestant had stayed longer than five weeks on both *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* and to be more specific, 59% of black contestants left the show within two weeks (Fitzpatrick: 2016). While this is not a complete or up to date history of how far racial minorities make it on the show, it does reveal a pattern as it relates to racial minorities not having the same opportunities as their white counterparts. This is also a reminder that democratic nature of the genre that Andrejevic referred to in the early beginnings is no longer relevant as the lottery-like chances of an ordinary person becoming a celebrity (2003: 4) actually have conditions, as white contestants have better odds.

An additional element of strategic whiteness is the erasure of cultural differences as a representation of ethnic markers in an attempt to maintain the absence of race (Ibid: 380). The group date took place at Wayne Newton’s mansion, who is a known Las Vegas entertainer that all the contestants seemed to know except Lincoln who is of Nigerian origins. The edit purposely pointed that he was the only one, making him stand out even more from the other contestants by reinforcing the idea that this was a part of American culture that he was expected to know. There was also a moment where he mentioned using a word in his native language but we never saw him explain to Becca the meaning behind it or more about his background. However, it was a rare occasion where a contestant was able to purposely assert his difference from the norm which

is established using “*experiences and communication patterns of whites (...) from which Other are marked*” (Nakayam and Krizek 1995: 293). Therefore, strategic whiteness contributes to the continued construction of the modern social imaginary and the “*deeper normative notions and images*” that make up our expectations for how individuals see themselves and each other (Charles 2004: 23). All in an attempt to maintain whiteness as the expected norm and everything deviating from that as the Other. In addition, this is further evidence of how the social order is constructed and maintained through media representations, privileging a white middle-class, heteronormative perspective (Kidd 2016: 36).

*Lincoln: “I’m gonna use wanyimu (??), it means my lady in my native language”-*  
(Season 14, episode 5)

### 3. How are racial representations received by the audience?

#### 2 Black Girls 1 Rose

The podcast 2 Black Girls 1 Rose was started in 2017 by two friends Natasha Scott and Justine Kay to talk about The Bachelor franchise from their own perspective being two black women watching a predominantly white show. While there are many Bachelor related podcasts this is the only one hosted by people of colour whose aim was “*to provide a voice to the viewers of colours of this show*” (Kay and Scott, 2019). Their primary purpose in creating this podcast, besides wanting to give a voice to an audience that had been voiceless until now, was wanting to see more men and women that looked like them in the quintessential love story that the franchise is always promoting (Ibid). The two have a strong belief that men and women of all ethnicities, sexual orientation as well as size deserve to feel represented in Bachelor Nation because as they said “*we strive to be the voice for everyone across the country who tunes into this show for a glimpse at romance, without seeing THEIR love story told!*” (Ibid). As evidenced by the primarily positive reviews currently on their Apple Podcast page:

*“I’m Not Alone!*

*For the longest I thought I was the only Black woman who was obsessed with The Bachelor and then I found this podcast! I love Justine and Natasha and even though I'm so over Peter I'm watching this season just so I can listen to them!!" - Heathaliciousss, 02/12/2020*

This mission statement is the guiding light of all their content as they recap weekly episodes of The Bachelor and all its spinoffs with it in mind, starting with their opening signature “*Where two black ass girls invade the whitest show on earth... The Bachelor*”. Besides recapping the episodes, they have also been able to do interviews with some of the former contestants of colour of The Bachelor including Rachel Lindsay, the only black Bachelorette.

In spite of the amateur-like nature of the podcast, they have stayed consistent in their content that comes out weekly during each season of the franchise, also covering *Bachelor News* in a special segment each episode. This is a segment where they discuss news surrounding the contestants on and off the show such as the scandal, breakup, social media drama, etc. In the 3 to 4 years of the podcast, the structure of the episodes has not changed much as they will always open with their initial thoughts on the episode, followed by the *Church Announcements*, *Bachelor News* and then get into the recap of the episode.

Within the recaps they have certain awards they give throughout the episode to certain moments or contestants-- *Becky of the week*, *escape to Wakanda*, *Becca you aight moment*, *ni\*\*a you ain't sh\*t*. Each award carries its own meaning and will often refer to how ‘white’ the show is, for example a Becky is a term used in African American Vernacular English that cannot really be explained by a single definition because it is constantly evolving but The Roots defined it as “*a white woman who uses her privilege as a weapon, a ladder or an excuse.*” (Harriot: 2019). *Escape to Wakanda* is a reference to the Marvel movie, Black Panther in which Wakanda is a powerful fictional African country that has been able to hide itself and its resource from the rest of the world, serving as a safe haven for its population. Therefore, the hosts have been using it as the antithesis of the Bachelor which they’ve referred to as the ‘whitest show on earth’.

Both hosts, Natasha and Justine are friends who currently live in New York making the style of their speech very familiar, sometimes bringing in personal stories that they’ve experienced

together and inside jokes. Furthermore, being two African American women they will speak using terms and turns of phrase from the African American Vernacular English which can make it less relatable for an audience who is not familiar with it. They tend to be humorous and lighthearted in their recaps with over the top exaggerations except when it comes to discussing issues of race as those bring a more serious tone with affect at the forefront. As they often say, they have a love-hate relationship with the franchise and feel frustrated by the way the show treats contestants of colour and how this leads to the audience having the watch different versions of the same love story as evidenced by this comment:

*Natasha: "This date reminded me exactly why I'm so tired of this perpetual whiteness on this show. We've seen this love story, this exact date, this exact two people, we've seen this exact same scenario a bazillion times. Like I was just so bored watching this cause we've watched this before. Like aren't the producers tired of seeing this shit."* - (2 Black Girls 1 Rose, Episode 5 Let me tell you about men who write poetry)

While they described the show as a side project in the early seasons, as they gained popularity they moved from free content to paid content on the Patreon platform when the franchise announced their Bachelorette in 2019. Hannah Brown who was chosen as the lead represented the same archetype they have had in previous seasons, a white woman from Alabama and a former beauty queen. After the announcement, the two hosts debated covering the season but chose to do it after all despite not reaching their initial goal of 1000 paying patrons: *"Although we didn't hit out 1000 patrons goal (yet!), everyone's overwhelming love and support has propelled us to come back and recap Hannah B's journey for love any damn ways!"* (Instagram: 2019). The support they were able to garner from their listeners perfectly exemplifies that regardless of the official ratings of the franchise that have remained at high numbers, the audience is in fact in need of diversity in casting and representations. Otherwise this podcast that is very vocal about those issues would not be as popular as it is. In addition to being popular among fans of the show, they have recently been featured on many lists and articles such as 20 Best Bachelor Nation Podcasts, *Time's* 50 Best Podcasts to Listen to Right Now, 25 New Best

Podcasts of 2020, etc. All the while without being affiliated to any network or company and producing the Podcast themselves.

## Engagement

Viewers of The Bachelor are known to have a special relationship with the franchise, it is often referred to as a guilty pleasure, hate watching, implying that as much as there is a deep investment in the show it also comes with a deep loathing of what it stands for. The Bachelor stands out within the genre specifically due to the fact that it invites group viewings and investment in the love life of the contestants through live tweeting-- making it the 'most tweeted' TV show (Feuer 2018: 50). Furthermore, viewers have been known to be vocal about certain production decisions they did not agree with, most notably when the franchise picked Peter Webber to be the latest Bachelor over Mike Johnson who could have been the first black Bachelor. This particular choice led fans to create a petition asking for Johnson to be the Bachelor, and while this did not reverse their decision the fans were able to garner more than 3.700 signatures and many hashtags such as #BachelorSoWhite and #MikeForBachelor. Keeping all this in mind, it was crucial to look into audience reception in order to get the full scope of the Bachelor phenomenon. Furthermore, this will allow us to better understand the implications of the representational practices of the franchise as an accurate assessment of representation needs to consider viewer interpretation and the target audience (Deery 2015: 116).

While it may be easy to assume that the majority of the viewers are critical of most aspects of the show, it is necessary to recognize that there are some that engage positively with the contestants for multiple reasons that can range from their physical appearance to their individual character. Beyond a deep investment for individual contestants one cannot forget that the entire premise of the show is for a man and a woman to find love and the franchise does a good job at selling a love story that audiences can feel strongly about, leading them to buy into the fairytale and root for the relationship they believe in the most.

*“Okay well I have only watched the last two weeks but obviously it has to be Cassie right? That felt too real lol. #TheBachelor” - (Twitter)*

In addition, every season some contestants will stand out so much so that audiences will be asking for them to become the next Bachelor/ette. This will usually happen either while still on the show once it has become obvious that they will not be engaged by the end or after they have been eliminated. It is often how audiences will let production know who their favorites are in hopes that they do get chosen for the following season.

As previously mentioned, The Bachelor is what we call appointment TV that is *“communally watched and discussed when they air live”* (Monk-Payton 2018: 259) shaping the viewing experience for the audience as they are creating their own discourse online.

*“Honestly the best part about watching #TheBachelor is then following #BachelorTwitter let’s be real now 🤔💯 #HasBeenKissed” - (Twitter)*

This tweet, like many others, is the perfect illustration of Hermes’s idea of cultural citizenship as viewers have built a community through tweeting about The Bachelor, finding common grounds in who to criticize, root for and celebrate; knowing that they all have the same understanding of the universe of The Bachelor (2005: 10). As a popular culture artifact, The Bachelor has the power to create belonging through an inclusive community and a chance for individuals who do not have economic or political power to finally be recognized (Ibid: 11). This sense of community is particularly present within the Bachelor fandom so much so that it could be compared to Benedict Anderson’s idea of an imagined community because how they refer to themselves and are referred to as Bachelor Nation. The term was originally coined by the producers of the show but eventually became a fully embodied concept that is the essence of this franchise which includes the fans, all the spin-offs and international versions, any past contestant, and derived products of the show (Feuer 2018: 50; Mumhoreze: 2019). By definition an imagined community means that *“the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the*

*image of their communion.*” (Ibid: 56). When looking at how fans engage with the show on social media, this fact becomes very clear as they come together to live tweet every episode, continually upholding this imagined community by investing themselves and participating in the fan culture.

The other side of the coin is the negative engagement that the show creates which comes in two main forms; firstly around the contestants which are often a result of actions judged as inappropriate such as Chris threatening to leave the show:

*“Saying you are going to be a man and fight for what you want is just toxic masculinity personified. #chris #TheBachelorette”* - (Twitter)

This does reveal that in reality TV *“patriarchal arrangements are still visible”* (Deery 2015: 106) and therefore will be called out by viewers. Consequently, showing that The Bachelor stands at both extremes of the engagement spectrum and that these two emotional modes work in tandem to evoke intense feelings within the audience (Hill 2017: 8). Secondly, fans have shown a deep awareness of the editing process, in terms of which storylines will be privileged and manufactured cliffhangers as they have a tendency to promote stand out moments all season long to build up the anticipation. During season 23, audiences were repeatedly shown Colton, the lead, jumping over a fence to run away from the cameras-- this particular scene became a highly anticipated moment all season long. So much so that every episode fans wondered when they would finally see the jump, multiple articles were even written about it as this became one of the most talked about moment of the season:

*“No rose ceremony or fence jump?!?! I’m PISSED #TheBachelor”* - (Twitter)

Keeping all this in mind it is necessary to note that engagement is not a binary concept but in fact a complex process that requires *‘sustained cognitive and affective work’* with nuanced economic and sociocultural relations that would be worth investigating further (Corner: 2011; Hill 2017: 6). The concept of irony bribe will show the many layers involved in how audiences engage with The Bachelor, demonstrating the cognitive and affective work that is required in order to enjoy



the viewing experience. Furthermore, The Bachelor franchise serves as a good example of the economic and sociocultural layers of engagement in the way that it has dominated ratings and social media analytics but also in its ability to spark up debates within popular culture. Both in positive and negative ways as we will see when talking about issues of representations.

### Irony bribe

This research would be remiss to talk about audience engagement without mentioning the irony bribe which is crucial to understanding Bachelor Nation. Dana Cloud applied this concept to The Bachelor describing it as “*a strategic mechanism of a cultural text that invites audiences to identify with the pleasures of the rejection of a patently ideological fantasy.*” (Cloud 2010: 430). Over many seasons of The Bachelor, fans have become increasingly aware, making the irony bribe that much more prominent in the way they engage with the show on social media. Actively rejecting the fantasy created by the show by being critical of the “process”.

*“I feel like Elyse was the realest representation of what we all think outside of watching this show for the entertainment and pretending it’s shocking when the engagements don’t work out. Accepting a proposal after a few months of shared attention IS abnormal lol #TheBachelor” - (Twitter)*

Perhaps, this comment perfectly exemplifies the way audiences feel watching The Bachelor being earnestly self-aware; acknowledging that the premise of the show is not realistic as they go back and forth between buying into the fantasy and at times rejecting it. This identity play is essential to being part of Bachelor Nation as it is the only way for them to simultaneously believe in the ‘real’ and the ‘not real’ while avoiding the cognitive dissonance that comes with knowing that it is all manufactured by the producers (Mumhoreze: 2019). No moment took fans out of the fantasy more than in season 23 when Elyse decided to leave the show because as she said “*I can’t, I literally can’t accept a proposal after a few months of sharing your time and attention with other people. I can’t do it (...).*” This eventually forced fans to acknowledge that there is in fact a timeline that contestants are expected to follow that should end in a proposal

therefore taking romance out of the whole process by reminding them that this is a television show. As a result, this created a clear divide in how fans reacted to the fantasy being broken as some embraced Elyse, others took it as her not knowing the ‘rules’.

*“I can't accept a proposal after a few months of sharing your time and attention with other people.” - Elyse, the most reasonable woman in bachelor history #TheBachelor” - (Twitter)*

*“When Elyse says “I don't know if I can accept your proposal in a few weeks” THIS IS WHAT YOU SIGNED UP FOR!!!! YOU KNEW THE FINAL OUTCOME!!!! I hate/enjoy this show #thebachelor” - (Twitter)*

The last comment leads back to another element of the irony bribe which is hate watching, a type of engagement that is in fact very prominent in reality TV and comes as a result of recognizing the artificial construct of the text (Cloud 2010: 430). Moreover, as the seasons go on, fans have become more disillusioned by the show and the promise of ‘true love’ when contestants go from being heartbroken on one season to ready for another engagement a few months later.

*“It's almost as if Becca was engaged a month ago and she's struggling with this insane emotional ringer? Idk just spitballing here #TheBachelorette” - (Twitter)*

As we can see the level of awareness of the production side of the show is an essential part of how fans will engage with it, as the most savvy viewers will make it a point to mention that they can see through all the tactics of the franchise. All this in an attempt to justify their investment in the show despite knowing how produced it is. In many ways, this will carry over to how they view issues of representation-- with a deep sense of awareness that improvements still need to be made. As they continuously choose to call out these issues while still keeping up with the show, in the same way that they choose to believe in the ‘real’ and the ‘not real’.

## Stereotyped narratives

*“Once again, Asian men get absolutely no love on this show. @Millsy11374 knows how much this grieves me. #TheBachelorette” - (Twitter)*

John’s journey on season 14 was one that fans were very invested in because he was the first Asian American man to make it as far as he did on the show regardless of not getting a lot of airtime. As a result his exit at the end of episode 5 over Chris, who was disliked, upset the fans including Natasha and Justine:

*“Like we know nothing about him, I feel like there’s more under the surface that we didn’t get to see. I would love to watch him as the bachelor. Like he has the characteristics, they always look for somebody who’s successful. Sienne said he’s one of the wealthiest and most successful contestants they’ve ever had so in terms of Bachelor he would 100% fit that mold. Asian male, hello! Let’s change the narrative up. If you really wanna be historic, Mike Fleiss.”<sup>11</sup> - ( 2 Black Girls 1 Rose: Episode 6 Wills is not the one)*

As they mentioned, we as the audience had not gotten to know much about John except that he was one of the founding members of Venmo, a popular money transferring platform, pushing him into the shy, ‘nerdy’ archetype. Throughout the episodes this became John’s narrative where the emphasis was consistently put on him being smart and nothing else. This was only reinforced by Becca’s surprise that he was able to beat Blake in a physical activity during the group date. Further proving that when it comes to racial minorities *“narratives frequently fall into a longer history of racialized discourses and stereotypes.”* (Wong 2010: 408)

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<sup>11</sup> Note: Mike Fleiss is the creator of The Bachelor franchise

*Becca: "You all did great but overall I'm giving this to somebody who really surprised me and you did so well John so the golden axe is yours" - (Season 14, episode 4)*

## Representation matters

Reality TV is a genre that is easy to dismiss as stupid or uninteresting and ignoring its ability to shape public and private perceptions of race (Bell-Jordan 2008: 355). However, this analysis has shown that viewers do care about being able to see themselves in the contestants and relate to their experiences in the same way that white audiences can.

*"Nicole on #TheBachelor is extremely relatable to me because*

- 1. She's is a spunky & sweet Latina*
- 2. She can't do a pull-up*
- 3. She cries every day*

*Representation in media matters !!" - (Twitter)*

However lighthearted the tone of this tweet may be, the truth remains that seeing a Cuban woman on The Bachelor does not happen often and being able to relate to her does change the viewing experience for Latinx viewers. This is in fact something that Natasha and Justine discuss and preach about on the podcast often because they value seeing contestants of colour they can root for, even when they do not agree with them:

*"Thank god for Tayshia! Someone on twitter said as black people we obviously want to root for everybody black but Courtney and Onyeka are really making it hard (...)" - (2 Black Girls 1 Rose, episode 6 Fighting like Two Bodega Cats)*

In addition, it is worth looking at the more subtle ways in which the franchise reaffirms which segment of their audience they value more. A recurring tradition on The Bachelor is surprising couples during 1 on 1 dates with a musical performance in front of screaming fans. Historically,

those performers are known to be country music singers which in many ways is a symptom of this franchise being for a specific audience that some would call middle-class white America.

*“Always amusing to see what music act #TheBachelorette features for their awkward date dance. Always unknown and caucasian, has a Country But Not Country sound. A guy named Granger Smith got the nod tonight.” - (Twitter)*

This sentiment was also shared by the two hosts of 2 Black Girls 1 Rose who talked about not being able to relate to the experience that was for a specific audience that is not them and wanting the franchise to expand on the music genres they are showing.

*Justine: “And it only relates to a certain type of viewer and not to others and I don’t think it’s fair. Everybody knows who Lil John is, EVERYBODY knows who that is. Why cant you have an artist like that, even an up and coming one. Come on guys!”- (2 Black Girls 1 Rose, episode 5 Let me tell you about men who write poetry)*

*“when are they going to surprise #TheBachelorette & her date with a rap show? mix it up a little @chrisbharrison” - (Twitter)*

Mirroring what has been said by fans on social media which in turn can also be linked to the production of the show continuously refusing to change up a formula they believe to be working despite the fans asking for it every season. While this is not an issue that directly relates to racial representations it does demonstrate that the franchise is curating an ideal of romance and entertainment that only a segment of their audience feel they can relate to. Furthermore, it is clear that it is an essential element of the social imaginary as it is apparent to viewers that these moments are tailor made for who the franchise believes is watching-- middle class white America. Consequently, they are choosing to cater to a group of the population whose experiences are repeatedly privileged over minorities who have had to accept the status quo. As a result, production is not willing to stray too far from that by having a hip hop performance which would not fit into their idea of romance.

Furthermore, it is also a symptom of the format style of The Bachelor and production's unwillingness to change what makes the format what it is and as we have established even the casting has not evolved much over the seasons as the same archetype remains to be the norm. This further proves that the production of the franchise is not willing to stray too far away from what they believe to be a successful format. However, from an industry perspective, it is also worth noting that before anything else The Bachelor is a television program that needs to maintain its ratings in order to be profitable meaning that at times it can be easier to stick to what has been working for more than 30 seasons.

Justine: *"They could have done something cool. But no, Bachelor producers had to stick to what they've been doing since 1985 and just stick them in a hot tub outdoors."*

Natasha: *"Surprise, write a love song. We 1) already did this 2 days ago with Chris and 2) we do this every season. There's always a date where they have to write a song and it's always the worst group date because no one wants to be on this and it's not even that entertaining."* - (2 Black Girls 1 Rose, episode 6 Wills is not the one)

### All representations matter

While the main interest of this research is racial representation within the franchise, issues of diversity go far beyond that as The Bachelor promotes an ideal that imposes restrictions not only on race but also on looks and body type. Therefore, looking at the reception of representational practices also means looking at how audiences respond to the lack of diversity in that area. An ongoing joke between fans of the show has been that the contestants picked often look the same, making it difficult to distinguish them which has been a result of the franchise continually casting the same type of people.

*"Just now realized Connor and Blake were different people #TheBachelorette"* - (Twitter)

When it comes to representation, fans find themselves constantly juggling between investment and being openly critical of the show for primarily casting able bodied, traditionally attractive,

middle-class white contestants proving that they are a direct reflection of our modern social imaginary where the same people will be used as the norm.

*“Becca what obstacles do you think Colton has overcome in life? He's white, attractive and a former professional athlete. #Bachelorette #TheBachelorette #BachelorNation #ABC”* - (Twitter)

Because the franchise will more often than not pick contestants that fit a certain body type and what is considered traditionally attractive, viewers who do not fit this particular mold have been vocal about this exclusion in the same way that people of colour do not feel represented in the love stories promoted by the franchise.

*“Dear @BachelorABC, Please consider having some plus size girls on next season! We are looking for love just like everyone else!! Thanks!! 🙄🌹 Love Always, Ash  
Ps- I'll totally volunteer for the position (especially if its colton! 😍😂)  
#TheBachelorette”* - (Twitter)

What this tweets and many others are showing is that the audience has a clear need for diversity in the love stories the franchise is attempting to sell them as the quintessential love, in fact fans want to see imperfect people who they feel they can relate to. By continually casting the same archetypes of primarily white, traditionally attractive, able bodied people, the production is telling everyone who does not fit into those boxes that they are not worthy of the fairytale built into the fabric of the show.

While it is true that this research started off as an exploration of racial representations, what came out of it is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to The Bachelor. In order to be the ideal mate for the lead, contestants will not only be limited in terms of race but also body type, sexuality and really anything that deviates from the ‘norm’. As a matter of fact, a look at the first 28 seasons of The Bachelor/ette revealed that no woman ‘older’ than 32 years old had made it to

the final 4 on *The Bachelor*, while the oldest contestant to make it to the final 4 on *The Bachelorette* was 35 year old (Zhao: 2017). But regardless of that the average winner for *The Bachelor* was 26 years old and 28 years old for *The Bachelorette* (Zhao: 2017), showing that age is also an area in which the franchise has a long way to go. Also there have been instances during season 23 of *The Bachelor* where a female contestant was continually shamed for being 31 years old by another who was only 23, exposing the stigma around age within the franchise. Furthermore, as we have seen in the way Onyeka and Nicole were portrayed by the edit, any performance that does not fit the ideal of romance perpetuated by the extravagant dates, international travels, glamorous cocktail parties will be judged as unworthy of the final rose and the love of the lead. Proving once more that the love portrayed is not realistic hence the need for audiences to adopt strategies to negotiate those realities.



## 5. Conclusion

This research started with the goal to examine the construction of race on reality TV by looking at The Bachelor franchise as a case study and analyzing how racial minorities are represented because the show has a history of prioritising white contestants in their casting and storylines. This served as the starting point of this thesis as it became clear that The Bachelor is not an independent entity but a cultural phenomenon that should be contextualised in order to get an overall understanding. Furthermore, to fully grasp the impact of The Bachelor this research also investigated how racial representations were received by the audience on social media and through a podcast analysis. It became apparent that The Bachelor was more than just a dating reality TV show but actually a reflection of the modern social imaginary, in the way that it portrays romance, race, and relationships where everything can be looked at as an economy. This leads us to the three main research questions of this thesis-- (1) How are racial minorities represented on The Bachelor/ette? (2) How do racial representations contribute to the construction of the modern social imaginary? (3) How are racial representations received by the audience?

These three questions were answered using a multimethod approach in order to look at the franchise from the perspective of the episodes themselves, the production and the audience. This gave a full understanding of the franchise in its context. During the initial research phase for this thesis, it was apparent that racial representations on reality TV and The Bachelor specifically, had already been researched. Therefore using a multimethod approach was the best way to add to the already existing field, as previous research either focused primarily on the episode themselves or the audience. Combining all the elements that make the The Bachelor franchise what it is was a turning point because it was an opportunity to take into account the cultural shift that the franchise is experiencing. From the prevalence of social media and the role played by influencer culture to the economy surrounding the franchise as a whole. Furthermore, while the sample of episodes was relatively small considering there have been 24 seasons of The Bachelor and 15 seasons of The Bachelorette, each added method compensated for that by uncovering

different valuable elements for the analysis. This multimethod approach proved itself to be one of the main strengths of this thesis and an important contribution to the field. Moreover, the addition of the 2 Black Girls 1 Rose podcast was essential to how this thesis sets itself apart from what has already been written about the franchise, as fan-made podcasts dedicated to recapping TV shows are becoming increasingly popular, especially in Bachelor Nation.

When looking at how racial minorities are represented on *The Bachelor*, the first thing that was established is that they will find themselves underrepresented by having a limited access to the narrative. This will be put in place in different ways, firstly by having less confessionals than the white contestants which is an essential part of building storylines in reality TV. Secondly, in the case where they are shown their interactions will be limited to lighthearted talks and gimmicky scenes which in turn means that it will be more difficult for them to connect with the audience. Within the dating reality TV genre, the expression of deep feelings is crucial to a contestant's performance and an important tool to portray authenticity in an environment that is mostly manufactured. The lack of airtime given to racial minorities also means that their presence on the show will be questioned by the audience who will view them as the token minority contestant as opposed to fully realized characters.

Moreover, racial minorities will be used as a means to an end while the white contestants will inevitably be put at the center of the narrative. As a matter of fact, when an argument erupted between two racial minorities, Onyeka and Nicole, it was used as a means to show the ways in which they would not make suitable wives for Colton, and were ultimately facilitators to the coupling of Colton with another white contestant. While very few racial minorities are given room to make it far on each season, when they do have the opportunity they will never be the center of the storylines unless it is to verify the behaviour of their white counterparts. In addition, the argument between the two women was dramatized and framed in the editing to portray Nicole as the 'victim' of Onyeka's attacks while she came off as the aggressor, confirming the stereotyped narrative of the 'aggressive' black woman that has been rampant in reality TV. In the same way Wills was portrayed as the 'angry' black man, showing the clear manner in which inferential racism manifests itself on the show. However, for the racial minorities who will be

portrayed in a favorable light, they will need to fit in the whiteness standards of the franchise in order to not interfere with imagined romance that is at stake. And if a contestant is able to do that they might be granted a 'front runner' edit which is for the most part reserved to the white contestants.

In answering the second research question, it was determined that The Bachelor is no longer limited to the made for television space but is actually transcending it to address the real life space by bringing in discussions of the production side of the franchise. This came to show that the manufactured fantasy created by the production will come before anything else and therefore any political or racial issues that put it in jeopardy will continually be ignored. An important element of the modern social imaginary is that everything in our society has come to be seen as an economy, meaning that anything can be commodified-- serving as the basis of The Bachelor franchise's business model. As the series is all about the commodification of the ideal love story by way of product placement and advertisers. However, the growing discourse around racial representations threatened the Bachelor economy which was confirmed by the long-time host and executive producer of the show, Chris Harrison. As he admitted that diversifying the cast was an attempt to change the narrative surrounding the show, proving that in many ways casting racial minorities was done in an effort to garner as many fragments of the audience as possible that could in turn be sold to advertisers. This was further confirmed by the hosts of *2 Black Girls 1 Rose* who discovered through their interviews with past Bachelor contestants of colour that the vetting process they went through to get on the show would be accelerated if the production felt they needed more diversity in the cast.

Another important element of the modern social imaginary that is prevalent on The Bachelor is the heterosexual imaginary that is the driving force of the franchise, so much so that contestant will be expected to prove their commitment to the idea of marriage otherwise, they will be judged by other contestants and the audience. However, the franchise's track record in terms of successful relationships and marriages is not very good, implying that contestants do not actually go on the show for marriage but really to promote themselves and eventually monetize their brand through social media. As a result of that, the audience and contestants will make it a point

to attempt to separate the contestants there for the 'right reason' from the ones who are not. This ultimately is a clear representation of the intergeneric space of The Bachelor when contestants accuse each other of being there for the wrong reasons, bringing to light the 'real life space' in the made for television environment.

Strategic whiteness is one the mechanism used on The Bachelor that continually contributes to the construction of the modern social imaginary in two main ways. Firstly, by making race invisible, avoiding any discussions of racial issues and pretending that all contestants have access to the same advantages that can come from the show. However, the truth is that historically racial minorities will not make it very far, therefore guaranteeing that they will not have the same opportunities as their white counterparts after the season. Secondly, strategic whiteness will contribute to the erasure of cultural differences between contestants in order to maintain whiteness as the norm. Therefore, helping preserve the normative notions and images that we have come to expect from each other, guaranteeing that media representations privilege white middle class, heteronormative voices.

The final research question was answered through an analysis of the podcast 2 Black Girls 1 Rose hosted by two black women who created it to give a voice to a part of the Bachelor fandom that has been voiceless for so long-- viewers of colour. Dedicating their content to calling out the franchise for their lack of representation and their treatment of racial minorities. Their popularity has proven that the audience of the show is in fact aware of these issues and do want the franchise to be more inclusive of different ideas of romance.

However, every season The Bachelor still finds itself at the top of the ratings and is continually trending on social media which shows a disconnect in what audiences are asking from the franchise and their viewing habits. This can be explained by the irony bribe which plays an important role in the viewing experience, as fans will actively take pleasure in rejecting the fantasy created by the show. Using that as a coping mechanism to simultaneously believe in the 'real' and 'not real.' By continuously acknowledging that the premise of the show is unrealistic or not an accurate representation of reality, it makes it easier to detach themselves from the obvious lack of diversity in casting and representations. This further proves that engagement

with *The Bachelor* is in fact complex and cannot be limited to a positive/negative dichotomy as the cognitive and affective work required to enjoy the viewing experience goes far beyond that. As a matter of fact, the more the seasons go on the more fans become disillusioned with the fantasy created by the show as they repeatedly see contestants go from ‘heartbreak’ to dating 25 new people a few months later forcing the savviest fans to question the production of the show and the contestants themselves.

As fans have grown more critical of the franchise it became more difficult to ignore the stereotyped narratives that racial minorities are forced into, such as John who was portrayed as the stereotypical Asian, shy ‘nerd’ throughout the entirety of the season. Meanwhile, fans were continuously asking for him to get more airtime. After his elimination, fans were upset knowing that he had no shot at being the next Bachelor even though he perfectly fit into the ideal of romance the franchise is creating. As he is successful, smart, and emotionally connected with the audience, making him the perfect candidate for the first Asian Bachelor.

Another observation to take into account when answering the final research question is how much fans value racial representations, being able to see themselves in the contestants and relating to their experiences. This is an element that was often insisted upon on the podcast, so much so that the two hosts would make it a point to root for all the racial minorities on the show, regardless of how they felt about them. Furthermore, this thesis established that there were more insidious ways in which the franchise would choose to cater to a specific segment of their audience. Musical performances by country artists are one of those ways, as this has become a sort of tradition on the show which serves as a reminder that the franchise is crafting this fairytale with middle-class white America in mind as their target audience. This became something that viewers grew frustrated with for a few reasons-- for one they felt like this created an experience that only some people could relate too but also because it showed the production’s unwillingness to change their format. As they would rather privilege the experiences of one segment of their audience, over having a hip-hop performance that would not fit in the imagined romance of *The Bachelor*.

Finally, this research proved that while audiences care about racial representations, they also want the franchise to do better with all types of representations, meaning being more inclusive of different types of people. Because the ideal promoted by the franchise is not just limited by restrictions on race but also sexuality, looks, body type, and even age. However, fans have learned to deal with their frustrations with the show through humour such as joking about how most of the contestants look the same while being critical of the same privileged people being used as the ‘norm.’

While it is true that reality TV may not seem like the most important place to argue for fair racial representations, this research has shown that it is a site for struggle over meanings about race that needs to be confronted. It has shown the pervasive nature of our media culture “*where racial ideologies have long been created, reproduced and sustained*” (Bell-Jordan 2008: 370). Keeping all that in mind, it would be naive to ignore that The Bachelor franchise has even more power in affecting how people look at racial minorities, simply because of their ability to garner millions of viewers every season for the last 18 years. But also because season after season, they perpetuate the idea that only the white contestants are worthy of finding love in this made for television fairytale and that racial minorities do not have a place in the quintessential love story, except if it is to stay in the background. When Marian Wright Edelman said “*You can’t be what you can’t see*” she may not have been talking about The Bachelor but the truth still remains that racial minorities do not get to see themselves in the extravagant dates and over the top proposals. And if they don't see themselves live that fairytale ending, how can they aspire to it.

During the inception of the genre, reality TV was seen as this democratic space where individuals who had been voiceless for so long would finally have agency in the way they would be portrayed. However, this did not take into account the many ways in which ‘reality’ would be mediated through editing and the crafting of storylines. What started off as an escape from the stereotyped narratives racial minorities had been reduced to, turned into the construction of race in “*superficial, reductive, and often hegemonic ways-- and this process has increasingly come to define the genre*” (Bell-Jordan 2008: 369).

Beyond not seeing themselves represented, racial minorities have had to watch the franchise continually erase any discussions of race and pretend to live in a post-racial society where it has no impact on the contestants themselves or even how the show is produced. During the *Women Tell All* <sup>12</sup> of the latest season of *The Bachelor*, Chris Harrison opened up a segment with these words “*I’d like to talk about something that has been going on for the last several seasons, something that is not okay (...) there’s some negative criticism but unfortunately there is a line that has been crossed and so it is time to address that.*” all the while having Rachel Lindsay, the first black Bachelorette sitting by his side nodding in agreement. At first it seemed that Rachel was there to finally talk about racism as Harrison said he brought her on to discuss an issue she dealt with, while the camera zoomed in specifically on the women of colour from that season.

Instead, Lindsay was actually there to talk about the online abuse that contestants have to face every season. While she mentioned that she wanted to pave the way for women who ‘looked like her’, she chose to never mention black women specifically. She later read offensive comments that had been directed at the women of that season including explicitly racist comments but still no mention of racism. This was followed by a discussion among the women about the hate they have experienced, during which Chris Harrison asked them to raise their hands if they had ever received ‘true hate’-- they all did. While this segment was important and there were many instances where the women of colour mentioned being attacked for their skin colour, at no point in that segment did anyone call it out for what it is. Furthermore, this discussion only resulted in equating a woman being attacked for ‘crying too much’ to another being accused of ‘playing the black card’. Although, both comments are unacceptable, for this discussion to truly be effective there needs to be a separation between both issues, as all this does is undermine the true racism some contestants have received from viewers of *The Bachelor*. Despite claiming to make efforts to be more inclusive and their desire to have everyone feel represented they still spend more effort on downplaying these issues rather than addressing them directly. The language used throughout that segment is direct proof that the franchise will do whatever they can to appease the people asking them to do better but will never make their primarily white audience uncomfortable by facing the realities of racism. They even went as far as using that segment to

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<sup>12</sup> Reunion episode before the final episode in front of a studio audience hosted by Chris Harrison.

praise themselves for the representation on the show as one of the African American contestants mentioned getting messages from fans thanking her for being on The Bachelor: *“It is important to have representation and thank you.”*

In conclusion, being a black woman and a faithful viewer of The Bachelor myself it was important for me to do this research because these were questions I have asked myself season after season and perhaps was attempting to understand what brought me back knowing what I know about the franchise. While I may not have found all the answers, it became clear that The Bachelor has been able to perpetuate this ideal of romance that deserves to be researched further because as previously mentioned racial representations are only the tip of the iceberg and there are in fact many other areas that should be studied. Starting from looking at how racial representations have evolved over the seasons or a comparative study with another show in the same genre like Love Island which is now becoming as popular and experiencing the same type of criticism. Additionally, it would be interesting to study the franchise from a gender perspective in terms of how it portrays femininity and masculinity.

In many ways, what this thesis has shown is that The Bachelor is actually a reflection of our society and because of that if we decide that we do not like what is being reflected to us then perhaps we should also look within ourselves to change it.



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## 7. Appendix

### 1. Contestant name key

#### The Bachelorette, season 14

The Bachelorette: Becca Kufrin

Contestant	Race/Ethnicity
Garrett	White
Blake	White
Colton Underwood	White
Wills	African American
Lincoln	Nigerian origins
Chris	White
David	White
Jordan	White
John	Asian American
Jean Blanc	Haitian origins

#### The Bachelor, season 23

The Bachelor: Colton Underwood

Contestant	Race/Ethnicity
Tayshia	African American

Onyeka	Nigerian origins
Nicole	Cuban origins
Kirpa	Mixed race- Indian and White
Heather	White
Hannah B.	White
Katie	African American
Sydney	Mixed race- Filipino and White
Elyse	White
Cassie	White

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Qualitative textual analysis

Final coding scheme:

Categories	Subcategories	Codes	Examples
Engagement	Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Love story</li> <li>+ Social Media</li> <li>+ Contestants (Character, physical appearance, for Bachelor/ette)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Okay I feel like I’m watching a Cassie &amp; Colton love story and am mad at all the other girls for getting in their way #TheBachelor”</li> <li>• “Honestly the best part about watching #TheBachelor is then following #BachelorTwitter let’s be real now 🤔👏 #HasBeenKissed”</li> <li>• “Wills, a man who respects himself, women and bold fashion choices. MAKE HIM OUR BACHELOR #TheBachelorette”</li> </ul>
	Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Contestant (Character, Elimination)</li> <li>+ Editing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When Becca keeps Lincoln, Garrett, and Chris but let's Venmo John go #TheBachelorette”</li> <li>• “No rose ceremony or fence jump?!?! I’m PISSED #TheBachelor”</li> </ul>
	Irony Bribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Hate watching</li> <li>+ Disillusionment with the show</li> <li>+ Proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “WHY DO I CONTINUE TO WATCH THIS DUMBASS SHOW #TheBachelorette”</li> <li>• “It’s almost as if Becca was engaged a month ago and she’s struggling with this insane emotional ringer? Idk just spitballing here #TheBachelorette”</li> <li>• “When Elyse says “I don’t know if I can accept your proposal in a few weeks” THIS IS WHAT YOU SIGNED UP FOR!!!! YOU</li> </ul>

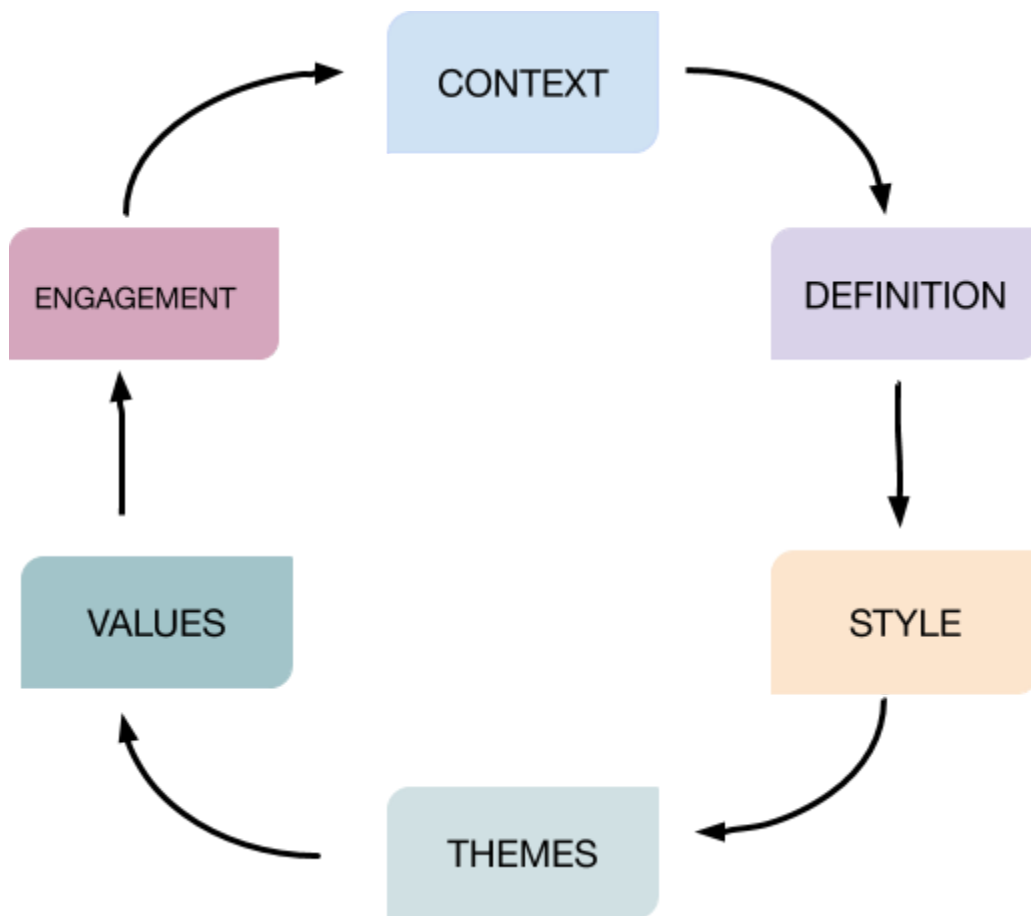
			<p>KNEW THE FINAL OUTCOME!!!! I hate/enjoy this show #thebachelor When Elyse says “I don’t know if I can accept your proposal in a few weeks” THIS IS WHAT YOU SIGNED UP FOR!!!! YOU KNEW THE FINAL OUTCOME!!!! I hate/enjoy this show #thebachelor”</p>
Representation	Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Looks</li> <li>+ Musical performance</li> <li>+ Race (Airtime, Tokenism)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “every time you tell a blonde white 20 something female you're insanely attracted to her an angel loses its wings #theBachelor”</li> <li>• “Always amusing to see what music act #TheBachelorette features for their awkward date dance. Always unknown and caucasian, has a Country But Not Country sound. A guy named Granger Smith got the nod tonight.”</li> <li>• “Is Kirpa the token brown girl on #thebachelor??? Bc homegirl messes up her chin and we don’t know how??? I’ve never seen her kiss him and it’s been 5 whole weeks???? Then the only interaction this week was her flossing his teeth???? Wild”</li> </ul>
	Representation	+ Why it matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nicole on #TheBachelor is extremely relatable to me because             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. She’s is a spunky &amp; sweet Latina</li> <li>2. She can’t do a pull-up</li> <li>3. She cries every day</li> </ol>             Representation in media matters !!           </li> </ul>
	Bachelor rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Producer pick</li> <li>+ Format (types of dates)</li> <li>+ Tradition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Jordan and his golden undies are proof the producers force #TheBachelorette to keep certain people around to keep the drama going.”</li> <li>• “There’s a 2 on 1 with Jordan and David? We are SO shocked, we NEVER saw that coming! #TheBachelorette</li> </ul>

Format			<p>#stillexcitedforit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I could never be #TheBachelorette because never in my life have I ever greeted a man by jumping up and wrapping my legs around his waist and it seems like that’s a prerequisite for the job.”</li> </ul>
	Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Editing</li> <li>+ Spinoffs</li> <li>+ Product placement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I wish @chrisbharrison would switch it up sometimes and come in saying, "yo, yo, yo.. it's time for some of you to go." Then just leave. #TheBachelorette”</li> <li>• “\$20 says Nicole and Onyeka are both in Paradise because drama. #Thebachelor”</li> <li>• “#TheBachelorette is a giant hotel ad. How many times do we think they’ll say “Aria sky suites” this episode?”</li> </ul>
Authenticity	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Authentic</li> <li>+ Inauthentic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Guys. I think...I think I forgot that people on #TheBachelorette can actually have real conversations on these dates? It's been a WHILE. Thanks, Wills and Becca.”</li> <li>• “also Colton knows this show very well. his monologue is laced with “journey,” “guard up,” “take my walls down,” &amp; “vulnerable.” it’s like he watched and prepared #TheBachelorette”</li> </ul>
	Intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Right vs wrong reasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Can we please get rid of the right reasons thing? Good god, no one's there for the "right reasons" #TheBachelor”</li> <li>• “Can someone tell me how one could possibly be ready for MARRIAGE when they haven’t even had their first kiss in 23 years? Comeeee onnnnn; I think not #TheBachelor #ShouldBePopularOpinion”</li> </ul>

Real life space	Scandals	+ Lincoln + Garrett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I would rather #TheBachelorette start with 10 guys if it meant that there were no racist, homophobic sex offenders on the season”</li> <li>• "bloodline" garrett letting out that white supremacist jargon #TheBachelorette”</li> </ul>
	Production	+ Vetting of contestants + Backstage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I don’t understand how #theBachelorette continues to have vetting issues. Your target demographic is millennial women. Give us 30 minutes + a dude’s last initials and we’ve got a home address for his first kiss. Maybe let us try next time?”</li> <li>• “Wonder what Vegas date ideas @BacheloretteABC discarded before deciding on these cause pretty sure any of those would have been better. #TheBachelorette”</li> </ul>

## 2.2. Genre analysis

Annette Hill genre model



## The Bachelorette season 14 Episode 4: aired June 18, 2018

### Episode notes: (Pages 2/8)

Heterosexual imaginary Sob story/emotional confession; Making the contestants look bad/stupid;  
Racial representation; Praise for opening up; Competitiveness; Right vs. wrong reasons

- + Becca asks Blake: How many kids do you want? 3 to 5. Start talking about baby names. Both start laughing and kissing. Becca mentions in voiceover that Blake always lifts her spirits.
- + All cheers to David (who fell out of bed) except Jordan who has a rivalry with him
- + Car pulls up as Jordan is gloating about David being in the hospital until David walks in and Becca interrupts her time with Jordan to take him to the side. Becca tells him to wait on the couch while she goes to get a rose as Jordan is heard in voiceover saying there's no way David is getting it. Zoom in on Jordan's face looking angry
- + Jean-Blanc is seen in confessional talking about how strong his connection with Becca is 'I feel like if i'm one of the first ones getting a rose it definitely holds heavier of a weight'
- + Becca: 'It feels me with so much hope that I do see a future here'
- + Wills is called to get his rose but Nick is still the one heard talking in voiceover, putting emphasis on whether or not he'll get a rose just because he took a 'risk' by wearing a tracksuit
- + Jean-Blanc called last despite him being confident about his relationship, seen in confessional talking about how is not as confident as he used to be and is ready to show her more about himself
- + Utah montage with Becca 'I truly, truly feel my husband, my partner, my teammate is in that group of guys'

Becca and Garrett's 1on1:

- + He got the first impression rose



- + Shopping trip, playing around in stores trying on clothes
- + ‘Garrett does remind me of home, I feel like my dad is watching throughout this and Garrett is somebody that he would really like and that honestly warms my heart’

Cut back to the guys at the house talking: 18:53 - 20:07

- + Talk about how Lincoln thinks the earth is flat and Chris is putting him on the spot to explain why
- + ‘I just personally think I need more evidence’ long shot of Lincoln and then moves to Jean-Blanc as they’re both sitting there surrounded by white men.
- + How did people go around the world without falling off? Lincoln: ‘By just travelling and friction and gravity’ doppy music starts playing as he says this and Jean-Blanc is seen looking uncomfortable
- + Leo in confessionnal saying you have to question Lincoln sannity for thinking that earth is flat
- + Cuts back to Lincoln “Or it could be rectangle, I’m not positive. When you look out the plane everything you see is flat right?”
- + Lincoln now in a confessionnal explains to the camera making a circle with his hand representing earth and wondering why the water from the ocean isn’t falling down.
- + John and Jean-Blanc are talking about how he thinks he’s gonna get the 1on1 but John thinks he’s too on edge. Jean-Blanc “This week I sense something brewing, I feel it”

Back to Becca and Garrett’s date:

- + Going on and on about how handsome she thinks Garrett is!
- + “On a scale of 1 to 10, today was a 10... I feel so secure with Garrett and I trust him so completely, he gets me. I feel like I could see him at the end of this”
- + Tells him he reminds her of her dad.

## The Bachelorette season 14 Episode 5: aired June 26 2018

### Episode notes: (Pages 2/9)

Reference to marriage/partner; Sob story/emotional confession; Making the contestants look bad/stupid; Racial representation; Reference to opening up; Competitiveness; Right vs. wrong reasons; Hyperbolic about feelings/dates; Reference to format of the show; Reference to time; Editing used as dramatic device; Talking about a contestant as front runner; Reference to past season

Colton gets the first 1 on 1:

- + Colton: The focus for today's date is to have some quality time with Becca no distractions just us.
- + Close up on a sign on the road that says "virgin river" reference to Colton being a virgin
- + They are in the middle of the desert but the camel rides lead to a hot tub.

Back at the hotel the guys are talking and David is trying to antagonize Jordan by bringing up that he got the last rose during the rose ceremony. The other guys are sitting awkwardly as they go back and forth. Music accelerates as Blake talks about the tension between the two of them.

- + Blake: Jordan and David are still very awkward together, it seems like there's this tension between the two that's why I definitely think it will blow over

Becca and Colton in the hottub:

- + Colton: Frustration, I think has been the one consistent emotion with me this whole time. The Tia situation was hard, obviously that was frustrating in the beginning because all I wanted to do was talk about us.
- + The music swells as they start making out and straddling each other
- + Becca; I had such a good time with Colton. It was so fun, magical, so different riding on a camel and sitting in a hot tub... Just sitting in his arms and have him hold me, I just enjoyed every moment of it.

+ Colton: The best is when you told me we were on the same page because I haven't had that and that's something I'm looking for.

+ Colton: I don't want you to think that because I've only been in love once, it's in any way a bad thing and for me the word love it means so much because it's only happened once and I hold it so high... And I don't even use "falling in love" lightly and I want you to know that.

Group date card arrives and the guys realize that David and Jordan are going on a 2 on 1 date:

+ David: One of us is going to get a rose and one of us isn't. And I'm excited to spend some more time with her.

+ Jordan (in confessional): There's no planet in which Jordan and Becca would be compatible; Becca is intellectual and Jordan is an idiot

Night time portion of 1 on 1:

+ Colton: The reassurance that she's given me that she appreciates who I am is a good feeling for me. This has so far been the pinnacle of our relationship and we're only gonna keep getting stronger and going up.

+ They're riding on the roof of a bus through the street of vegas with a huge billboard that says Kiss her and the guys are looking at the sign from their hotel room

+ Colton: Our relationship has grown and I want that to continue and I want that to last forever. I think that there is a great future for us. I can confidently say i'm falling in love with Becca (music swells increase the romantic feeling of the scene as we watch them make out on the roof)

Group date:

+ Casino-like music starts playing to the rhythm of the fountains in front of the huge mansion they are pulling up to.

+ Wayne Newton rides up on a horse to the guys.

+ They visit the huge mansion

+ Lincoln talks about how he doesn't know the song or what it's about, as this ditzy music plays in the background. Implying that he should know what the song means because it's a popular song

## The Bachelor Season 23 Episode 5: aired Feb. 5th 2019

### Episode notes: (Pages 2/7)

Reference to marriage/partner; Sob story/emotional confession; Making the contestants look bad/stupid; Racial representation; Reference to opening up; Competitiveness; Right vs. wrong reasons; Hyperbolic about feelings/dates; Reference to format of the show; Reference to time; Editing used as dramatic device; Talking about a contestant as front runner

Heather 1 on 1:

- + Heather: He's trying to find a potential future wife so I can only hope that both of us continue to get to know each other on a deeper level and that we can progress and really move forward.
- + Heather: For me if i know deep down that they're not the person for me and that's why I haven't really gone there but with colton it's different he has amazing qualities, he's the kind of guy I would love to have my first kiss with

Elise crying to Kirpa about not getting another 1 on 1

- + Elise: I did not anticipate coming to Thailand and not spending time with him... Our date was way above and beyond. We had some moments that I felt were one of the best days I've ever had something that you read in a romance novel and think that will never happen to me and then it happened. And then you think when am i getting the next 1 on 1... I just want a validation that he's on the same page.

Back to 1 on 1:

- + Editing: close up on Colton's mouth as Heater talks about potentially getting her first kiss with him
- + Sitting on a dock talking about the view, long pause building up tension around them kissing or not

Group date announcement

- + Cassie: I'm not begging for a 1 on 1 but I do need one if I'm gonna get anywhere with him

Night time portion of 1 on 1:

- + Colton: I know the last time that we talked you told me about one of your past relationships and I just wanna to hear more about that and what your experiences are.
- + Heather talks about her past relationship while Colton is looking at her slightly confused because the guy didn't try to kiss her in a 8 months relationship
- + Colton: I do have a concern with it too, I really do want to give our relationship an honest shot so I'm concerned about that moment, just making sure we're on the same page.
- + Colton: You are someone I can definitely respect, with you I know how serious you are taking these steps...
- + Awkwardly walking on the beach waiting for the moment to kiss
- + Colton Kissing Heather was magical and something that she did not take lightly and I didn't either. I'm feeling so good and so hopeful. I'm on a high

Girls at the hotel:

- + Heather tells everyone about her date, all the girls are in their PJs except Elise who's dressed up. She gets up to leave as soon as Heather mentions kissing Colton. No background music and emphasis on the sound of the door closing
- + Camera following Elise walking in the dark to go find Colton, shaky camera movement highlighting that this was not a 'planned'

Colton and Elise sit down for their conversation:

- + Elise: Because I want to know all about you and how we are together but I can't call Chris Harisson and say I want every 1 on 1 for the next year. I want the time and attention that a relationship deserves to be able to when you get down on one knee... (Colton interupts her)
- + Colton: With you I'm excited, I can't help but think about what we have, the connection is there.
- + Colton: When i was in your position it was tough to go on a 1 on 1 watching all the other guys come back with a bigger smile on their face

## 2.3. Qualitative content analysis

### Codes pre-pilot

#### **Racial representation**

1. Racial minority in a confessional
2. Racial minority speaking about their own feelings
3. Racial minority speaking on another contestant
4. White contestant speaking about their own feelings
5. White contestant speaking on another contestant
6. Race addressed by a contestant
7. Comparing a racial minority to a white contestant
8. A Contestant differentiates themselves culturally (speaking a foreign language, cultural tradition, etc.)

#### **Format of the show**

9. Reference to the format of the show
10. Reference to marriage
11. Contestant questioning another contestant's intentions
12. A contestant shares a personal story with the lead
13. Editing portraying a contestant in a bad light
14. Contestant mentions 'drama'
15. Contestants arguing/fighting among themselves
16. Contestant being competitive
17. Voiceover used to show disconnect between words and actions

#### **Social imaginary**

18. Close up shot on a rose
19. Music used as an emotional cue (to build up tension, show a scene is sad, etc.)
20. White contestant portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants
21. Racial minority portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants
22. Musical performance
23. Contestant refers to the fairytale like nature of the date (descriptive words like: magical, perfect, romantic)
24. Product placement:

## Codes post-pilot:

### The Bachelorette Season 14 Episode 4

#### **Racial representation**

1. Racial minority in a confessional: **13**
2. Racial minority speaking about their own feelings: **11**
3. Racial minority speaking on another contestant: **3**
4. White contestant in a confessional: **28**
5. White contestant speaking about their own feelings: **14**
6. White contestant speaking on another contestant: **20**
7. Race addressed by a contestant: **0**
8. A Contestant differentiates themselves culturally (speaking a foreign language, cultural tradition, etc.): **0**

#### **Format of the show**

9. Reference to the format of the show: **21**
10. Reference to getting or not getting enough time with the lead : **4**
11. Reference to marriage: **5**
12. Reference to right/wrong reasons: **15**
13. A contestant shares a personal story with the lead: **3**
14. Editing portraying a contestant in a bad light: **4**
15. Contestant mentions 'drama': **0**
16. Contestants arguing/fighting among themselves: **1**
17. Contestant being competitive: **10**
18. Editing used to show disconnect between words and actions: **4**

#### **Social imaginary**

19. Close up shot on a rose: **10**
20. Music used as an emotional cue (to build up tension, show a scene is sad, etc.): **18**
21. White contestant portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants: **3**
22. Racial minority portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants: **0**
23. Contestant mentions romantic feelings towards the lead: **7**
24. Musical performance: **1**
25. Contestant refers to the fairytale like nature of the date (descriptive words like: magical, perfect, romantic): **4**
26. Product placement: **5**

## The Bachelorette Season 14 Episode 5

### **Racial representation**

1. Racial minority in a confessional: **5**
2. Racial minority speaking about their own feelings: **3**
3. Racial minority speaking on another contestant: **4**
4. White contestant in a confessional: **34**
5. White contestant speaking about their own feelings: **23**
6. White contestant speaking on another contestant: **13**
7. Race addressed by a contestant: **0**
8. A Contestant differentiates themselves culturally (speaking a foreign language, cultural tradition, etc.): **3**

### **Format of the show**

9. Reference to the format of the show: **25**
10. Reference to getting or not getting enough time with the lead : **12**
11. Reference to marriage: **3**
12. Reference to right/wrong reasons: **8**
13. A contestant shares a personal story with the lead: **3**
14. Editing portraying a contestant in a bad light: **7**
15. Contestant mentions 'drama': **3**
16. Contestants arguing/fighting among themselves: **14**
17. Contestant being competitive: **11**
18. Editing used to show disconnect between words and actions: **2**

### **Social imaginary**

19. Close up shot on a rose: **3**
20. Music used as an emotional cue (to build up tension, show a scene is sad, etc.): **21**
21. White contestant portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants: **1**
22. Racial minority portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants: **0**
23. Contestant mentions romantic feelings towards the lead: **3**
24. Musical performance: **0**
25. Contestant refers to the fairytale like nature of the date (descriptive words like: magical, perfect, romantic): **3**
26. Product placement: **9**



## The Bachelor Season 23 episode 5

### **Racial representation**

1. Racial minority in a confessional: **16**
2. Racial minority speaking about their own feelings: **6**
3. Racial minority speaking on another contestant: **10**
4. White contestant in a confessional: **23**
5. White contestant speaking about their own feelings: **5**
6. White contestant speaking on another contestant: **6**
7. Race addressed by a contestant: **0**
8. A contestant differentiates themselves culturally (speaking a foreign language, cultural tradition, etc.): **0**

### **Format of the show**

9. Reference to the format of the show: **13**
10. Reference to getting or not getting enough time with the lead : **5**
11. Reference to marriage: **4**
12. Reference to right/wrong reasons: **10**
13. A contestant shares a personal story with the lead: **2**
14. Editing portraying a contestant in a bad light: **4**
15. Contestant mentions 'drama': **7**
16. Contestants arguing/fighting among themselves: **1**
17. Contestant being competitive: **4**
18. Editing used to show disconnect between words and actions: **1**

### **Social imaginary**

19. Close up shot on a rose: **4**
20. Music used as an emotional cue (to build up tension, show a scene is sad, etc.): **11**
21. White contestant portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants: **3**
22. Racial minority portrayed as the "front runner" by editing or the other contestants: **2**
23. Contestant mentions romantic feelings towards the lead: **6**
24. Musical performance: **0**
25. Contestant refers to the fairytale like nature of the date (descriptive words like: magical, perfect, romantic): **5**
26. Product placement: **2**

## Codes frequencies

	S14E04	S14E05	S23E05	Average
<b>Racial representation</b>				
1) Racial minority confessional	13	5	16	11
2) RM speaking about feelings	11	3	6	7
3) RM speaking about other contestant	3	4	10	6
4) White contestant in confessional	28	34	23	28
5) WC speaking about feelings	14	23	5	14
6) WC speaking about other contestant	20	13	6	13
7) Race addressed	0	0	0	0
8) Contestant differentiates themselves culturally	0	3	0	1
<b>Format of the show</b>				
9) Show format	21	25	13	20
10) Reference to time with lead	4	12	5	7
11) Reference to marriage	5	3	4	4
12) Reference to right/wrong reasons	15	8	10	11
13) Shares personal story with the lead	3	3	2	3
14) Contestant edited in negative way	4	7	4	5
15) Contestant	0	3	7	3

mentions 'drama'				
16) Contestants arguing/fighting among themselves	1	14	1	5
17) Contestant being competitive	10	11	4	8
18) Editing used to show disconnect between words and actions	4	2	1	2
<b>Social Imaginary</b>				
19) Close up shot on a rose	10	3	4	6
20) Music used as an emotional cue	18	21	11	17
21) White contestant portrayed as the "front runner"	3	1	3	2
22) Racial minority portrayed as the "front runner"	0	0	2	0.7
23) Contestant mentions romantic feelings towards the lead	7	3	6	5.3
24) Musical performance	1	0	0	0.33
25) Contestant refers to the fairytale like nature of the date	4	3	5	4
26) Product placement	5	9	2	5

## 2.4. Podcast analysis

### Podcast analysis framework

<b>Podcast content</b>	
Spoken content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong focus and point of view: talks about anything Bachelor related and particular interest in issues of diversity and representation</li> <li>● Had interviews with multiple with past contestants of colour and one of other alumni who also writes about the show</li> <li>● Contains Bachelor specific facts about past seasons and contestants but from memory so not always accurate</li> <li>● Hosts mostly share their personal opinions and commentary on the show. They have open conversations about representation and race and are vocal about what they disagree with on the show.</li> <li>● Bachelor centric content so they don't share recommendations about anything outside the bachelor world but will cite sources and where to find articles and such about bachelor news</li> </ul>
Content consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Each episode is about a particular episode of the bachelor except for special mailbag episodes</li> <li>● Consistent structure: initial thoughts, church announcements, bachelor news, recap <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recurring segment: Becky of the week, escape to wakanda, you aight moment, you aint shit moment, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Episodes are posted once a week during every season and sometimes twice a week if two episodes aired that week</li> </ul>
<b>Podcaster</b>	
Podcaster speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Speech mostly fluent as they follow notes on how things happened in the episode</li> <li>● Hesitation when they go on tangent about more sensitive topics in relation to social issues</li> <li>● "American" accent since both hosts are americans living in New-York</li> </ul>
Podcaster style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mostly conversational style because the two hosts are friends and you hear that in the way they talk to each other</li> <li>● Over the seasons they have started to share more personal details about them and stories when they relate to a topic they were talking about</li> <li>● Mostly share personal experiences around both of them being black women in America</li> <li>● Use of African American vernacular english (AAVE) and a lot</li> </ul>

	<p>of internet slang. Very creative in their descriptions of what happened on the show</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong use of humour and exaggeration for entertainment purposes</li> <li>● The affect is present throughout most of the episodes but comes out more when they feel frustrated by the way POC are treated on the show. And when they are faced with the reality that the show is not made for them. Or as they say when they get on their ‘soapbox’</li> <li>● Podcast are of varied length but always 1 hour +, final episodes will usually be in 2 parts that add up to around 2 hours</li> </ul>
Podcaster profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hosts had no affiliations to any company until they created a Patreon to monetize their content 3 seasons ago and were suppose to have their first live show as SXSW through Patreon</li> <li>● They are self produced, started as 2 friends who just wanted to talk about the show but gained popularity in the Bachelor world</li> <li>● They don’t have any credentials as the podcast is a “side” project to their regular job</li> <li>● They are known within the Bachelor world but not ‘famous’ outside of it</li> </ul>
<b>Podcast context</b>	
Podcaster/listener interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Podcaster address the listener directly often throughout the episodes in the form of listener call outs when they want people to write in about specific topics</li> <li>● ‘Church announcements’ is the section of the show where they read or talk about email they’ve received from the previous episode and respond to the listener. They are also active and interact on social media</li> <li>● They encourage the listeners to write reviews and they are all positive</li> <li>● Podcast page has their email address and all social media accounts but no links to things discussed on the episode</li> <li>● Forum on the patreon where patrons can post comments and interact with other people otherwise through their Twitter account</li> </ul>
Real world context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The entire show is a recap of Bachelor episodes that are currently airing and is recorded usually the day the episode aired</li> <li>● They also make references to past contestants and their post show lives in the ‘Bachelor news’ segment</li> <li>● They have a store for their merch</li> <li>● They have advertisers or sponsors</li> </ul>
<b>Technical execution</b>	
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● They have an intro and closing jingle and signature opening  <i>“Where two black ass girls invade the whitest show on earth... The Bachelor”</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There's usually no background music except special sound effects for comedic purpose</li> <li>• Very few editing effects</li> <li>• The podcast is self-produced so the quality can vary, especially in the earlier season of the show</li> <li>• But now the quality is mostly good except when they have technical issues</li> </ul>
Packaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metadata is complete with a title, date and description of each episode as well as links to all social media, email and patreon</li> <li>• Only one audio quality available</li> <li>• Feed has a logo that is present with each episode when you play it</li> </ul>
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple domain name: 2 Black girls 1 Rose that is the same on every platform</li> <li>• Distributed through Apple podcast, and Overcast, BeyondPod for Androids.Or directly on the Patreon app.</li> <li>• No obvious issues with downloading the episodes</li> </ul>

Podcast episode notes: Let me tell you about men who write poetry  
(page 1/7)

The Bachelorette Season 14 Episode 4

Negative engagement; Positive engagement; Lack of diversity/representation; Bachelor specific facts; Reference to real life space; Irony bribe; Mention to airtime; Right vs. wrong reasons; Competitiveness;

**Deeper voice: Natasha**

**More high pitched voice: Justine**

Bachelor news segment: Lincoln scandal

- + He was convicted of assault and battery, the charges were brought on before they started filming the season and was convicted afterwards.
- + The girls are questioning the casting process, saying that Garrett being a bigot is one thing but full on sexual abuse is one step too far. Especially for a show where you're meant to be in contact with a woman. "What is going on with the casting?"
- + Discussing the extensive background check the contestants supposedly go through and are debating whether Lincoln was picked by the casting and therefore had a less intense vetting process
  - + Natasha: "As we've seen with some of our interviews with some of the black people they kinda move quickly through the process. Look we're at the end stages we need a couple black people, let's just push them through. Because they're so desperate for people"
  - + Justine: "Or they need people of colour"
  - + Natasha: He has a lot of little random bonus things going for him like: 'he's back, he has a cool accent, he's super ripped apparently, and I don't know he loves being on camera I guess'
  - + Natasha: It just sucks cause first we have Garrett and every time he comes on screen i'm just uncomfortable. Now we have Lincoln and every time he comes on

screen I'm like WTF. Now we have two people on the show who have so much scandal and controversy off the show that it makes watching them very weird.

- + Justine: It's like part of the article that E! Had where there were talking about how now it's not fun anymore watching The Bachelor cause they're just not doing the homework that we as viewers are doing
- + 14:34 - Talks about how tiring it is that every time something like this happens, the show releases a statement saying they didn't know like they did with Lincoln cause they supposedly hire a 3rd party contractor to do the background checks but anyone could find Lincoln charges with a google search so those excuses don't work anymore. It makes you wonder if they knew and went ahead with the show anyway which makes it super icky but it's "a different layer" when you watch the show that's not good.
  - + Natsha: "I want this to be a guilty pleasure, I don't want to feel guilty as I'm watching her fall in love with a sex offender and the other one is a bigot"
- + Natash: David gets a pity rose, obviously
- + Nick the white Josiah nickname for Nick because of his tracksuit



## Podcast notes: Wills is Not the One (Page 1 / 4)

### The Bachelorette Season 14 Episode 5

Negative engagement; Positive engagement; Lack of diversity/representation; Bachelor specific facts; Reference to real life space; Irony bribe; Mention to airtime; Right vs. wrong reasons; Competitiveness; Reference to youth of contestants; Performance Talking about a contestant as front runner

#### Initial thoughts:

- + Natasha: Regarding Jordan, once a gimmick always a gimmick. You can't suddenly try to become a real person and want her to take you seriously. You're not fitting the mold of the gimmick, we're done with you!
- + Natasha: It's usually around this time that one person starts to have a mental breakdown, usually around this episode.
- + Natasha: Especially after a 1 on 1 date where you felt like for those 12 hours you felt like you were the only person in the world and then you realise there's literally 15 other niggas here!

#### Bachelor Nation news:

- + Someone send them a link to Garrett's wedding video with his ex wife
- + The friend of Garrett's ex did an interview saying that Garrett really was the problem but not a lot of details.

#### Recap:

##### Colton 1 on 1:

- + Natasha: He's nervous, he has some other personal information he needs to share \*horror movie, suspense sound effect\*
- + Justine: This man has a lot of secrets, he's too much to handle
- + Make fun of the bachelor editing for zooming in on the virgin sign

- + Natasha: It's just an excuse to have to see Becca in a bikini, an excuse to make them rub up on each other in the middle of the day time with cameras around. Like when you break it down it's just very odd that they have to do this
- + Justine: They could have done something cool. But no, Bachelor producers had to stick to what they've been doing since 1985 and just stick them in a hot tub outdoors.
- + Natasha: Basically kind setting up next week where he's gonna tell her. Like he's already plotting in his head, "I'm gonna tell her next week i'm in love so let me set the groundwork now"
- + Natasha: When he was saying she's making it easier for him to take his walls down, I don't understand that because you're still one of 13 guys in the house. Your walls should

## Podcast notes: Fighting like two Bodega cats (Page 1 /6)

### The Bachelor Season 23 Episode 5

Negative engagement; Positive engagement; Lack of diversity/representation; Bachelor specific facts; Reference to real life space; Irony bribe; Mention to airtime; Right vs. wrong reasons; Competitiveness; Reference to youth of contestants; Performance

#### Initial thoughts:

- + Natasha: Nobody this week is coming to my cookout... The bickering in tonight's episode, their youth was really showing this episode. This really feels like middle school/high school drama
- + Natasha: Thank god for Taisha! Someone on twitter said as black people we obviously want to root for everybody black but Courtney and Oneyak are really making it hard,
- + Justine: Kirpa they don't even show her and Sydney is only in the credits what are we supposed to do?
- + Natasha: She's like Venmo John where he was only popping up in the after credit part.
- + Justine: Is that what they do with people who are Asian they put them in the last 2 mins of the show
- + Natasha: Shoutout to Taishia who's redeeming everything for the people of colour on this show.
- + Natasha: It made me so annoyed to see the length they are going to, to avoid any topic of substance: politics, religion. They edited a scene that was so confusing if you don't have the context all because they didn't want to have a conversation about religion. I know you're catering to your middle America white folks but are they really going to be that pissed off if you have a conversation about something of substance.

#### Recap:

##### Heather 1 on 1:

- + Natasha: The word wife coming out of her mouth is just so ridiculous

+ Natasha: Quoting Heather talking about past relationships. Heather stop these lies, relationship where?

+ Justine: Every relationship? That means there's been more than 1!

+ Natash: As she said it, you couldn't believe any word coming out of her mouth! Just lies! That was just ridiculous.