

HAPPILY EVER AFTER AND THE BATTLE OF THE RACES: A CRITICAL AND
CULTURAL APPROACH TO REALITY TELEVISION – *THE BACHELORETTE*
VS. THE ULTIMATE MERGER

by

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Communication Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2011

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ABSTRACT

The pervasiveness of reality television (RTV) can be observed by the sheer number of television shows that feature unscripted situations by non-actors thrust into seemingly “real” life situations. They range from shows like *The Swan* that promise to makeover an “ugly duckling into a beautiful swan,” to *The Amazing Race* where participants use feats of athleticism and strategy to win cash prizes, to “catfights” and hyper-masculine displays of manhood or hyper-feminine displays of womanhood on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* to prove one’s ability to attract the heterosexual “love” of the eligible bachelor or bachelorette. RTV has become a place in which stereotypes are reinforced, antiquated gender roles are resurrected, and violators who dare to step outside of the clearly defined White, heterosexual, American box are punished. Reminiscent of American canonical narratives of love, coded messages of position and place are interwoven throughout the storylines in competitive dating RTV programs which could contribute to legitimizing a particularly framed perspective of racialized and gendered behavior and expectations. Through the analysis of six episodes of each of the RTV shows, *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger*, and juxtaposing them, this study uncovers how competitive dating reality programs explain the current state of culture and gender performance within U.S. society, including how certain racial performances are privileged.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who create and define what love means to and for them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been without the unwavering support, guidance, and dedication of my thesis committee. Dr. Jason Black and Dr. Robin Boylorn, the co-chairs of my committee, along with Dr. Jeremy Butler have been instrumental in bringing this project to life.

To my family, I appreciate your encouragement throughout my graduate studies at the University of Alabama. When it seemed that there was “no” way, you made a way and because of that, this is as much your success and achievement as it is mine.

And, finally, to the love of my life, Dr. Hubert Randolph Scott III, I simply want to say thank you...fairy tales do come true.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
<i>Précis</i>	7
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
<i>Televsual Studies</i>	9
<i>Critical Race Theory</i>	18
<i>Black Feminist Thought</i>	23
<i>Whiteness</i>	27
3. SEXUALITY EXPOSED	32
<i>Constructing the Image</i>	32
<i>True Womanhood</i>	39
<i>Love Relationships</i>	50
4. PRIVILEGING MASCULINITY	55
<i>He Knows Best (The Ultimate Merger)</i>	55
<i>Hegemonic Masculinity (The Bachelorette)</i>	63
<i>Negotiating Blackness</i>	69

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS	80
<i>Ideal White Womanhood</i>	81
<i>Black Womanhood</i>	82
<i>Patriarchy</i>	83
<i>White Masculinity</i>	84
<i>Negotiating Black Masculinity</i>	84
6. WORKS CITED	90
7. APPENDIX A: THE BACHELORETTE.....	98
<i>The Bachelorette’s Bachelors</i>	99
<i>Summary of Episodes</i>	107
<i>Episode 601</i>	107
<i>Episode 602</i>	107
<i>Episode 603</i>	107
<i>Episode 608</i>	108
<i>Episode 609</i>	108
<i>Episode 610</i>	108
8. APPENDIX B: THE ULTIMATE MERGER	110
<i>The Ultimate Merger’s Bachelors</i>	111
<i>Summary of Episodes</i>	115
<i>Episode One: Blizzard</i>	115
<i>Episode Two: Champs and Chumps</i>	115

Episode Three: Verbal Combat116
Episode Six: Mommy Issues116
Episode Seven: Roughin' It.....116
Episode Eight: Merger117

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The opening credits of *The Bachelorette*40

Figure 2: The opening credits of *The Ultimate Merger*44

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Transcending the pages of children’s literature and Disney films, *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger*, two competitive reality television (RTV) dating programs, offer contemporary tales of romance and a potential “happily ever after” for their “deserving” heterosexual women. Ali Fedotowsky (*The Bachelorette*) and Omarosa Manigault (*The Ultimate Merger*) navigate through a sea of eligible bachelors who physically and *strategically* compete for their affections and, potentially, a marriage proposal.¹ Both women are college educated and their seeming inability to find love on their own is the catalyst for the RTV dating program. Beyond their education and inability to find their soul mate, the similarities between the women end.

Fedotowsky, breaking from the typical RTV script, gave up the opportunity to be with the eligible bachelor in order to pursue a career and became the sixth woman to be featured as the leading lady on *The Bachelorette*. On *The Bachelorette*’s official website hosted by ABC, she is described as a “beautiful, energetic, and charismatic career-oriented woman [who has] re-prioritized her life – and is now ready to find her soul mate.”² She is young (mid-twenties), White, has long blonde hair, and is physically fit. She is framed, through various vignettes, as the quintessential all-American girl next door who enjoys romantic evenings, walks on the beach and

¹ Ali Fedotowsky was selected as the bachelorette for the sixth season of *The Bachelorette*. Omarosa Manigault was selected as the bachelorette for the first season of *The Ultimate Merger*.

² See <<http://abc.go.com/shows/the-bachelorette>>.

playing soccer. She, along with her eligible bachelors, takes the viewers on a journey around the world to exotic, romantic, and luxurious islands and European countries.

Manigault is in her late thirties, Black, physically fit and is described by TVOne, the official website host for Donald Trump's *The Ultimate Merger*, as "reality TV's most-loved villainess."³ Prior to participating in *The Ultimate Merger*, Omarosa's first foray into reality television was on Trump's *The Apprentice* where she competed for the opportunity to win the role of Trump's business apprentice.⁴ Using her business acumen and strategy, Omarosa earned a reputation for having a "sassy no holds barred [sic] business savvy."⁵ There is no short descriptive biography of where Manigault is from or even if she has a current career – only whether any of the men "hand-picked" by Trump can "tame" her. Unlike the exotic and varied set locations of *The Bachelorette*, *The Ultimate Merger* has one set location – Las Vegas, Nevada.

The Ultimate Merger's choice of location has several implications. Trump's hotel is the primary place so it creates an advertising opportunity for the business mogul. Careful attention is paid to the display of the products bearing Trump's moniker and when the contestants are enjoying the spa, restaurant, or hotel, they always say the name "Trump" in their descriptions. The emphasis on branding will eventually lead to the branding of Omarosa as a "Trump brand" through her participation on both *The Apprentice* and *The Ultimate Merger*. Further, the location of Las Vegas is not known for romance. It is more commonly understood to be a place where people gamble and get married on a whim and where, in years past, quick divorces could be

³ See: <<http://ultimatemerger.tvoneonline.com/>>.

⁴ *The Apprentice* is produced by Mark Burnett and Donald Trump for NBC studios. It features business people who compete to win the opportunity to win a contract to run one of Trump's magnate businesses.

⁵ For more information, please visit www.omarosa.com

obtained. Unlike *The Bachelorette*'s romantic European and island getaways, *The Ultimate Merger* primarily features Las Vegas nightlife.

The Bachelorette is shown on a major broadcast channel ABC. *The Ultimate Merger* is aired on a boutique channel— TVOne.⁶ TVOne airs television programs that cater to Black audiences and have predominantly Black casts. Unlike ABC, which is available over the air and with most basic cable services, TVOne is only available if added to a cable package. As one of the “mainstream” channels, ABC position itself as normalized and reflective of U.S. cultural values which continue to place channels like TVOne on the periphery. The two RTV shows were selected because they both use a competitive dating format and cast a woman as the eligible bachelorette who must choose from a pre-selected group of men. Season six of *The Bachelorette* and season one of *The Ultimate Merger* were selected because they aired within the same season.⁷ Also, this is the first opportunity to compare two former RTV female stars of different racial backgrounds who are not associated with music or sports entertainment. This is significant given the stereotypical notion that for Black people, in particular, being an athlete or music entertainer is the one of the few ways to achieve financial success. Both Ali and Omarosa achieved celebrity status on reality television programs which makes their comparison fruitful. It provides an opportunity to explore how their prior exposure could potentially affect the constructions of their characters. Because the programs are different lengths in terms of the number of episodes within each season (*The Bachelorette* has 13 episodes versus *The Ultimate Merger*'s eight episodes), the first three episodes of each show and the last three episodes of each show will be used for analysis.

⁶ A boutique channel refers to a specialty channel that caters to a specific audience. They are unavailable on basic cable packages and there is an additional charge to add the channel. Because there is a cost associated with this type of channel, it limits the access to the programs that it airs. Also, it maintains uniformity in programming on major network channels which relegates specialty programs (especially those that feature minority casts) on the periphery.

⁷ The second season of *The Ultimate Merger* is slated to begin August 4, 2011, on TVOne.

RTV has been understood as a window through which society can be gazed upon and simultaneously a reflection of the norms of the dominant culture (Murray and Ouellette 4). Scholars have also argued that RTV can help overhaul the negative images and misrepresentations of marginalized and under-represented groups within televisual milieu. For example, Andrejevic and Colby contend that reality television “invok[es] issues of race... and offers the promise of access to the means of signification to selected members of the audience – including minorities – with the implicit suggestion they might be able to play some shared role in refashioning the mediated portrayals that have been foisted on them ‘from above’ by a centralized, top-down, mass media” (197). This ostensible participatory element for RTV viewers differentiates the genre from traditional television formats whose viewers are passively engaged.

This thesis discusses the ways in which RTV, specifically, the competitive dating programs *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger*, constructs and reinforces social norms with respect to image, sexuality, and relationships, in racially biased ways. The textual analysis develops from visual and oral representations as communicated through the competitive RTV dating programs. The analysis explores the performance of Whiteness, Blackness, Black femininity, and Black masculinity through the format of the programs, narrative structure, and character depictions and development.

In terms of a rationale, the pervasiveness of television, in general, and RTV, expressly, speaks to the need to study this genre of popular culture. During primetime, there is at least one RTV program showing every night of the week. RTV, despite the recent uptick in the number of available programs, can be traced back to *Candid Camera* in 1948 (O’Donnell 127). And, *Cops*, a reality program that has aired since 1989, is considered to be the longest running RTV program

(O'Donnell 128). This accessibility and “staying” power speaks to the pervasiveness and potential influence of this particular genre of television.

Although RTV has become a mainstay of the television viewing experience, most research has primarily focused on defining RTV, interpreting reasons that people watch it, and questioning its authenticity to be “real.” These themes are demonstrated in studies such as *Understanding Reality Television* edited by Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn, Hill’s *Reality TV Audiences and Popular Factual Television*, and Biressi and Nunn’s *Reality TV Realism and Revelation*. Of the available research, “the decontextualization of social issues in reality TV portrayals have been noted by several scholars, including Peck, Andrejevic, Brenton and Cohen, and Andersen, but there has been, as of yet, little in the way of scholarship devoted to its impact on the portrayal of race in entertainment formats” (Escoffery 196). Recent scholarship has explored the ways in which race is used as a source of conflict within the shows by positioning the White and Black binary in dramatic and contentious ways (Dubrofsky 39-56; Bell-Jordan 353-72; Dubrofsky and Hardy 373-92). Critical analysis and reflections on the images and performance of Black femininity and Black masculinity have also been investigated in television through the analysis of several shows that have been marketed or geared towards Black viewers (Orbe 32-47; Boylorn 413-33; Hopson 441-46). However, there has been little opportunity to examine an RTV program that features an educated, mostly Black cast in a competitive dating program prior to the creation of *The Ultimate Merger*. Most of the RTV that featured Black person as the eligible bachelor or bachelorette relied heavily on the music and sports industries – Flava Flav, a former hype man of the rap group, Public Enemy; Chad Ochocinco, a wide receiver for the Cincinnati Bengals; Terrell Owens, a wide receiver for the Cincinnati Bengals; Rozonda Thomas (also known as Chilli) from the music group TLC; and Tiffany Pollard (also known as

New York) who gained celebrity status because of her infamous relationship with Flava Flav on the RTV series *Flavor of Love*.⁸

The creation of *The Ultimate Merger* provides a fruitful opportunity to complete a comparative analysis with *The Bachelorette*. Previously, analysis of *The Bachelorette* focused on close-textual analysis (in isolation) as well as evaluating its content with that of its “brother” show – *The Bachelor* (Dubrofsky 263-84; Barton 460-76). A close textual analysis consists of a complete analysis of the basic and underlining meaning, how specific content relates to the text as a whole, what rhetorical devices are used, and the overall structure.

The success of network shows *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* addresses the interest in audiences to experience contemporary canonical narratives of love through the voyeuristic gaze of reality television. Unfortunately, for Black people, those two shows exclude minorities, render them invisible, or tokenize them. While the RTV programs that feature music artists and athletes have a majority of Black men and women as active participants in the programs, the ways in which their characters are constructed and performed reinforces negative perceptions of Black intellect, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Additionally, *The Bachelorette* has been explored using a comparison of its show and *The Bachelor* (Dubrofsky 263-84; Barton 460-76). Juxtaposing *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger* provides an opportunity to uncover the lessons that competitive dating reality programs might explain about the current state of culture and gender performance within society including how certain racial performances are privileged.

⁸ *Flavor of Love*, which featured Flava Flav, is a reality television dating show. The first season also featured Tiffany Pollard as one of the bachelorettes who competed to win Flava Flav. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flavor_of_Love. Chad Ochocinco’s reality dating television show, *The Ultimate Catch*, was featured on VH1. For more information see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ochocinco:_The_Ultimate_Catch. *The T.O. Show* featured the day to day life of Terrell Owens off of the football field and also aired on VH1. For more information, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_T.O._Show. Rozonda Thomas, a music artist, stars in a reality dating television program that airs on VH1. The premise of the show is to help Rozonda find a man to date. For more information, see: http://www.vh1.com/shows/what_chilli_wants/season_1/series.jhtml

Précis

The pervasiveness of RTV and its ability to construct, manipulate, render marginalized people invisible and reinforce stereotypes about gender and racial identity and relationships makes the study of competitive dating reality programs significant. Using television criticism offers insight into the ways that television visual style reinforces dominant ideologies. Next, the application of critical race theory examines the ways that the intersection of race, gender, and class contrast in the two case studies - *The Ultimate Merger* and *The Bachelorette*. Finally, drawing on Black feminism, Whiteness, and Black masculinity theories help to uncover how controlling images of Black women and Black womanhood influence Manigault's opportunity to find resolution at the end of *The Ultimate Merger*.

The thesis is developed as follows. Chapter Two explores previous research conducted on RTV and the use of television criticism, critical race theory, Black feminist thought, Whiteness, and Black masculinity in the field of communications.

Chapter Three analyzes the construction of *The Bachelorette's* Ali Fedotowsky's and *The Ultimate Merger's* Omarosa Manigault's images and sexuality. Specifically, Manigault is evaluated using Collins' Black lady and Jezebel controlling images and putting them in opposition to the idealized White image construct of Fedotowsky. The chapter also explores the issue of raced sexuality using Collins' perspective on sexual politics. Explicitly, the analysis uncovers Black women's sexuality through the framework of symbolic dimensions of heterosexism proffered by Collins as an approach to analyzing Black women's sexuality and the normalization of (White) heterosexuality. I contend that as the idealized White woman, Ali's sexuality is repressed while Omarosa's sexuality is placed front and center.

Chapter Four applies the tenets of critical race theory as advanced by Delgado and Stefancic to look at the ways in which patriarchy is maintained in both of the RTV competitive dating series. Of particular interest are ways in which the bachelors on *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger* perform masculinity, through the use of White masculinity and Black masculinity lenses, to (re)affirm socially constructed gender roles in dating and to sanction particular definitions of manhood. I argue that both shows privilege and promote patriarchy and specific forms of masculinity.

The final chapter summarizes the thesis' results and discusses potential implications of the case studies, the methods used, and the theories engaged to analyze the case studies. I explore the ways in which my study adds to the conversation of the implications of race and gender in RTV, the field of communication studies, and global communities.⁹ In light of this research, I assert that passively engaging in RTV, without interrogating the representations performed, continues the perpetuation of stereotypical raced and gendered expectations. Specifically, *The Bachelorette* insinuates that White women who conform to the notion of idealized White womanhood are rewarded with a “happily ever after” while *The Ultimate Merger* positions Black women, regardless of their success or the achievements of their potential male partner, as incapable of experiencing their own loving relationships.

⁹ On the implications of race, see Andrejevic and Colby 195-211; Bell-Jordan 353-72; Dubrofsky and Hardy 373-92. On the implications of race and gender, see Dubrofsky 39-56; Franco 471-83; Harvey 212-227; Hasinoff 324 – 43.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Televsual Studies

The evolution of television, after the success of radio, transformed audience's experiences. Television created an opportunity for individuals to visually live through another person's experiences. With radio, there was a voice that told a story and the image of the person or people within the narrative was left largely to the imaginations of the listening audience. After the broad success and distribution of television, little was left to the imagination. Characters were scripted, selected, and performed based on producers' and advertisers' needs. Television, in general, "reflect[s] a society's values, norms, and practices as well as its fads, interests, and trends" (O'Donnell 8). To that end, its ability to influence culture and shape identity is profound. "Culture and television are clearly involved in reciprocal relations: television affects culture, but culture also affects television in regard to interpretative strategies and social attitudes toward viewing" (Adams 119). Television has played a key role in constructing and reinforcing gender roles as well (Hess and Grant 371). This is problematic because of studies that suggest how, during primetime viewing hours, men are more frequently shown than women and are more often employed and have higher-status jobs (Butler and Paisely 93-94). These distortions are significant because they can be interpreted as privileging the status of men over women. What is important to also note is that the studies conducted on the number of men versus women, their interactions, and employment and job status is based on White men and White women (Hess and Grant 373). Despite the inequities in quantity, White women outnumber minorities on a

primetime television show (unless it is an all minority cast). When minorities are cast on commercial television, they are more likely not to be cast in a favorable light – although Havens argues that there are notable exceptions such as *The Cosby Show* that aired from 1984 until 1992 before syndication (371-88). They are often cast as comedic, criminal, or secondary characters. The disparaging images of women have a “daily impact because commercial television is part of the socialization process which influences the lives of the audience” (Hess and Grant 372). And, in so doing, reinforces a cultural distortion of women and minorities.

Because of the mounting costs of production and the increasing competition for viewership, the lower cost of RTV has created an opportunity for it to be more visible on television during prime-time programming hours. Several definitions have been offered to describe and define RTV. Kilborn characterizes RTV as:

[Involving] (a) the recording, ‘on the wing,’ and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives in individuals or groups, (b) the attempt to simulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstructions and (c) the incorporation of this material, in suitable edited form, into an attractive packaged television program which can be promoted on the strength of its ‘reality’ (423).

However, for the purposes of my research, I use the definition offered by Butler – RTV is a “genre with an ostensible base in reality – featuring non-actors in unscripted situations” due to its brevity and universal application (490). The number of RTV programs available and their longevity on television have opened up an opportunity to create two additional Emmy categories. There are several categories of RTV – competition, docusoaps, transformative improvements and shows that use hidden cameras (Orbe 348). Initially, scholarly research on RTV was limited to documentary film. Because of its staying power and pervasiveness, academics across disciplines have begun to see the viability in critically engaging in the research of RTV. Its medium –

television – and its marketing as “reality” or “real” television have lead to important implications with regards to its influence on culture.

Similar to other televisual genres, RTV has been cited as a way of “present[ing] itself as an unmediated picture of external reality” (Fiske 17). Fiske goes on to say that “television is seen either as a transparent window on the world or as a mirror reflecting our own reality back at us” (17). RTV is often the production of dominant ideology and “*our* reality, not *the* reality that is reflected; in other words it admits that reality is the product of people, and not a universal object that people merely observe from the outside” (Fiske 17). To that end, the idea of RTV is somewhat of a misnomer. It is a carefully constructed production that is often manipulated by producers and commercial advertisers.

An example of a popular RTV program on MTV, *The Real World*, has been extensively researched.¹⁰ Hall, using a social science perspective, investigated the perceptions of authenticity and their relationships to audience involvement, enjoyment, and perceived learning (515-530). She found that one of the most repeatedly watched RTV programs is *The Real World* and that the audiences most likely to watch are young, educated adults. Hall found that this particular show attracts a large audience and *Real World* “gives these shows the potential to affect a larger number of viewers” (529). She adds that “the findings... can help strengthen understandings of the roles that perceived authenticity and viewer involvement can have on the enjoyment of... [the] reality programming genre” (Hall 529). Park discusses the implications of creating a program viewed through an RTV lens where people who would normally never interact live in a house together (152). Park analyzes two episodes of MTV’s *The Real World: Philadelphia* in order to critically evaluate the significance of the strategic placement of individuals from

¹⁰ As of 2011, *The Real World* is in its twenty-fifth season. The show groups together individuals from different backgrounds (and often contentious personalities) and places them in one house to live together (Park 152). The show chronicles their experiences as they negotiate their differences and learn to live together.

different racial backgrounds, an urban Black male with a rural White male, within the same household. Conclusions drawn from Park's study suggest that "[w]hile racial conflict on [RTV] does not [solve] racial problems or close the gap between audiences' discrepant views, it may make race a focal point, potentially helping some viewers [understand the value] of open and candid dialogue about different racial perspectives and experiences" (169). Building on the idea of a black:white dichotomy and the impact of cultural perceptions, Orbe extends this conversation by uncovering the ways in which hegemonic power reinforces cultural perceptions of Black masculinity in episodes of *The Real World* (32-47). His study finds that based on casting call efforts to select individuals for potential conflict and edited footage, *The Real World* helps to legitimize the image of Black men as inherently angry, violent, and sexually aggressive. So, while Park asserts that the strategic placement of individuals from different backgrounds creates an opportunity to open the dialogue among races, Orbe contends that the placement has more to do with reinforcing cultural perceptions already in place than fostering an open space for deconstruction of socially constructed identities of Black masculinity.

In addition to analysis of *The Real World*, scholars have explored case studies on *The Flavor of Love*, *The Bachelor*, *Extreme Makeover*, and *Survivor* (Dubrofsky and Hardy 373-92; Dubrofsky 39-56; Franco 471-83; Bell-Jordan 353-72). Studies have examined the authentic (re)presentation of reality, constructions of gender and race using social scientific, humanistic, and autoethnographic theoretical perspectives (Hall 515-31; Dubrofsky and Hardy 373-92; Orbe 32-42; Boylorn 413-33).

Most of the current literature has focused on the ways in which Blackness and Whiteness are performed. A case in point is Bell-Jordan's study on the reality programs *Black.White*, *Survivor: Cook Islands*, and *The Real World: Denver*. She argues that the shows "promote a

politics of difference, emphasize conflict and division by positioning race as a point of contention among the cast members and dramatize scenarios that reinforce cultural codes and stereotypes” (353). In Bell-Jordan’s first example, she studies the RTV program *Black. White* which takes two families – one Black and one White – and forces them to swap lives. To perform this feat, the families were tanned or lightened to appear either Black or White and placed in situations that were meant to create conflict. In contrast to performing blackface and whiteface, in Bell-Jordan’s next example, she focused on the performance of Blackness and Whiteness – constructions of race – in MTV’s RTV program *The Real World: Denver*. For the first time in the program, two African American men were cast in the same season. Tyrie, from the “hood,” and Stephen who is described as “uppity” and “White washed” present two images of Black masculinity –unacceptable or “hood” and acceptable or “integrated” (Bell-Jordan 360). The show’s “juxtaposition of the men reinforces essentialist thinking, limits the interpretations of Black masculinity, and positions it as inherently in conflict” (Bell-Jordan 360). In her final example, she examines the series *Survivor: Cook Islands*. In *Survivor: Cook Islands*, the contestants were divided into teams based on ethnicity and given names to represent specific groups. This separation of the races “reflects the burden of representation felt by many ethnic groups” (Bell-Jordan 365). What she found throughout the three RTV programs she studied was that:

[the] narratives about race on these shows can be understood as similar in five prevailing ways to how race is mediated in television news: (1) they dramatize race and racial issues by juxtaposing opposing viewpoints; (2) they promote conflict in the framing of race and racial issues, specifically in terms of interracial and intraracial conflict; (3) they perpetuate hegemonic representations of race by emphasizing violence and anger; (4) they personalize racism by privileging individual solutions to complex social problems; and (5) they leave conflict and contradictions unresolved (357).

Despite three different types of shows and premises for their creation and manipulation of cast roles, they still depend on familiar representations that do not advance race relations.

Using an autoethnographic approach, Boylorn explores the representations of Black women on RTV and offers a critique of existing images. Black women, in particular, are perceived as the vanguards of their gender and race so the images available on RTV are particularly harmful (Boylorn 423). Boylorn comments on the images and performance of Black womanhood in the RTV program the *Flavor of Love* and offers a challenge to Black women to become more critically engaged in the ways in which they are constructed on RTV programs.

In addition to Black womanhood, other scholars have examined Whiteness and RTV. For example, Dubrofsky looks at how Whiteness and women of color are (re)presented on *The Bachelor*. She implies that RTV shows how “only white people find romantic partners” (39). Another study conducted by Dubrofsky and Hardy examine how the conceptions and performance of race, specifically Whiteness and Blackness, intersect with identity and authenticity (373-92). In *The Bachelor*, the presence of women of color as eligible romantic partners for the White bachelor makes the suggestion that women of color and White women have access to same choices; therefore their (women of color) inability to be selected by the bachelor has more to do with their own failure than it being a strategic exclusion from the central narrative of the program. Women of color, according to Dubrofsky, were used as a frame to highlight the “unsuitability of some white women, add flavor, and serve as window dressing to White women” (44). *The Bachelor*’s seeming openness to interracial relationships is contradicted by its lack “face time” on camera for women of color, the limited interactions between the bachelor and women of color, and how women of color are used as a way to frame

Whiteness as natural and centered. Therefore the inclusion of women of color on the show merely reinforces that they do not count.

Most of the existing literature highlights the Black/White binary. Bell-Jordan, Dubrofsky, and Dubrofsky and Hardy use case studies from RTV programs that purposefully set Black and White cast members in opposition. Schroeder, Andrejevic and Colby, and Harvey have also examined the racial conflicts within specific groups and the dynamics that those conflicts place on gender roles, sexuality, and relationships. Four critical approaches are useful for analyzing *The Ultimate Merger* and *The Bachelorette* – including television studies, critical race theory, black feminist thought and whiteness studies. Beginning with television studies, I discuss the approaches that previous scholars have used and how I plan to draw on this approach in my study.

Theorists approach television studies in several ways. Two approaches to analyze television include rhetorical criticism and cultural criticism. Rhetorical criticism is a method of analyzing public communication that is text-centered and “focuses on the conception, composition, presentation, and reception of messages that tend to be persuasive in nature...” (O’Donnell 138). On the contrary, meaning is a key concept of cultural criticism because it “lies in the power of a symbol to signify something and in the viewer’s potential to derive meaning from the symbol” (O’Donnell 149). Critically engaging in cultural criticism finds ways to tease out “attitudes, beliefs, values, preferred forms of conduct, and ideologies [that] are embedded and reinforced in images and supporting discourse” (O’Donnell 160). According to O’Donnell, “cultural criticism examines the struggle and conflict over meaning” (137). Cultural criticism focuses primarily on subaltern artifacts, is ideological, and looks to broader social forces with an emphasis on *doing* something beyond writing about the discourse. While it is important to

understand meaning behind marginalized groups' discourse, it is equally important to investigate the ways that institutional discourse operates. Burghardt puts forth the view of rhetorical criticism as being "primarily concerned with maintaining or challenging power, and the critic's role is to reveal how discourse oppresses and silences" (3). Rhetorical criticism traditionally uses institutional or top-down discourse and is concerned with a particular context and moment that calls forth a response. Even though there are differences, rhetorical criticism and cultural criticism have begun to blend together. Rhetorical criticism and cultural criticism "address specific and often similar issues about culture, critical practice, and interpretation" and interrogate power (Rosteck 3).

Television has the potential "to [inform], [persuade], and [represent] the real and fictional worlds to its audience" (O'Donnell 145). Audiences actively participate during and after the viewing of television programs. They analyze and interpret characters and plots, determine authenticity of images portrayed and respond by comparing it to their lived experiences. As such, television studies uncovers meaning derived from the relationship between the viewer and what is viewed. Because the viewers bring their own experiences and beliefs into their interpretations, meaning is polysemic (i.e., contain many meanings). For that reason, television studies warrants a hybrid approach of rhetorical and cultural criticism

In an analysis, not only are images and dialogue analyzed but so too are the non-narrative structures such as "lighting and set design, camera style, editing, and sound... that the makers of television use to communicate with their audience" (Butler 10). In "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," Levine explored the use of black-and-white film stock in the televised play *Fail Safe*, and how its aesthetic qualities gave it a more "cinematic" look, thereby giving it a higher regard than "traditional" color TV (403). Kepplinger

investigates the use of camera position, image cutting, sound and lighting during his case study of two candidates running for the office of the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1976 election (433). Mcanany discusses how “visual elements such as camera angle, background, and pictorial selection” can construct a story in particular ways (209). Through the particular shots, certain elements are ignored and others are highlighted. This can sway the viewer to perceive certain characters or scenes as being more important, or ominous or more positive based on a particular framing of camera angles and lighting.

Lauerbach identifies ways in which the camera angle, position, whether it is a close-up or long shot, the size and duration of shot “impose a further layer of semiotic meaning into the images” (136). Exploring the effects of split-screen debate coverage, Scheufele et. alia analyzes the impact of split-versus single-screen debate coverage in the 2004 campaign (3). In “Picturing Afghan Women,” Fahmy scrutinizes the way that Afghan women are visually framed after the fall of the Taliban regime. For the purposes of my analysis, my use of television studies will focus specifically on the use of the aesthetics associated with television’s technologies and its influence on images and sound and how it intersects with issues of ideology.¹¹

The pervasiveness of television and RTV, specifically, warrants examination through a close-textual analysis of the messages communicated orally and visually. Exploring these areas through the lens of television studies will allow the opportunity to observe hegemonic forces at work. Hegemony is naturalized and invisible.¹² It is “the process by which social order remains stable by generating consent to its parameters through the production and distribution of ideological texts that define social reality for the majority of people” (Cloud 117). Subaltern

¹¹ Ideology is a “framework” with which society is produced. It is the lens through which we understand ourselves and the world (Sardar and Van Loon 46).

¹² Hegemony, as defined by Gramsci, is a concept in which rules of behavior, position, values and beliefs set by dominant society and are adopted by all members of society without question or challenged; they become naturalized and accepted as truth; and almost impossible to get rid of (Sardar and Van Loon 49).

voices adopt the values and beliefs of the dominant group as their own and it becomes the “truth.” It is this co-optation of values and beliefs that makes it difficult to challenge and when it is, those individuals are considered deviant or outsiders. In order to understand how hegemony can affect the way that meaning is constructed and understood, I begin the next section with a discussion of ideology and how critical race theory (CRT) was developed to disrupt socially-constructed control over minorities and women in law and society.

Critical Race Theory

In order to recognize the relevance of CRT with respect to my project, an understanding of the institutionalized control exerted over minorities and women in law and society is needed. Guillaumin borrows from Karl Marx the idea that in any given society there are socially constructed beliefs or doctrines that form the basis for social, economic and political systems that promote a specific group (35). Guillaumin, a sociologist and French feminist, asserts this position in her study of the ideology of race in Western societies in *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*.

In addition to Marx’s definition, scholars use the term “ideology” from various perspectives. According to Gerring, some view it as “refer[ing] to dominant modes of thought” or “based on concrete interests of a social class” or “refer[ing] primarily to those most alienated by the status quo” (957). Despite the discrepancy, there appears to be consistent agreement among the definitions offered by Gerring that posits a specific group’s interest above or below another group’s interests. Because of the numerous definitions, there are the false notions that ideology is always visible and able to be named. This idea is untrue, which further illustrates why others believe that ideology is so entrenched in society’s culture, that it is rendered invisible and difficult to recognize.

To that end, CRT deals with the ways in which race and racial power are constructed in American society. It is grounded in critical legal studies and radical feminism. Before continuing the discussion on CRT, I, first, explain these two schools of thought.

Critical legal studies (CLS) and radical feminism are theories used across disciplines. CLS is a theoretical concept that seeks to “[challenge] liberalism from the Left, [deny] that law [is] neutral, that every case [has] a single correct answer, and that rights [are] of vital importance” (Delgado and Stefancic 144). CLS theorists question the perception that law is value free or neutral. Moreover, they believe that laws are a collection of beliefs and prejudices that legitimize inequality and that one can decide cases from any perspective based on one’s interpretation of facts (Delgado and Stefancic 5). Radical feminism, on the other hand, is concerned with not conforming to mainstream politics. Emphasis is placed on “the importance of break[ing] away from status quo structures, relationships, and norms” so there is a distrust of spokeswomen (who could be perceived as leaders) and mainstream press (Poirot 272). Radical feminism is a decentralized movement. Feminists eschew hierarchical structures of power or media-identified leaders. Drawing from these perspectives, there are several tenets of CRT that will help explain the efficacy of using this theory in my project.

Some of the tenets of CRT include the idea of “legal indeterminacy...the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination, [and] a sympathetic understanding of the notions of nationalism and group empowerment” (Delgado and Stefancic 5). Because of the entrenched dominant ideology prevalent in society, critical race theorists consider the idea that race is normalized and created and maintained through the manipulation of dominant members in society. They also advance the idea that racism is an

“ordinary part of doing business for people of color...so it is difficult to cure or address” and that those who are a part of the minority – African Americans, Latino/a, Asian, and Indian – have the “competence to speak about race and racism” more so than their White counterparts (Delgado and Stefancic 5).

Because CLS is grounded in CRT, I will examine three studies that incorporate CLS. A recent illustration by Hasian examined Anatasie Desarzant’s defamation case where she alleged that her neighbors were defaming her character by spreading rumors that she was taking advantage of her lighter complexion through her “false” assertion that she was a White woman from Europe (“Critical Legal Theorizing”121). This study (and others that have examined this same case) is of particular importance because it challenges the racial demarcations established in Louisiana post-slavery in the antebellum South – Black, White, and Mulatta/o – and the legal standings of laws that cannot neatly categorize bi-racial and multi-ethnic people because they fall outside of the Black/White dichotomy. Hasian addresses, in a second study, the unequal attention academic scholars encourage by focusing only on major judicial opinions and that “it obfuscates the role that ‘vernacular’ discourse plays in the creation of our ‘rules of law’” (“Legal Argumentation”184). He focuses on the ways in which “the material realities of individuals and communities negotiate judicial situations and their relationship [with] legal symbolic universes” (184). He examines the discrepancy between what is communicated through text in the form of a law and how it is performed or acted upon in communities. In the third study, Dzialo argues that scholarship which focuses on the ideas challenged by CLS overlook the fact that this debate is not new. He asserts that it is “another manifestation of a continuous debate in Western thought – one that has its roots in pre-Socratic rhetoric and philosophy” (217). He looks at the classical rhetorical debate between Protagoras and Plato and how the fictional “Truths” elaborated on by

Plato create a dichotomy in thought that is impossible to avoid (Dzialo 217).¹³ Now that I have briefly covered scholarship situated in CLS, I explore research that incorporates radical feminism, one of the two foundational theories of CRT.

Radical feminism moved a step further than CLS and made a case that gender was just as important as focusing primarily on the intersectionality of race and the law. The construct of radical feminism is an alternative to what they believe is the essentializing of women even when giving “voice” to diverse ethnic and racial groups by traditional strains of feminist criticism. So Third Wave feminism advanced the idea of the “difference between women” perspective (Cai 276). Cai speculates that although radical feminism gave agency to minority feminists, “it also fragmented women’s collective identity and complicated their social-change agenda” (276). Cai investigates the way that first-generation Chinese American writer Maxine Han Kingston negotiates her own narrative by using trickster discourse in order to traverse her status as an outsider while still promoting societal change collectively in the community. This study is particularly salient because it attempts to provide an illustration of how the use of trickster discourse can bridge the perceived gap between the politics of radical feminism and the rhetoric of social change. In the second study, D’Enbeau examines the usefulness of radical feminism as a method of criticism in the critique of *Bust* magazine. Radical feminism “allows women to disturb and disrupt the discourses over which men have had a monopoly, undermining the assumption that there is one, single, objective reality and highlighting the tensions and contradictions women face navigating multiple realities” (D’Enbeau 18). To that end, studying popular culture like magazines enables feminist scholars to reclaim their voice and agency through the constructing and defining of their lived experiences (D’Enbeau 18). Through the lens

¹³ For more information on Protagoras, written by Plato, see <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/protagoras.html> for a translation.

of radical feminism, examining *Bust* magazine advances the discussion of the utility of applying this particular perspective to pieces of popular media.¹⁴ In addition to radical feminism application in the critique of narrative and popular culture, another scholar considers the idea of tattooing as a performative expression of radical feminism. In Harlow's study of *Suicide Girls*, she explores the use of "pain as beauty in order to upset beauty's hegemonic control on women's bodies" (186). Her analysis concentrates on the tattoos of one specific feminist actor and how they serve as a means to resist and reject hegemonic, socially-constructed perceptions of beauty. The three studies in radical feminism highlight the diverse ways in which radical feminism has been used as a critique; thereby putting forward the idea that its application is valuable and important. Recognizing the importance of both CLS and radical feminism, critical race theory emerged.

As stated previously, critical race theorists are concerned with the impact of court cases and argue the idea that a court case could suddenly eliminate oppression was naïve at best. So, CRT is primarily concerned with studying and changing the relationship among race, racism, and power. "Critical race theorists assume that most people of [c]olor experience racism in their daily everyday lives and that white elites shape race relations to serve their own self-interests. As such, race is a powerful social construct that is created and recreated over time to regulate 'racial progress' and to preserve white privilege" (Limbert and Bullock 254). While this was significant scholarship, it did not respond to the double bind that minorities, who were also women, faced. Women of color scholars argue that their experiences differed from both men of color and White women, so the CRT was broadened to create critical race feminism (Limbert and Bullock 254). The idea of the double bind – gender and race discrimination – made the experiences of women

¹⁴ For more information on *Bust* magazine, see: <http://www.bust.com/>

of color particularly distinctive from the previously mentioned groups because they often faced different forms of discrimination simultaneously. This double bind is illustrated in Joseph's article discussing the gendered and racialized messages communicated about the Black female body. Specifically, through her study she rejects the notion that society has moved beyond issues of race and gender by examining the rhetoric surrounding Tyra Banks, a former supermodel, her perceived weight gain exemplified through visual representations and what that might mean in terms of hegemonic ideas concerning gender and of "White" standards of beauty (Joseph 238).¹⁵ Given that one of my case studies will include a Black woman, the main critical perspective from CRT that I explore is the intersection of gender and race, or more specifically, critical race feminism. Because of the emphasis on the intersections of race and gender, the next critical perspectives I use in the analysis of my case studies are black feminist thought and Whiteness.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought is a vital lens to use when examining televisual discourse and race because a discussion of the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality, nation of origin and gender cannot be adequately developed through feminist criticism alone. Collins, a Black feminist and sociologist asserts that feminist "[t]heories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group upon closer examination appear greatly limited by the White, middle-class, and Western origins of their proponents" (8). The crux of black feminist thought is Black women's standpoint¹⁶ and Collins points to three interconnected components of oppression – "long-standing ghettoization in service occupations," institutionalized suppression of educational rights

¹⁵ Tyra Banks is an actor, entrepreneur, and former supermodel. For more information, see: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0004723/bio>

¹⁶ Black women's standpoint theory refers to the drawing upon the individual lives and experiences of marginalized women as a source of knowledge which is uniquely different from members of the dominant group (Allen 258). Standpoint theory is also concerned with power relations and emancipation.

and living conditions, and “controlling images” that make plain the economic, political and ideological forces at work. (Collins 6-7).

Collins outlines five controlling images of black womanhood – the mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, black lady, and jezebel – that work to define Black women’s fertility and sexuality while justifying the “social practices that characterize the matrix of domination in the United States...by meshing smoothly with intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Collins 93). The first image, the mammy, is seen as maternal and asexual. She is nurturing and maternal to White children but has little time to extend her love to her own family or children. Because of her role as a domestic, she can also be seen as a conduit for teaching deference to her children which continues the justification for racial inferiority and need for oppression. The matriarch, while seen as sexual and head of the household, is problematic as well. This image of Black womanhood emasculates Black men therefore rendering her sexually unavailable and undesirable. The welfare mother is seen as sexually promiscuous, lazy, and poor. Because of her “reliance” on government benefits, the need to contain and control her sexuality and fertility is of utmost concern and provides justification for continued oppression. The Black lady image of womanhood is a woman who is middle-class and professional. While at first glance, this image seems positive, in actuality, it is not. Because she stayed in school, worked hard (and often long hours), and competed against men for jobs, she is less feminine, has no family of her own and is rendered asexual due to her inability to get married. The final controlling image that Collins outlines in *Black Feminist Thought* is that of the jezebel or “hoochie.” She has an insatiable appetite for sex and engages in sexual acts that are considered deviant. The common theme throughout all of the images, regardless of class, is the need to repress and control the sexuality of Black women.

Black women's interpretations of said realities are vastly different from the dominant group. There are substantive differences in racial oppression that focuses on Black men and sexist oppression that focuses on White women. Drawing from Smith, King also recognizes that the identities and lived experiences of Black women are uniquely different from White women and Black men so incorporating a Black feminist standpoint is vital to understanding the impact of sexism and racism (45). In order to understand Black womanhood, one must be familiar with the distinctions between sexism and racism.

According to Collins there are six defining features of Black Feminist Thought. The first feature of Black Feminist Thought is that it seeks to "empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions" (Collins 25-26). Black women cannot be fully empowered until all oppression is eliminated because of the connection of gender and race. The second feature of Black Feminist Thought is also a core theme of Black women's standpoint – legacy of struggle. Society is constructed in such a way that it relegates Black women to the lowest paid jobs, worst housing, and schools. Although African American women may share similar challenges, the ways in which they respond or interpret that experience varies. Expounding on this point, Collins asserts:

There is no essential or archetypal Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic... Instead, it may be more accurate to say that a Black women's collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges. Since Black feminist thought both arises within and aims to articulate a Black women's group standpoint regarding experiences associated with intersecting oppressions, stressing this groups standpoint's heterogeneous composition is significant (32).

This is important because it adds to the discourse that recognizes American Black women and women of African descent which speaks to a global context.

A third feature of Black Feminist Thought is that self-defining standpoints can fuel resistance. The act of defining oneself enables an oppressed group to rearticulate a different view and inspire defiance. “Rather than raising consciousness, Black Feminist Thought affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that...already exists” (Collins 36). The last three features of Black Feminist Thought concern the contributions of African American intellectuals. Black Feminist Thought is not static, it is dynamic and changing; and it is concerned with “its relationship to other projects for social justice” (Collins 37-48).

In *Un/masking Identity: Healing Our Wounded Souls*, Rodriguez takes CRT, Black Feminist Thought and Chicana feminism and uses them collectively as a way to understand how females of color stimulate resistance (1067). Because lived experiences of women of color are different from those of White women, using theories that acknowledge the implications of race serve as a way to allow a space for their emancipation. The use of “race-based theories such as CRT and Black Feminist Thought...can serve as a venue to voice marginalized voices...and can allow for a space to critique social structures for the perpetuation of inequality” (Rodriguez 1071). Keyes analyzes female rap artists’ construction of self and identity through the lens of Black feminist thought (255 – 69). For the purposes of my analysis, I use Black Feminist Thought to analyze image (self-definition) through the lens of color, standards of beauty, the sexual politics of black womanhood, and black women’s love relationships.

Whiteness

In order to complete a comparison between *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger*, a discussion of Whiteness and White privilege is also needed. Dyer discusses the importance of identifying White as a race rather than a category by which all other races are defined. When White is not “raced,” it is given a designation as normalized and human.

There is no more powerful a position than being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all its inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in the world. (Dyer 2)

He goes on to add that it is this normalizing that gives White people the power to create the dominant images of the world (based on from their positions) and set standards for all without regard to the various standpoints of Others. Building on the idea of power in being invisible or non-raced, Dalton asserts that “[far] and away the most troublesome consequence of [being non-raced] is the failure of many to recognize the privileges our society confers on them because they have white skin. White skin privilege is a birthright, a set of advantages one receives simply by being born with features that society values highly” (18). Placing value and privilege on something that is unable to be achieved through hard work or education, renders it unattainable by Others.

Contending that White people are taught to not recognize their privilege, McIntosh unpacks the concept of White privilege. They are taught to think of their lives as “morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work for the benefit of others, this is seen as work which will allow “them” to be more like “us” (McIntosh 124). McIntosh identifies privileges that she says have more to do with her skin color than social class, gender,

religion, or geographic location. These “everyday” experiences are important to uncover because their existence confers dominance over other races.

Frankenberg conducted a study to gauge how White women viewed their experiences and identity in relation to race. Specifically, she wanted to determine how the women viewed race and racism and whether it impacted their lives. She argued that race shapes White women’s lives just as it does people of color. Frankenberg contends that “any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses” (1). Because she believes that race affects and shapes White women’s lives, she defines that framing as Whiteness. Whiteness, according to Frankenberg, has three dimensions. She argues that Whiteness “is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege;” that “it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society;” and that “‘whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and un-named” (Frankenberg 1). Throughout the interviews of the women and the narratives they tell Frankenberg, it is indisputably clear that race shapes White women’s lives. The intersectionality of gender, sexuality, region, class, and generation created further divisions in the lived experiences of the diverse White women interviewed. Whiteness cannot be essentialized. It varies based on a range of factors and is “[co-constructed] with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and gender. This [co-construction] is... asymmetrical for the term ‘whiteness’ signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage” (Frankenberg 236-37). Jackson and Nakayama and Krizek also examine the positionality of Whiteness as centered. Nakayama and Krizek interrogates from their perspectives as a Japanese American and White male, respectively, in order to try to “expose the meanings of ‘white’” and to “deterritorialize the territory of ‘white’” (291-292). Jackson’s study

focuses on interviews with White students, who are enrolled in historically Black colleges, to investigate the ways in which these students used communication to define their Whiteness.

Dyer, Dalton, McIntosh, Frankenberg, Nakayama and Krizek, and Jackson all agree that White privilege exists and that Whiteness is a concept that needs to be recognized and rendered visible. Failing to unpack or uncover ways in which White is raced, keeps it centered and normalized.

Whiteness and White privilege are important discussions for my study because of the centering of masculinity and femininity as White. Normalizing masculinity and femininity to be synonymous with what it means to be White continues to perpetuate the concept that “Others” are deviant, less masculine (or hyper-masculine), and less feminine. Butterworth examines the home run race between Sammy Sosa, of Dominican descent, and Mark McGwire, who is White, and argues that masculinity and heroism (or the myth of the American hero), is inextricably linked to Whiteness.¹⁷ He points to the ways in which McGwire’s “heroism is constructed...through a fascination with his size and strength; McGwire as the rightful front-runner; and in images that marginalize Sosa through representations of racial identity” (Butterworth 233). In a sense, the prevailing message in the array of media coverage studied by Butterworth and surrounding the two baseball stars reinforces an image of the American mythic hero as superhuman and White. Dickinson and Anderson examined the visual rhetoric of two *Time* magazine covers. They examined the ways in which two figures – O.J. Simpson and Hillary Rodham Clinton – work to reassert messages of guilt of African Americans and women. Dickinson and Anderson argue that “the cover photos function as a visual rhetoric naturalizing the ideology that [Black] men and women of all colors are sinful, and, as such, re-center White

¹⁷ Sammy Sosa was a baseball player in the major leagues. For more information, see: http://www.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=122544. Mark McGwire, was a baseball player in the major leagues. For more information, see: <http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/m/mcgwima01.shtml>.

patriarchy at a time when Whiteness and masculinity supposedly are ‘in crisis’” (272).¹⁸ Social and cultural movements of the 1960s made whiteness visible and “undercut its mythic status” (Dickinson and Anderson 276). Due to the concept that no person can be White or masculine enough “the culture industry works assiduously to re-center, re-naturalize, re-mythologize white masculinity” (Dickinson and Anderson 276). O.J. Simpson and his “Blackness” along with Hillary Rodham Clinton and her “femaleness” helped to re-center and re-mythologize White masculinity. The *Time* magazine told the “tragic downfall” of Simpson and Clinton. In the visual image, Simpson’s face is not in focus and it is noticeably dark reinforcing the idea of blackness equaling evil and guilty. Similarly, Clinton’s image is shrouded in black. Her face is stark and white, almost corpse-like engulfed in shadows. Because she did not “know her place,” she is dubbed as the fallen woman or “Eve.” Both of these images help to reassert that White patriarchy is good and is superior to minority groups, including women, for a justified reason – women and Blacks are inherently sinful.

Despite the concept that “feminine” is synonymous with “White” ideals, there are constraints that are placed on White womanhood as a result of being the socially constructed ideal. White is synonymous with purity and chastity. To conform to that image, White women must repress their sexuality (including being firmly categorized as heterosexual) and be submissive in established gender roles. Dyer discusses the Virgin Mary as the ideal white woman – “unmarked” by sexual intercourse, is never shown pregnant, and is always shown young (74 – 77).¹⁹ To achieve this ideal image of womanhood, White women must be sexually chaste, young,

¹⁸ O.J. Simpson was a former football player and actor. For more information, see: <http://www.infoplease.com/biography/var/ojsimpson.html>. Hilary Rodham Clinton was a New York Senator and is currently serving as Secretary of State for the United States. For more information, see: <http://www.biography.com/articles/Hillary-Clinton-9251306>.

¹⁹ For more information on the Virgin Mary, also known as Mary of Nazareth, see: http://www.womeninthebible.net/2.1.Mary_of_Nazareth.htm

with clear, even skin. Using the concept of Whiteness and White womanhood, I critically compare the performance of White womanhood in *The Bachelorette* and Black womanhood in *The Ultimate Merger*.

CHAPTER THREE

SEXUALITY EXPOSED

The female image has been a site of voyeuristic gaze and debate for decades. Popular culture outlets such as magazines, movies, and television programs, have helped to reify the socially acceptable image of what it means to be a woman. Popular culture has also helped to “call out” those who do not conform to a very narrow definition of beauty, which includes sexual neutrality and youth. This chapter explores, first, how the two RTV actresses, Ali Fedotowsky and Omarosa Manigault, are constructed prior to meeting the bachelors. To explore their constructed images, a textual analysis of the narrative surrounding each woman is critiqued from the first episode of *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger* season. Next, the chapter unpacks ways in which Fedotowsky and Manigault conform to particular racial performances – ideal White womanhood and the Black lady and Jezebel controlling images advanced by Collins. Last, the chapter discusses the symbolic dimensions of heterosexism by juxtaposing Fedotowsky’s and Manigault’s sexual images as constructed by the intimate scenes available for analysis in each of the episodes.

Constructing the Image

The first analysis is a close-textual treatment of the constructed narrative in the premiere episode of *The Bachelorette* in which the audience meets Ali Fedotowsky. The premiere²⁰ begins with a sunset and seagulls flying in the background and a sepia colored image of side profile of a woman looking down while standing on the pier. As the shot fades to an aerial view, a voice-

²⁰ See synopsis in Appendix A.

over states “last season on *The Bachelor*” and the audience is given a flashback image of Ali on another RTV program *The Bachelor*.

There are seven shots from the previous season of *The Bachelor* that show Ali and Jake, the star of *The Bachelor*, interacting on dates. Jake tells Ali that it feels “almost like a fairy tale.” The voice-over then states, “Ali falls head over heels in love with Jake. And, to America, it looked as if Ali had found her ‘Prince Charming.’” Two more shots are shown and then the voice-over says, “Ali was forced to choose between her dream job and the love of her life.” Ali makes the decision to choose her job and leave the show. Her decision to leave the show for her career was not without regrets. Ali discloses, “The biggest mistake I made that night was choosing a desk, computer, and keyboard over someone who could be the love of my life.” She goes on to express that she has been unable to put love and relationships first and that she allows her insecurities and fear to “dictate [her] life.” She next asserts that she will not be a “victim to that anymore. And, that [she] is ready to meet someone and put them first above all things.” The voice-over returns to announce, “Now, Ali will get a second chance at love as the next bachelorette.”

The studio and television audience are re-introduced to Ali as the leading woman on *The Bachelorette*, season six. Several more shots are played as the viewer sees her warm reception from the studio audience. Several vignettes play of her shopping, trying on clothes, dancing, and smiling. Ali says she doesn’t know how they found 25 guys to date her because she’s tried her whole life to find Mr. Right but “bring on those boys.” Through Ali’s voice, we learn that she has quit her job and moved out of her apartment in order to put everything she has into finding love. She talks about how hopeful she is that she will find love as long as she moves forward with an “open mind and open heart.”

Based on the first five minutes and nine seconds of the one hour twenty-six minute and eight second premiere episode, the audience learns a lot about Ali. The vignettes that we see – her tormented over her decision, crying while she told him that she had to make a decision between him and her “dream job,” and ending with uncontrollable sobbing in the limousine as it drives away from the bachelor – create an opportunity for the audience to see how conflicted she is about the decision. Following those shots, there are images of her looking pensive, worried, somber (which is in sharp contrast to the previous images of her smiling and laughing with Jake). This sets up an opportunity for her to be viewed as a character worth redeeming (and deserving of a second chance). She has seen the error of her decision and has accepted that putting someone first in her life “above everything” is the approach that would give her an opportunity to realize and attain true love. She has prioritized her life and with this acknowledgement, she is seen in shots smiling, carefree, happy, and dancing. Despite the fact that she has no job or place to call “home,” she is content in the idea of finding her husband.

Additionally, *The Bachelorette* shows Ali as a trendy dresser. In less than one minute, she is shown thirteen times modeling clothing at what is to be assumed a boutique, not a commercial department store. She poses and dances for the camera with ease. Her movements are fluid, like the clothing that she is wearing. While her age has not been divulged by the narrator of the show or digitally added to the screen, the audience can assume based on how physical features of her face; the youthful, flirty clothing that she selects; and the carefree way that she models and dances in the dressing room that she is fairly young – early to mid-twenties. Even though she is primarily shown in dresses, there are instances when she is wearing trendy jeans with tennis shoes. Although she is wearing jeans, there is always a tailored, fitted shirt or belted sweater to

continue the youthful image while showing the contours of her body. Even when she is shown running outside, her pants and tank top are fitted.

Because Ali turned down the opportunity to be with Jake, the construction of her image as remorseful and seeking a second chance to “get it right,” enables the audience to embrace her again as deserving of the opportunity to find love. The only time that we see Ali not smile is immediately following her decision to choose her career over staying with Jake. Otherwise, we see her bubbly, smiling, and happy disposition throughout the first five minutes of the premiere. This paints Ali as a generally happy, carefree, youthful person who is fun-loving and, while she made the mistake of choosing her job over a potential husband, has “righted” this wrong by giving up everything in order to find her husband.

Ali said that insecurities and fear have kept her from putting relationships first. This allows the audience to empathize and connect with the bachelorette. She’s young, carefree, and beautiful, yet she has fears and insecurities. It makes her more “human” and endearing to the audience. This “confession” allows the viewer to connect with Ali on a personal level. Last season, the audiences rooted for her and Jake. To restore the image built before her decision that ended the romance, she had to be constructed as vulnerable and “likeable” again.

Turning next to the constructed image of Manigault, the audience’s introduction to her is quite different than Ali’s. Omarosa is the eligible bachelorette on *The Ultimate Merger*. The premiere episode, titled as “Blizzard,”²¹ begins immediately with snippets of the episodes that will air over the course of the season. The first time the viewers hear Omarosa’s voice is when she is seated in the back of a black sport utility vehicle. The next frame shows her seated in a chair. She begins by stating, “Since *The Apprentice*, Donald Trump has become an incredible mentor to me and in fact, he’s kind of become my life coach. He called me because he said he

²¹ See synopsis in Appendix B.

had a very interesting proposal for me.” Based on Omarosa’s words, she builds an expectation that there is a close and personal relationship between her and Trump which helps to legitimize his right to summon her at whim.

Next, Omarosa is greeted by the receptionist and is given permission to go to Trump’s office. When she enters, he greets her by her first name, she responds, saying, “Mr. Trump,” then they shake hands and he says “sit.” The following excerpt involves direct quotations from the interaction between Omarosa and Trump in his office.

Donald: You’ve been very good for me. You know, *The Apprentice* has become a great great success. It’s become the number one show on television. We became number one together and you’re my pal. [Omarosa nods and smiles at Trump.] But, you know, I’d love for you to meet some guy. Is there anyone who can tame you? Some male?

Omarosa: I think the right guy can – [Donald interrupts.]

Donald: I know no woman can tame you. Would you agree with that? [Omarosa laughs and smiles.] The women don’t have a chance.

Omarosa: No, they don’t.

Donald: I have here 12 dossiers in this briefcase. I’m going to give you credit reports, pictures. I’m going to give you lots of different things and you are to go to the best and most beautiful hotel in Las Vegas –Trump International – [Trump lifts briefcase and passes it across the desk to Omarosa.] and you’re going to meet with these people. Now, they’re very different. Some of them are great. Some of them are amazing. And, some of them aren’t so great. That’s for me. [Omarosa laughs.] They’re not that good. I mean, I wouldn’t pick them but maybe you’ll like them. I’d love to see this work for you.

Omarosa: There’s a pre-nup in here.

Donald: You must have a pre-nup, Omarosa, okay? I want you to go out to Las Vegas, meet these guys and over a period of weeks, you're gonna decide whether or not there's somebody for you. Goodbye, sweetheart. Good luck.

Omarosa: Thank you, Mr. Trump.

Trump: Have a good time. [Omarosa turns to leave. The next image shown is Omarosa seated in a chair narrating what her thoughts were after leaving Trump's office.]

Omarosa: After leaving Mr. Trump, I only had two things on my mind – get me to Vegas and who are these guys?

This concludes the narrative before Omarosa meets any of the eligible bachelors. After showing the snippets of the different episodes within the season, the characters are introduced through a visual image and their name written on the screen. The audience is given one minute and fifty-eight seconds to understand who Omarosa is. As demonstrated by the excerpt above, the primary speaker was Trump.

Trump establishes who Omarosa is by tying her to his previous RTV program, *The Apprentice*, and through the literal words he uses. We know, as an audience, that she was on a previous show of his. We also learn that she helped make the show a success which could potentially point to a familiar image construction. Her image, however, was problematic on *The Apprentice* and Trump makes this clear with his reference to taming her. Trump asks if anyone can “tame” her. When he adds that “no woman can tame [her],” the audience is led to make the assumption that she might have been a trouble-maker or hard to handle and it subtly references her sexual orientation. Also, the notion of taming Omarosa and the historical references of Black people being animalistic, savage, and hypersexual make his word choice problematic.

Next, when he discusses the “proposal” with Omarosa, he constructs her quest to find a husband as more of a business venture than about finding “true” love. He runs credit checks, gives her pictures, and various other items, including pre-nuptial agreements for the twelve bachelors he selected for her. This continues to construct Omarosa’s image as superficial, materialistic, and business-like. The fact that some of the men “aren’t great [and that he] wouldn’t pick them but she might like them” gives the impression that she has made poor choices in the past and her expectations are less than what would seem desirable. It also indicates that as a White upper-class male, his standards are higher than what he would expect for Omarosa.

Unlike Ali in *The Bachelorette*, there are no vulnerable moments displayed by Omarosa. She comes across as cold, distant, and business-like. Because her voice is primarily silent, the audience only has Trump’s words and actions to help construct Omarosa’s image. The audience has no opportunity to connect with Omarosa. There is no “confession” shared that might help explain why Omarosa has to find a partner on RTV. With Ali, we learn through her voice that it is her insecurities and fears that has kept her from finding true love. That admission is something that connects the audience in very personal ways as they examine their own unsuccessful attempts at love. This humanizes Ali.

Omarosa, on the other hand, is the polar opposite. She is not constructed through her image as being youthful or bubbly – she is shown wearing a conservative-styled dress. Her facial expressions are stoic for the most part – unreadable. When Omarosa smiles, it seems forced and stiff. She lacks a sense of warmth. This construction creates Omarosa’s image as unapproachable, distant, and “inhuman” which prevents an emotional investment by the

audience. We do not have an opportunity to learn about Omarosa through her voice or vignettes. We learn about her through her lack of voice, her physical demeanor, and Trump's voice.

Just as first impressions are generally lasting, the constructions of Ali and Omarosa's images before they meet the bachelors creates an opportunity for audiences to connect and become emotionally invested. In *The Bachelorette*, audiences have an opportunity to understand that Ali is on a quest to find love and her "Prince Charming." Ali describes herself through the visual images in the vignettes and her voice as someone who is "ready to put it all on the line" in her quest to find her husband. At first glance, audiences can connect with the image of Ali as the "All-American girl next door" who seems hopeful about finding true love. The audience's first impression of Omarosa in *The Ultimate Merger* is quite different. There is no personal narrative told by Omarosa. There are no moments where the audience can connect with her from a personal perspective. Audiences only have the words constructed by Trump and they are led to assume that Omarosa's quest to find a mate is led by her mind versus her heart. Unfortunately, the audience also has no opportunity to determine whether Omarosa even desires a relationship or whether it is societal pressure that places an expectation that she should desire and actively seek a partner.

True Womanhood

Gender is a social construction that is assigned to a biological sex as being appropriate or "normalized." There are particular expectations of femininity that place or privilege certain characteristics of female bodies. The constructions are further stratified across race. The ideal woman and the Black lady controlling images are examined based on the character developments of Ali and Omarosa. Using a close textual analysis of dialogue and images, Ali's critique is based on the ideal White woman and Omarosa is analyzed based on the construction of the Black

lady and Jezebel controlling images advanced by Patricia Hill-Collins using a close textual analysis of dialogue and images.

Whiteness, more specifically, White womanhood is constructed as the ideal. White women are privileged as being desired, youthful, sexually chaste, and in need of protection. They are “asexual women who [are] idealized and brought home to mother” (Collins 157). And, while being valued from a family perspective is positive, it simultaneously suppresses White women’s ability to be sexual beings thereby suppressing their sexuality. “Idealized [White] women are bathed in and permeated by light” (Dyer 122). This “glow,” along with women who are blond, gives the appearance of an ethereal or angel-like quality (Dyer 124). The woman selected for the sixth season of *The Bachelorette*, Ali, conforms to these popular constructions.

Each episode starts with the profile image of Ali standing on a pier. It is almost sunset. There are sea gulls flying the background and the sun is silhouetting her (see figure 1). Despite her image being in profile and sepia colored, this immediately gives her an airy, ethereal type of image. She is in shadows but is lit from below because of the sunset. This is a technique that Dyer discusses in his book, *White*, which gives White women (and, presumably, others who want to capture the idealized angel-like quality) a “glow.” The strategic positioning of Ali on the pier at sunset reinforces the notions of White beauty while at the same time elevating her above other women (in particular, non-White women).

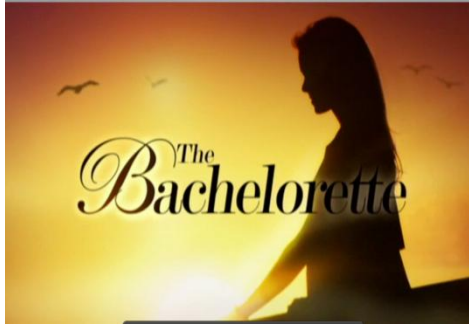


Figure 1. The opening credits of *The Bachelorette*. Source: “Episode 601”; iTunes.com; 20 Jan. 2011

Throughout each of the episodes analyzed, Ali is described in ways that place her in a position of being highly desirable, another component of ideal White womanhood. When she is announced as the next bachelorette, Chris Harrison, the host of *The Bachelorette*, introduces her by saying, “welcome back America’s newest sweetheart.” She is already afforded a title of desirability that is universal through the use of American and sweetheart. Prior to meeting Ali, the bachelors are told they are competing against each other to “win her heart.” Immediately, the men are excited to meet her and express words like “I need Ali,” “Ali is the type of girl that I could get married to.” Several men vowed to “fight for her”. These statements were made before any of the men were formally introduced to Ali. A few of them had watched *The Bachelor* but most of them had only seen clips of Ali. They were basing these feelings of excitement and enthusiasm on images they had seen, not through conversations or getting to know her in person. Once the bachelors met her in person, she is described as “everything [he’s] ever wanted,” “girl next-door,” and “sweet as apple pie” (*The Bachelorette*, episode 601). These descriptions continue to posit her as universally acceptable based on American ideals through the use of “girl next-door” and “sweet as apple pie.” When Ali met the families of the four men left in the competition in episode 608,²² she fit right into Chris N., Kirk, and Frank’s families. Roberto, who is Latino, did not describe her as fitting in but he did say his family liked her. There was no

²² See Appendix A.

doubt among Chris, Kirk and Frank that she would fit in easily. She was described as being “one of us,” “automatically blended in,” and she could “make herself at home and fit into [Chris N.] house.” What is particularly interesting is that all of the families know that she narrowed down the field of men from 25 to 4 but do not openly express concerns about her promiscuity or fidelity.

Being youthful is also a component of White womanhood. Ali is relatively young, she is 25 years-old, but she is also described by the men in ways that reinforce her youthfulness. She is most frequently referred to as “girl,” cute, and adorable. Chris N. describes Ali as being the “perfect girl for [him because she] is smart, playful, and drop-dead gorgeous” (*The Bachelorette*, episode 608). He goes on to say in a subsequent episode that she makes him “feel like [he’s] 12...we joke, we laugh.” Most of the images we see of Ali are shots of her laughing, playing in the water, playing a round of catch with Roberto (at the bachelors’ house and in his hometown), and playing soccer with Kirk and his adopted sister.

Tying into the idea of being youthful is the need to protect Ali. Kasey, upon first meeting her, states that he is there to guard and protect her heart. He says this throughout the season until his elimination and even tattoos a picture of a heart and shield on his wrist. Christ L. says that when he saw Ali on *The Bachelor*, she was the one he wanted and that “when she was crying in the hallway, she looked like she needed a hug and [Jake] didn’t do anything” (*The Bachelorette*, episode 601). The men also begin to critique the reasons why some men may be on the show to meet Ali. Before the elimination round, also known as the rose ceremony, the men are asked to place the name of an individual “who is not there for love” (*The Bachelor*, episode 601). In subsequent episodes, clashes between the men arise out from the idea that some of the men felt that there were men who did not have the best intentions. They felt like they needed to protect

Ali from men who were “glaringly not right for her.” This need to protect Ali superseded their needs. Even when men were eliminated, they wished her good luck because she was such a “great girl” and that they did not want her to “end up with someone who wasn’t there for her.” This is significant to note because when the Black men on *The Ultimate Merger* were eliminated, they acknowledged the friendships of the other men but did not wish Omarosa well or state that she was a “great girl.” As an idealized White woman, even when she rejects the men, they still think highly of her.

In each of the episodes Ali stresses the importance of feeling safe and protected. In the season finale, Roberto and Ali stop the Jet Ski and wade in the water along with a school of sting ray. Ali says his immediate reaction was to protect her. Even though she is saying this during the final episode, the show airs previous clips of him holding her hand while on the helicopter rides, while they are tight-rope walking, and when she expressed that for the first time in her life, she felt safe. In episode 603, she describes Roberto as protective and manly and that Kirk also made her feel safe. Ali also talks about how comfortable she is with Chris N. and that she “felt safe in the nook of his arm” (*The Bachelorette*, episode 608). The audience is reminded throughout each of the episodes that Ali wants a man in her life who will physically take care of and protect her.

In terms of being sexually chaste, while much attention is given to Ali and the bachelors’ good looks, there are no intimate scenes that go beyond cuddling and kissing (shown on the televised clips of the season). She is described as “wicked awesome,” “gorgeous,” and beautiful but is not described by her body parts. She wears bikinis and dresses that show off her body, but the men do not spend much time talking about it. They talk more about her playfulness and personality. When Ali talks about the men, other than her description of Roberto being sexy, the men are described as adorable and handsome. She also talks about the romantic chemistry – not a

sexual one – between her and a few of the bachelors. The way that the show is set up promotes an image of her being sexually conservative. The bachelors live several miles down the mountain from her residence. This creates a barrier to access because they are not able to drive cars. Other than Justin, who we learn is a womanizer, no one tries to breach the boundary set by her location. Also, prior to the season finale she is shown kissing and cuddling various bachelors. When she is cuddling them, they are both fully clothed and she is wrapped in a blanket or comforter. There is no physical skin-to-skin contact other than kissing. When the season finale is shown, there are three men left. As a part of the show, Chris Harrison gives a key for an overnight visit with Ali. Only two men accept – Roberto and Chris N. Frank, goes home after realizing he still has very strong feelings for his ex-girlfriend. The audience is able to see the “fantasy suite” but once they are inside the curtains are drawn and the clip fades to the next day. The audience can make assumptions about what could have occurred overnight but due to the construction of her image, there is no certainty that she was sexually intimate with the men.

Throughout the episodes, the construction of Ali’s image through her words, the words of the bachelors, and the set up of the show, help to position her as an ideal woman. She is constructed as desirable, youthful, in need of protection, and sexually chaste. This image is in sharp contrast to the image constructed of Omarosa in *The Ultimate Merger*.

There are various controlling images of Black women advanced by Collins (93). The images most related to the way in which Omarosa is constructed are the Black Lady and Jezebel. The Black Lady dimension of Black womanhood positions Black women as fiercely competitive women who emasculate Black men which is the reason for their undesirability and single status. Their ambition and career success, which often pits them against Black men for positions, creates a tension between Black men and is another reason that they cannot have long-term lasting

relationships (Collins 93). The Jezebel controlling image marks Black women as sexually aggressive with an insatiable appetite for sex. Jezebel also engages in sexual acts that are considered deviant (Collins 93). Omarosa is constructed as business-like (see figure 2) and competitive but she is also constructed as preoccupied with sex and sexual organs. As such, she represents multiple images. From a larger perspective, this indicates that Black women lack the ability to have romantic partners or love. If they are asexual, as in the Black Lady controlling image, it is only due to their inability to find a partner. Internally, the competitive, emasculating, Black woman is a closet Jezebel. This overly simplistic stereotype does not allow for any acknowledgment of the complexities of sexuality. It also makes the assumption that because she is competing with Black men (and therefore undesirable to Black men), she is incapable of going outside of her racial group to find a partner and that her mate has to be a man.



Figure 2. The opening credits of *The Ultimate Merger*. Source: “Blizzard”; iTunes.com; 20 Jan. 2011

As a former track athlete and debater, Omarosa is competitive. She creates opportunities for the suitors to show their athletic and verbal prowess. In the episode, “Verbal Combat”, Omarosa makes the men debate hair weaves versus natural hair styles, affirmation action, public healthcare option, unusual names,²³ and whether Kanye West²⁴ is a genius or insane. The men

²³ Omarosa challenges Sterling and Eddy to debate on the acceptability of using unusual names. When Omarosa refers to “unusual names,” she is referring to the use of names that are found in Black communities that are not used in mainstream dominant society.

debate each side. The winner overall has to then debate Omarosa. When she and Lyle, the overall winner, debated, she is overpowering and would not allow Lyle to speak. Omarosa is consistently interrupting the men throughout the six episodes of *The Ultimate Merger*. When it is time to eliminate a person during the elimination round, also referred to as “mediation,” she interrupts the men and would not allow them to finish a sentence or respond. In the first episode, Omarosa talks about her failed marriage. She points to the excessive work hours as the culprit. She also shares with Lyle that she could see herself in him – his dominating personality, competitiveness, and emphasis on career (*The Ultimate Merger*, “Roughing It”). When she talks about his personality with the camera “confession,” she discusses how “off-putting” that was. Interestingly enough, her reflection of his behavior and acknowledged similarity to him does not give way to awareness of how her behavior might also be perceived. In a different episode, Omarosa comments that, “A lot of men say they can handle a strong woman but at the end of the day, can you really handle your mate being just as smart, just as competitive, [and] just as successful as you are?” (*The Ultimate Merger*, “Verbal Combat”). This statement by Omarosa alludes to previous times in her life where being considered and valued as an equal in terms of capability and strength were not valued or considered assets.

In addition to being fiercely competitive, Omarosa is also considered to be sexually aggressive, a characteristic of the Jezebel controlling image. Omarosa is constructed as having an insatiable sexual appetite. During episode one, “Blizzard,” the men are given an “O-Harmony” exam to test their knowledge of Omarosa. While all of the questions were not provided to the audience, the audience did have the opportunity to hear some of the questions. A majority of the questions related to sex - “after sex, what does [she] want,” “we’re in an intimate setting, what

²⁴ Kanye West is an American hip-hop music artist. For more information, see: http://www.mtv.com/music/artist/west_kanye/artist.jhtml#biographyEnd.

do you wear,” and “would you grow for O.” Her response to the question regarding what she wanted after sex, all of the men got wrong. She said that she would want “more” and that she has an “insatiable” appetite. She directs the question of what he would wear in an intimate setting to Isaac. Isaac circled the response that stated he would wear “speedos.” She retorts that “most black men can’t fit into a speedo” to which he responds that “there was not an option for wearing nothing and that if it’s an intimate setting [he] shouldn’t have them on for long.” The question, “would you grow for O,” was directed at the only White man in the group of 12 bachelors, Sterling. Essentially, she is asking him whether he would enhance his genitalia to be larger. She directly refers to the size of his penis by asking if there was a need for him to grow.

In the second episode, “Champs and Chumps,” Omarosa has the men compete in track and field exercises. The winners – Isaac, Lyle, and Ray – are rewarded for their athletic prowess by having a group date with Omarosa. She tells the men that they are “jumping in the hot tub and getting it on.” This sets up an opportunity for expectations of sexual intimacy. When Lyle interrupts the one-on-one time that she is sharing with Ray, she responds to the camera that “we would have been going at it the rest of the night if we weren’t interrupted.” Again, this points to her insatiable sexual appetite.

Other examples include her direct actions and comments. In the “Verbal Combat” episode, she talks about the idea that “men have to not only seduce [her] mind but also to pleasure [her] body” and “when the talking is over, what would [he] do to seduce [her].” In episode seven, “Roughing It,” she states that she “came in on a white horse and rode out on a stallion” after spending an evening with Ray. Dyer notes that the term “white” is synonymous with something positive, pure and clean while the term “black” has historically meant the complete opposite (70). Omarosa’s use of white alludes to stereotypical ideas about purity and

being sexually chaste. Additionally, her usage of “stallion” makes reference to Lyle, during mediation, responds to Omarosa questioning his pace and absence of intimacy. He states, “That [relationships] are much more than physical [and] I put the physical part last. Maybe physical is more at the forefront for her, I’m sorry but we aren’t talking about a booty call.” Her requests for intimacy and the questioning of pace is constructed as being too fast – even for a male. During a particularly romantic scene, Omarosa and Al are laying on a bearskin rug in front of the fireplace. He shows his affection for her by lightly stroking her arm while he is lying behind her. He asks if she can feel his affection for her in his touch. She responds, “Not in your hands but right there” and thrusts her hips backwards into him. This constant discussion of sex through the questions in the “O-Harmony” questionnaire, in the mediation room, and on dates, constructs Omarosa as hypersexual.

The final dimension of the Black lady controlling image is the characterization that Black women emasculate Black men which is the reason for their single status and undesirability (Collins 93). Omarosa is characterized by various men on the show as overpowering and overbearing. In the episode, “Champs and Chumps,” Omarosa goes on a group date with Michael, Jarvis, and Sterling. While on the date, she engages Michael in a conversation in order to get to know him better. Michael states that he is a shy person and that the best way to get to know him is through his writings on blogs. She responds, “I’m not going to the Internet to get to know you.” During his confession to the camera, he felt that her dismissive attitude towards him was disrespectful. “Come on, how more disrespectful can you be? I mean, I’m a man. I have pride.” He moves to the front of the tour bus and she says, “Oh, that’s cute. He’s pouting.” Jarvis asks her if she wants a “man’s man.” She responds, “I want a *man’s* man.” Laughing with Jarvis and Sterling, she continues, “I’m like, I don’t want somebody who’s like picking up drawers

[underwear] and making pancakes in the morning. I want a man's man." This is referencing an earlier scene in which she learns that Michael has been cooking for the men in the house. This takes place within earshot of Michael. Finally she goes up to the front of the bus and Michael says he is "re-evaluating if he wants to be there." She promptly stops the tour bus and tells him to evaluate it at Planet Hollywood. She continues to emasculate Michael by discussing him with the other men. She talks about the fact that he cooks and cleans but she "didn't keep him around to be a chef." Omarosa has attached gendered meaning to Michael's cooking and cleaning while making it clear to all of the men that she wants a man's man and he isn't it.

Michael's supposed lack of masculinity points to the stereotypical expectations of Black masculinity. The expectations of Black masculinity include being "inherently angry, potentially violent, and sexually aggressive" (Orbe 35). Michael voluntarily cooks for the men and keeps the hotel suite clean. As a Black man, these would be considered feminized roles. Because she uses this in a way to emasculate him, she subtly questions his manhood. During one of the elimination rounds, she questions his ability to please her. He responds, "I'd have to go down on you for sure." To counteract the statements she makes about him, he responds sexually therefore he re-asserts his manhood and saves himself from elimination. From a larger perspective, this is problematic. One of Omarosa's guest judges is a professional chef and is a Black man. She does not, however, question his manhood. It is Michael's willingness to provide his services to the men freely that contradicts her notions of manhood. By continuing to perpetuate the stereotype, she is reaffirming gender roles.

During the mediation in the second episode, she tells Jason that he "debunked the myth that Black men can jump." Then she lists every mistake he made during the competition – "were you trying to run into the pole or jump over it;" "almost took out a couple people when throwing

discus;” and “ran like the giraffe in *Madagascar*.” She then asks if he would consider it a failure and whether he is athletic. Jason responds, “I have no aspirations –.” Before he could complete his sentence, she cuts him off by asking, “are you coordinated in the bedroom? Because I’d have to wonder...you can barely clear a bar, walk around a track, throw a little discus.” Without allowing him an opportunity to respond, she says, “moving on.” She ties his lack of athletic prowess with masculinity. His inability to perform in track and field makes her question his “manhood.”

Throughout the episodes, Omarosa dominates conversations much to the chagrin of the bachelors. They constantly tell her that she needs to listen more and that she cannot be the only one to talk. We also learn from Omarosa’s mother in the episode, “Mommy Issues,” which she has always been “rough and tumble...beating boys up.” This positions Omarosa as having been overpowering and domineering her entire life which might hint at why she divorced and has since remained single.

Through the constructions created by the bachelors, visual imagery, and their own words, Ali and Omarosa advance particular ways of expressing womanhood. Ali comes across to the bachelors as likeable while Omarosa is not. At elimination, the bachelors on *The Bachelorette* continue to sing Ali’s praises and are concerned about men not being there for her. The bachelors on *The Ultimate Merger* consistently state that they don’t believe Omarosa will end up with anyone. This continues the notion that Ali possesses the characteristic of the ideal woman while Omarosa maintains the controlling image of the Black lady.

Love Relationships

The last section of analysis contrasts ways in which Ali and Omarosa’s intimate scenes are constructed. While both of the women are dressed in bikinis and form-fitting dresses, the

opportunities that the audiences have to see them interact with the various bachelors are quite different. Prior to the season finale, Ali is shown cuddling and kissing various bachelors. During each of those scenes, they are both fully clothed and, most often, she is wrapped in a comforter or throw. If she is seen lying down in a bed with one of the bachelors, her comforter is wrapped tightly around her and he is either halfway on the bed or lying on the bed fully clothed. The bachelors live in a house a few miles from Ali so aside from one of the bachelors walking to her residence, there is no easy access to her. We learn during the season finale that there were no overnights until the final three men are selected. They are given an option of staying overnight in the Fantasy Suite while on the island of Bora Bora. Both bachelors, Roberto and Chris N. take advantage of the opportunity to “extend their date” with Ali. The scenes are carefully constructed to preserve Ali’s sexual purity. While the audience can guess what happened on the date, there was no opportunity to hear or view Ali transcend the ideal “White” womanhood model by having sexual relations with the men.

Omarosa, on the other hand, is shown in various scenes in sexual ways. She is shown straddling Ray in the episode, “Roughing It,” and kissing him. The audience can see them rolling around in the tent before the cameras pull out of the tent and sounds of her kissing and sighing can be heard. Also, her preoccupation with sex in each of the mediations and in her verbal banter with the men is highlighted throughout each episode. She asks Isaac if he can fit in a speedo; if Sterling needed to increase the size of his penis; and that she can feel Al B. Sure! . This preoccupation with penis size and a paycheck plays into the expectation that Black men are only acceptable if they are well-endowed and financially solvent.

A consistent theme throughout *The Ultimate Merger* is the emphasis on it being a “business” and that “love is a business.” She questions Darrell’s financial stability in the

mediation room. He listed on his dossier that he was a movie producer but in the meditation room, everyone learns that the last job he earned money from was “deejaying” a party. And, while it seemed that Darrell embellished his career, the admission that he has never dated a Black woman most likely sealed his fate. Before she shreds his prenuptial agreement, she explains to him that he doesn’t date Black women and she’s a “real” sister.

Even though Omarosa positions his elimination as a result of his dating preferences, it is clear that the lack of financial stability in Darrell’s employment history also carried some weight. At the very beginning of the season, all of the men signed prenuptial agreements. This act signaled to the audience that Omarosa must have some financial wealth or assets that need to be protected which, in turn, helped to construct her socioeconomic level. Specifically, Omarosa’s class affords her the expectation that her potential partner needs to have just as much, if not more, wealth as she has. This positions Omarosa as financially independent which places her in opposition to other Black women who do not share the same social class. Because of her wealth, Omarosa is able to demand that both needs – sexual and financial – have to be met in order for her to “close the deal.”

Both of these shows seek to sanction sexuality. *The Bachelorette* privileges white heterosexuality by repressing images and commentary that might be construed as overtly sexual. Instead, they emphasize romance and celibacy and place clear boundaries on how intimacy can be expressed. *The Ultimate Merger*, on the other hand, plays up the idea of the hyper-sexuality of Black women (and men) by placing promiscuous sex and sexuality front and center. It reinforces the heteronormative construct that posits White sexuality as the norm and Black sexuality as deviant.

In *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger*, Ali and Omarosa are constructed in different ways. We have an opportunity to get to know both Ali and Omarosa prior to meeting the bachelors. The bachelors and the bachelorettes also contribute to their respective images. Two of the most common phrases used to describe Ali and the experience of dating her is “fairy tale” and she looks like an “angel.” In contrast, Omarosa is described as overpowering and that sharing “deep intimate feelings” with her is “impossible in a hot tub” as well as constructed as overtly sexual. So, not only does *The Ultimate Merger* construct Omarosa as unconcerned about love, it also implies that she is disinterested in romance both of which are problematic given the idea that most canonical narratives of love are constructed as romanticized love stories. These frameworks help to reinforce racialized ways in which White and Black women perform gender and sexuality.

Through the course of the analysis, it is demonstrated that each woman is oppressed. While Ali’s image on the surface appears to be positive, it opens up broader questions for White woman and non-White women who do not conform to the idealized “White” womanhood model. And, for those that seem to fit within the boundaries of that stereotype, they have to deny or suppress their sexuality in order to maintain an unrealistic standard. With respect to the Black Lady and Jezebel controlling images, the representations performed by Omarosa undercuts the intricacies of heterogeneous Black women standpoints. These contrived representations erase the diversity in Black women’s sexuality, love relationships, and ability to have successful careers without becoming an emasculating “bitch.”

In addition to the stereotypical ways that womanhood is performed for both Ali and Omarosa, the men on the RTV programs negotiate their masculinity. In chapter four, my analysis will unpack the ways that hegemonic masculinity and Black masculinity is performed.

Specifically, I argue that the men in both of the RTV programs assert their masculinity in various ways that privilege patriarchal and hegemonic masculinity. I also argue that the bachelors on *The Ultimate Merger* typify the complexities of Black masculinity which illustrates that Omarosa's inability to find love or even a merger, has more to do with her role as a Black woman than the availability of eligible Black men. My analysis begins with Omarosa and the role of patriarchy in the strategic placement of men within each episode; then I uncover the privileging of hegemonic masculinity in *The Bachelorette*; and, finally, end with an unpacking of the ways that Black masculinity is negotiated on *The Ultimate Merger*.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRIVILEGING MASCULINITY

In traditional romantic love stories, a deserving White heterosexual young woman is swept off her feet by a dashing White young man. They live an opulent, perfect, “happily ever after” life and fade off into the sunset. In a traditional dating context, a heterosexual man courts a heterosexual woman and they go on dates with the “hope” of falling in love. The RTV program, *The Bachelor*, continues this contemporary twist on canonical narratives of love through its use of a singular (and deserving) bachelor who has his choice of beautiful women who fight and claw their way to the top – all in the name of “love.” By creating a television format that has a *woman* as the eligible bachelorette and a host of men vying for *her* attention, it would seem as if it is a reversal of roles or, in the least, a site of sexual freedom and women’s empowerment. By critically reading this format, however, one finds that this is not the case. Through the editing and construction of male characters, *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger* work to construct images that promote a particular way of viewing masculinity. I use the lens of critical race feminism to investigate how patriarchy is privileged through the set-up of the shows; hegemonic masculinity to unpack the ways that the men assert their masculinity on *The Bachelorette*; and studies of Black masculinity to help make sense of the construction of Black

men on *The Ultimate Merger*. I argue that both shows privilege, promote, and reify patriarchy and masculinity.

He Knows Best (The Ultimate Merger)

In *The Ultimate Merger*, Omarosa is depicted as needing the guidance of a man or father-figure in order to find a suitable mate. CRF posits that women of color occupy a space that is different from both Black men and White women. They (Black women) face gender and racial discrimination that cannot be adequately understood by focusing solely on race or solely on gender. CRF cannot be adequately understood because women of color often experience different forms of discrimination simultaneously (Limbert and Bullock 254; Collins 9). Because there is a double bind that exists for Omarosa in terms of race and gender, my analysis interrogates her relationship with Trump as well as her spiritual advisor, Dr. Bryant.²⁵ As such, Omarosa's experience in the "staging" of the RTV show is important to note given how the show positions Trump – an older White, upper-class male, who summons Omarosa to New York – and Bryant – an older Black Christian pastor who offers Omarosa guidance and advice for selecting a partner– as the only people capable of finding Omarosa a suitable mate.

In terms of the way that traditional patriarchy is understood, women are subordinate to men and those who have power in society are White middle-class men. During a particularly open moment with Javis, Omarosa makes the admission that her father was murdered. It is inferred that because of the unexpected death of her father, Omarosa assumes the position of the head of the household and takes on the responsibility of financially supporting and caring for her mother. Her role as the provider for her family undercuts the notion of familial patriarchy which sanctions the "manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and

²⁵ Dr. Jamal Harrison Bryant is a spiritual advisor and life coach for the Empowerment Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, MD. He serves as Omarosa's life coach and spiritual advisor on *The Ultimate Merger*.

children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general” (Lerner 239). The absence of her father makes Trump’s “stand-in” as a paternal figure interesting. Omarosa’s masculinized persona – aggressive, domineering, and a provider for her family – indicates that Trump is needed in order to correct the “natural” order of a gendered society.

At the beginning of the first episode, Trump makes it known that he “made” her on *The Apprentice*. Her success is predicated on his authority – he hired her on his show to compete. Although she did not win, she was asked back as a guest on *Celebrity Apprentice* at his behest. The show also demonstrates that despite her education and “real world” work experience as a staffer in the White House, she *owes* her status, visibility, and celebrity to Trump. And, for that she should be grateful. In fact, several times she talks about how close she and Trump are, yet throughout every vignette that she is viewed talking with him, it is in his office or over the phone. When Omarosa is in his office, he is seated behind a massive desk and a handshake is the only form of personal contact made between them. This “business-like” demeanor that Trump displays towards Omarosa demonstrates her usefulness as a commodity or business transaction more so than a “warm” friend. This is also reminiscent of the Black female body as being a commodity to White men.²⁶

This connection of Black female bodies as a commodity and Omarosa’s placement on both *The Apprentice* and *The Ultimate Merger* as part of a business plan, ties into the old notions of Black women (and men) as merely physical beings. Historically, Black female bodies were

²⁶ Although the premise of *The Apprentice* is based on the intellectual capability of the contestants, Omarosa was most often constructed as a conniving and domineering strategist. Her over-the-top personality on *The Apprentice* played into the stereotyped notions of successful Black women as overly assertive and incapable of having a man because “they either have no time or they fail to understand how to treat them” (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 9)The overwhelming amount of sexual language used by Omarosa (and others) to describe her and the situations she finds herself in throughout the season of *The Ultimate Merger* reinforces the idea of a sexualized Black body which, in turn, makes the case that even with success, Black women are still reduced to sexual objects.

bought and sold to produce offspring with other slaves, used as concubines for the pleasure of their master or their master's sons, and, in Sarah Bartman's case, as an object of gaze of White colonizers.²⁷ Contemporary scholarship continues to interrogate the commodification of Black female bodies through the analysis of media representations of Black women on RTV programs like *America's Next Top Model* (Joseph 242; Hasinoff 324). As such, the branding of Omarosa as a Trump commodity positions her as *his* product in which he has complete autonomy. This reinforces the idea that White men have the right to control the use and misuse of Black bodies.

Even the use of names demonstrates Omarosa's subordinated position. Throughout their conversation in his office, he uses her first name and she uses "Mr. Trump." This greeting, including the formal handshake, is played at the beginning of the opening credits of each episode. The repetitiveness of their formal relationship reinforces their respective positions – him as the authoritarian (who is owed a sense of respect) and her as the subordinate (who must provide that respect). In addition to the way that the opening credits are constructed and because Omarosa "plays" her part, their initial conversation in the office continues to place Trump as the patriarch who has an unquestioning right to tell Omarosa who she can date.

That is, he dominates the conversation during the entire interaction with Omarosa. He explains to her that he has selected 12 bachelors that he has pre-screened as individuals he feels are eligible partners for her. Without hesitation, Omarosa takes the briefcase with the dossiers and flies to Las Vegas. Missing from this storyline is any mention of a meeting where it appears that Omarosa has asked Trump for help to meet men. Her presence on the show implies her acceptance of his offer but not that she explicitly asked for *his* help. Furthermore, there is no discussion in which Omarosa provides Trump with a list of qualities that she would expect to

²⁷ Sarah Bartman was an African woman whose body was objectified by European audiences who viewed the Black body as deviant. (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 136-137).

have in her potential life partner. In fact, once the audience has an opportunity to meet the bachelors, it is apparent that *they* do not even know who they are meeting. Despite her inability to vocalize her choices, she “trusts him” to put together a group of men that would meet her needs. This gives the impression that her failure to find a partner is because she lacked the proper judgment to know who is right for her and that with a male’s guidance she will find her perfect mate.

In addition to Trump’s seeming ability to know what Omarosa needs and wants in a partner (or more accurately, *deserves*), the way that the mediation sessions are arranged continue the idea that, as a Black woman, Omarosa is incapable of deciding on her own who would make the best partner. At the end of each episode, the men go to the mediation room to determine whether they will survive elimination. In each episode, Omarosa is accompanied by a man during the mediation sessions to help her decide who to eliminate. In the first mediation, she uses inclusive language. She explains to the bachelors that “we will decide who will go and who will stay. I have a difficult decision to make and here to help me make that decision is my most trusted spiritual advisor, Dr. Jamal H. Bryant.” This admission tells the audience that she is relying on the guidance of Bryant for assistance on deciding her mate. Again, Omarosa has been framed as a woman who lacks the ability to understand the complexities of relationships and men; therefore she needs the guidance of a man to help “make sense of it all.”

This strategic placement of a man in the elimination rounds alongside Omarosa is different than the elimination rounds in *The Bachelorette*. In each of the six episodes analyzed, Bryant, Wallace,²⁸ Wornoff,²⁹ and McClain³⁰ accompany Omarosa in the mediation room. The

²⁸ George Wallace is an American comedian and actor. For more information, see: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0908648/#Actor>.

²⁹ Nick Wornoff was a former contestant on the first season of *The Apprentice*. For more information, see: <http://www.nbc.com/the-apprentice/>.

primary figure is Bryant. Because of church obligations, he is temporarily replaced by George Wallace, an older Black comedian, and Nick Wornoff, a White former contestant on *The Apprentice*. When he returns, another former White male contestant from *The Apprentice*, Troy McClain, joins him in the mediation room. Every deliberation made by Ali, on the other hand, is made on her own. There is no additional sidekick to help her finalize her decisions. This distinction subtly implies the idea that the inclusion of men in the elimination round may not be Omarosa's gender that renders her incapable of making a "sound" decision, but her race. The implication of Omarosa's race being a factor in her inability to make good decisions warrants a closer exploration of Bryant's role in her decision-making process.

As a Black Christian pastor, Bryant is uniquely positioned as having the authority to direct the flow of the elimination round along with the interrogation of the bachelors. Historically, in Black communities, the Black church served as a source of Black uplift and strength. Because the church is predominantly headed by men, it also helped to shape the patriarchal attitudes that subordinate women (Ward 496; Clawson and Clark 213). Bryant's presence and active involvement in guiding Omarosa's decisions is considered appropriate given the historical role of ministers as a father-figure and head of the "church family."

One example of Bryant's role in Omarosa's decision-making process is during the first mediation. Bryant takes control of the mediation by stating that "there are two more chairs to be filled." Michael, one of the bachelors, raises his hand and says that he's "up for a challenge." He responds, "That's appropriate." Despite Omarosa's statement at the beginning of the mediation in which she states that she has not made her decision, it appears that Bryant has decided that Michael should be one of the men selected for elimination. Once Michael is seated, Bryant

³⁰ Troy McClain was another former contestant on the first season of *The Apprentice*. He and Omarosa formed a friendship while being on the show. For more information, see: <http://www.nbc.com/the-apprentice/>.

addresses Michael about his behavior on the group date with Omarosa. By talking to Michael about his “behavior,” Bryant is exerting his older, affluent status over the younger Michael. Bryant, whose race [Black], gender, education, and occupational status position him as a paternal figure, directs the flow of the conversation.

Similarly, when the final person, Darrell, is asked to be seated in the O-chair, Bryant again takes the lead and asks Darrell why he believes that he is in the chair. Bryant – not Omarosa – leads the interrogation. She passively sits while Bryant grills Darrell. This demonstrates that he is in control because he directs the flow and pace of mediation. For each of the mediation sessions that he is a part of, Bryant is always the last person to call the session to close. Omarosa’s willingness to let him guide the elimination rounds may, at first glance, seem contradictory to the aggressive and over-bearing construct that has been offered up as a description of her character. However, given Bryant’s status as a Black Christian leader and the historical roots of patriarchy within the Black church, Omarosa’s deference to Bryant comes across as an appropriate and expected response.

From the very first episode, Omarosa is positioned as subordinated to Trump and to Bryant, both older and affluent men. Despite being older and White, he determines that he has the right and sensibilities to select a group of men for a Black woman with whom it is unclear that any authentic or personal relationship has been established. By Trump’s declaration, he and Omarosa made “a lot of money together.” That speaks to an understanding of what sells from a business perspective but it does not indicate that he has any knowledge of the heterogeneity of Black women or love relationships. Trump’s lack of knowledge about Black women experiences and their love relationships, speaks to the preoccupation with generating money rather than a sincere effort to find Omarosa a mate. Furthermore, the entire framing of the show as a merger

between Omarosa and a bachelor points to not just Trump's complicity in the show being solely about business, but also Omarosa's. This complicity by both Omarosa and Trump is significant given the notion that RTV competitive dating programs are constructed to be contemporary canonical narratives of love and *The Ultimate Merger* seems to operate as anything but a canonical narrative of love. Bryant, who is a Black man, may understand the diversity of Black communities, but still exerts his position as an older Christian minister to take over the direction and flow of the mediation sessions while helping to decide the fate of the men. Bryant and Trump's similarity in positioning themselves as patriarchal figures is expected because of their shared maleness and adoption of Eurocentric values.³¹ Both of the men work to establish Omarosa as "helpless" without their wise and expert opinions.

Because of Omarosa's previous RTV experience on *The Apprentice*, it is unlikely that she needs the men to help make her decisions. In fact, the premise of *The Apprentice* focused on her intellect and business skills. Omarosa positioned herself in strategic ways to win competitions and to form alliances which makes her participation in shaping her character as "helpless" interesting. Omarosa's Black Lady controlling image should theoretically preclude her from being dependent on any man because she is so independent which makes this performance seem contrived. Her collusion into the performance of helplessness could potentially be a way for Omarosa to "play up" her femininity to offset the Black Lady image by adopting aspects of heteronormative [White] feminine ideals such as needing the protection and guidance of a male figure.

The emphasis of re-centering masculinity in *The Ultimate Merger* creates an opportunity for particular definitions of manhood to exist. While my previous examples were limited to

³¹ Griffin examined the influence of Black men on the oppression of Black women through their adoption of White patriarchal values which include the subordination of women, authoritarianism, and intellectual superiority.

patriarchal constructions of manhood, further analysis is needed in order to completely understand the ways in which certain forms of masculinity are endorsed by *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger*. In the next section, I explore the ways that the men on *The Bachelorette* are accepted or diminished by their conformity or nonconformity to hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity (The Bachelorette)

The *Bachelorette* appears to be a show that features a leading woman who has the opportunity to date a group of eligible bachelors. Despite the control that Ali appears to have in terms of selection, the men on *The Bachelorette* are accepted or rejected based on their conformity or nonconformity to hegemonic masculinity.³² By re-centering what it means to be a “man,” *The Bachelorette* sanctions approved performances of masculinity.

Trujillo defines hegemonic masculinity as having five characteristics – physical force and control; occupational achievement; familial patriarchy; frontiersmanship; and heterosexuality (291). He bases the five themes on a study he conducted in which he analyzed the media representations of baseball player Nolan Ryan.³³ The first theme, physical force and control, relates to the function of sports in American culture.

The second characteristic of masculinity – occupational achievement – refers to career success. According to Trujillo, “masculinity is hegemonic when it is defined through occupational achievement in an industrial capitalistic society” (291). This reinforces the gendered notions of careers. Men are considered the “breadwinners” therefore it is their responsibility to be able to provide for their family. Their success hinges on his ability to find work outside of the home. Agreeing with the existence of this theme of masculinity, Messner defines the “breadwinner ethic” as the perceived responsibility of the men to provide for their

³² Hegemonic masculinity is defined by Connell as “the culturally idealized form of masculine character” (83).

³³ Nolan Ryan was a former Major League baseball pitcher. He is the all-time strikeout leader. For more information, see: http://www.baseballlibrary.com/ballplayers/player.php?name=nolan_ryan_1947.

families financially (205). By having successful careers and financially supporting their families, men are fulfilling the culturally accepted idealized form of masculinity.

The third theme of masculinity is familial patriarchy. Trujillo defines manifestations of patriarchy through the labeling of men as “breadwinners,” “family protectors,” and “strong father figures” (291). Because of the imbalance of gender roles, men who are deemed as “sensitive father[s]” are elevated to an even higher level of masculinity (Trujillo 291). This imbalance that allows men to take part in a nurturing role without having to sacrifice his legitimacy as a man speaks to the historical inequities in gender roles.

The daring and romanticized frontiersmanship is the fourth theme of masculinity. The frontiersman of yesteryear is the cowboy (Trujillo 291). Based on the construction of the cowboy in film, literature, and advertising, only certain men can fill that role. The idea of the frontiersman also connects to the idea of expansion into wild and uncivilized places that need to be tamed. This emphasis on taming bodies and land was drawn from Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” (Holland 42).³⁴

The final theme of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality. Hegemonic male sexuality is defined as being firmly heterosexual. Trujillo extends this argument by stating that hegemonic masculinity is defined “through [exclusive] social relationships with men and...sexual relationships with women...and it requires [that they are] not effeminate in physical appearance or mannerisms; not having relationships with men that are sexual or overly intimate; and [being successful] in sexual relationships with women” (292). In a socially constructed world, the idealized man has to be clearly defined as heterosexual with no hint of sexual ambiguity.

³⁴ Rudyard Kipling. "The White Man's Burden." *McClure's Magazine (1893-1926)* 1 Feb. 1899: American Periodicals Series Online, ProQuest.

For the purposes of my study, I focus on the constructions of hegemonic masculinity of three of the bachelors in *The Bachelorette* – Justin, Jonathan, and Roberto (see Appendix A). Through their constructed images, behavior, and relationships with other men as well as Ali on the RTV program, I argue that their characters demonstrate the utility of exploring three of the five themes of hegemonic masculinity – physical force and control; occupational achievement; and heterosexuality – and how they are accepted or not accepted based on their conformity or nonconformity.

Justin’s White, working-class background automatically enables him entry as an exemplar of White masculinity. Although his form of wrestling is considered entertainment, images of him in the ring tossing men around and slamming his opponents’ heads onto the wrestling mat and the brute force (even though fake) with which he performs seems to reflect the physical force and control tenet of hegemonic masculinity.

In episode 601, Ali confesses that she hopes that she is “smart” enough to recognize whether or not the bachelors are there for the right reasons. Throughout Justin’s time on the show, he is accused of using *The Bachelorette* as an opportunity to further his career. When he meets with Ali for the first time inside the bachelors’ house in the premiere episode, he shows her his t-shirt “Rated R” which is his wrestling name. His wearing of the t-shirt underneath his suit is immediately met with suspicion by the other men. If he were indeed successful, there would be no reason for him to wear paraphernalia that promoted his wrestling career. This violated the tenet of occupational success.

An important part of heterosexuality, as it relates to hegemonic masculinity, is the social relationship with men and the sexual relationship (and success) with women. In Justin’s case, his bond with the men is never really established. In the very beginning, the men begin to suspect

that Justin's intentions are dubious. Rather than trying to salvage a relationship with the men (in terms of male-bonding), Justin diminishes their importance. His claim that he "isn't there to make friends... [He's] there to win Ali's heart" prevents him from creating a relationship with the men in the house. He is considered an outsider who does not have the privilege of being among the men in the "good ol' boys club." Justin even tries to feign tears while explaining to the men that his desire to be with Ali is true. Not impressed or convinced, the other men conspire to get rid of him. Despite their inability to get Ali to see the "truth" about Justin, a phone call from one of the producers of the show, decides his fate. Ali, along with the audience, learns that Justin has a girlfriend and that the only reason he was on the show was to improve his career. Armed with the information, Ali confronts Justin but he walks away without ever telling her the truth. In spite of his race and class status giving him entry into what is commonly accepted as the ideal man, his character (or lack thereof) in due course exposes him as being the antithesis of what it means to be a "man."

Jonathan is depicted through images and relationships with others as diminutive and "not a real man." Even Jonathan talks to the camera about his size and how small he is compared to the other bachelors. When asked to don a pair of male bikini bottoms, Jonathan does not want to come out of the dressing room. When he does, the other men laugh at his bathing suit. In a conversation with the camera, Jonathan quips that he is convinced that the [male bikini] bottoms that he is wearing are actually the bottoms to Ali's bikini. Jonathan's small stature prevents Jonathan from being framed as having any type of physical force or strength or even any sexual appeal. Jonathan is never pictured on camera playing sports. He is shown surrounded by men who are taller than him. And, most of his images where he is standing alone show him the shadows which call even more attention to his small stature.

In terms of the relationships he has with the men in the house and Ali, Jonathan comes across as young, impotent, and effeminate. Craig M. squeezes into Jonathan's clothes and asks where his "little brother is at." Although Craig M. is considered average in size, he appears to almost be capable of bursting the seams on Jonathan's shirt and jacket. The constant teasing causes Jonathan to go to Ali and confide in how "dangerous" Craig M. is. Rather than working it out "man to man" as Craig M. says, he "sneaks behind his back" to "tell on him." This reduces Jonathan's actions to those of a child who tattle-tells on someone who is picking on him. While this does not draw the ire of the other men in the house, it certainly damages the relationship between Jonathan and Ali. This opens up an opportunity for Ali to feel sorry for Jonathan which makes him fail in his relationship with her. Additionally, in another scene, he is so nervous about kissing Ali that he is unable to complete the kissing scene.³⁵ Taking pity on him, Ali salvages the scene by kissing him. His inability to be sexually successful with Ali in this scene, along with his small stature and child-like behavior, depicts Jonathan as not conforming to the tenets of hegemonic masculinity. And, because he does not conform, he is unable to compete against the men to win Ali. He is eliminated from the running.

The final man analyzed from *The Bachelor* is also the winner of the RTV show. Roberto is Latino which upon first glance would seem to exclude him from entry into White masculinity. However, the ways in which he and his culture are framed, gives him not just entry into the culturally idealized notion of what it means to be a man but also the "winner" of Ali's heart. Roberto's fair skin, working-class background, professional sports career, and carefully constructed heterosexuality allow his entry into a space that normally excludes minorities.

³⁵ The men and Ali participate in a video shoot in which they each play a scene with Ali. In this scene, Jonathan is teased by the men, which only increases his anxiety. Ali notices his anxiety and the teasing by the other men and gives him what she refers to as a "pretty hot" kiss.

As a former college and professional baseball player, Roberto symbolizes hegemonic masculinity. Trujillo asserts that “no single institution in American culture has influenced our sense of masculinity more than sport” (292). In a visit to his hometown of Tampa, Florida, Roberto meets Ali at his former college. He takes her to the baseball field where he surprises her with a jersey (that his name on the back and college number) along with a baseball card. This is significant for several reasons. While other bachelors talked about their athletic prowess and working out, Roberto had proof of his ability to not just play baseball, but to play baseball well. Inviting her to his old baseball field gave him (and his athleticism) legitimacy. And, by placing his name on the back of the jersey that he gives to Ali also demonstrates ownership of Ali. This is notable because a part of performing masculinity is the subordination of women and children (Trujillo 291).

From the very beginning, Roberto’s culture is romanticized. The very first time that he meets Ali, he speaks to her in Spanish.³⁶ Being careful not to privilege Spanish above American English, Roberto makes light of his name and her initial failure at pronouncing it. He tells her “Roberto...Rober-toe, whatever you want to call me.” This re-centers White masculinity in the sense that he recognizes his name is not “normal” or “natural” in American English and, in essence, apologizes for it and accommodates her. Any time his culture is made visible on the show, they play salsa music, he (and his family) teach her dance steps, and emphasize the closeness of family. His father also helps to re-center White masculinity through his insistence that Ali not worry about her career. He tells her that Roberto has been successful and his career

³⁶ He tells her in Spanish that he wants to teach her how to dance. Rather than explain what it means, he tells Ali to find him in the house and he will tell her.

should be the most important in their relationship. This exchange between Roberto's father and Ali reaffirms gendered roles in marriages and careers.³⁷

In terms of his relationship with the other men in the house, Roberto is included. Because of his status as being the only minority, it can be inferred that he was not perceived as a threat. Prior to winning in this season, no other minority has won on *The Bachelorette* series. So, it is plausible that the men did not believe that Roberto was ever an actual part of the competition. Whenever the men did mention Roberto, they referenced his dancing with Ali or speaking Spanish – again, they romanticize his culture. In spite of their romanticizing of his culture, Roberto is invited in as an exception to the traditional “all White boys’ club” through his love of sports and his collusion with the men in confronting Justin.

The final aspect of heterosexuality is Roberto's success at a sexual relationship with Ali. She talks about him being “hot” and “sexy.” She is shown kissing and cuddling with him and she selects him as her bachelor. All of these signal his success of a heterosexual relationship with a woman. There is no sexual ambiguity – he is an athlete, has a successful insurance company (that his father alludes to), maintains a social relationship with men that is built on respect and male-bonding, and has a successful relationship with Ali. He embodies what it means to be a man and is rewarded with the opportunity to propose marriage to Ali.

Justin, Jonathan, and Roberto all conform to particular meanings of masculinity. In some cases, as in Justin and Jonathan, they violate what it means to be masculine and are “punished” through their exposure as a liar and opportunist or through their elimination. Because Roberto

³⁷ In Latino families, there is an emphasis on paternalism which positions the male as the head of the household to protect and support the family. Paternalism, which is an element of patriarchy, “has been at the root of gender relations” and it is tied to economic support and “the protection of the family...while women are cast as wives and mothers” in Latino households (Shaw 87).

performs accepted notions of hegemonic masculinity (despite being a minority), he is given a token status as acceptable to dominant society.

Negotiating Blackness

In *The Ultimate Merger*, the men have to negotiate their Black masculinity. Historically, the construction of “Black masculinity in popular culture not only illustrates negative representations of Black men” but also prevents Black people from “having control over the images that represents them” and it is a “cultural form that creates, reproduces, and sustains racial ideologies” (Brown “I Am Who I Am” 68). Because of the lack of control that Black people have over their own images in popular media, particular stereotypes are privileged. The overwhelming and prevalent image of Black men is “that they are aggressive, angry, prone to violence and sexually aggressive” (Brown “I Am Who I Am” 67; Orbe 32). These stereotypes not only affect the way that Black men are viewed but can also potentially impact their relationships with Black women. “Black men are seen as having large sexual appetites and being ultra endowed to perform sexually, but psychologically too immature to have meaningful relationships” (Brown “I Am Who I Am” 75). If this premise is true, then canonical narratives of love are unavailable to Black men or Black women since Black men are incapable of giving love. Brown adds also that “covert [practices of constructing Black people] as being sexually driven people who do not have loving and mature relationships [gives society and especially] dominant culture [the right to perceive] Black people as sex-crazed buffoons who are on public display” (“Allen Iverson as America’s Most Wanted”). Because these negative stereotypes of Black men are embedded within dominant society, Black masculinity is in a constant state of struggle. “U.S. Black men encounter contradictory expectations regarding manhood” (Collins 156). They are expected to have all of the trappings of manhood afforded to White men in terms

of power, financial success, and providing for their families, but institutionalized racism prevents them from being able to completely fulfill those expectations (*I am a Man*).³⁸ Despite the negative stereotypes found in RTV programs by Dubrofsky, Dubrofsky and Hardy, Pozner, and Schroeder, *The Ultimate Merger* takes a different approach and highlights the heterogeneity of Black masculinity. Borrowing from Trujillo's characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, Black masculinity deviates from White masculinity with respect to race. And, because Trujillo identifies five characteristics of masculinity, any number of these can be applied outside of White sports figures.

Black masculinity has been a site of struggle because of the contradictory images on television and in communities. Dyson, discussing the impact of *The Cosby Show*, says that "Cosby brought to America in an ingenious fashion...the notion that [Black] people are a diverse community" (229). He also alludes to the idea that it is "difficult to get the mainstream to identify with complex [Black] representations of reality, niche, or otherwise" which speaks to the persistence of Black stereotypes in popular media (Dyson 242). Within Black communities, however, there are a variety of men who do not fulfill the typecast images that are readily packaged for consumption on television programs. Hurt, in his documentary *I am a Man*, tries to define Black masculinity through the help of other Black men that he interviews in academia and in Black communities. Recurring throughout the documentary, the men state that Black masculinity is having a sense of responsibility, being honest, having values, integrity, a willingness to do something for the community and that manhood is a spectrum (*I am a Man*). They also point out that "being a man is not about the number of children [he] fathers or having a large number of women;" it is "predicated on being employed, taking care of [his] children, and taking care of [his] wife" (*I am a Man*). By being nurturers, protectors, and providers, Black men

³⁸ *I am a Man* is a documentary filmed and produced by Byron Hurt.

contradict the stereotype privileged in popular culture that they lack the psychological capacity and maturity to be in successful relationships. In *The Ultimate Merger*, the bachelors exemplify the diversity of Black manhood through their financial success, relationship with their children, and their expressed desire for intimacy with Omarosa. In the case of the bachelors on *The Ultimate Merger*, they come from a variety of occupational fields. While there are individuals who are a part of the sports and entertainment industries, there are exceptions. Represented on *The Ultimate Merger* are an attorney, a foreign currency trader, a massage therapist, a fashion designer, a model/author, and an entrepreneur. By having a variety of occupations represented, *The Ultimate Merger* gives the audience an opportunity to view Black men in ways that contradict the stereotypical sources of success (such as entertainment and sports). The foci of this analysis are the ways in which the bachelors, Lyle, Javis, and Ray negotiate Black masculinity.

Lyle is a successful attorney. As such, he is asked by Dr. Bryant to review the prenuptial agreements and explain what it means for the bachelors. Relishing in the attention, Lyle exclaims that he will “make sure they are alright.” His occupation not only affords him the opportunity to make sure that the bachelors’ interests are protected but also helps to construct Lyle’s image. Throughout the season, his ability to debate shots a large part of his masculinity.

A component of Lyle’s image construction is that he is combative. In the “Verbal Combat” episode, Lyle wins the challenge of debating Michael on the health care reform law. As a result of winning, he is given the opportunity to debate Omarosa. Because both of their personalities can be considered domineering and aggressive, a majority of the debate is spent talking over each other. In a candid discussion with the other men, Lyle says, “If you are a debater, it is about just running your opponent into the ground to the point where you get him off track with giving him a point. That’s what she was doing.” While he was able to successfully

defend against Michael in the debate, he acknowledges that Omarosa beat him in the challenge. But rather than seeing her argumentative skill as an asset, he questions how that would translate in a relationship. He explains to the other men, “If you’re a brother and you’re dealing with a woman like that, you’re gonna be like ‘yo!’” He goes further to say that as a man, “You have to stand up or she’s gonna walk all over you.” Asserting one’s masculinity, in Lyle’s opinion, is to have control over conversations and not allow a woman (in this case, Omarosa) to dominate. Lyle’s response is not unusual given the assertion by an interviewee in Hurt’s documentary that “there is a pecking order, so we [Black men] have to maintain it by keeping our foot on someone else’s [a Black woman’s] neck” (*I am a Man*). By implying that Omarosa’s aggressive debating skills should take a back seat for the success of a potential relationship, *The Ultimate Merger* subtly encourages Black women who want a successful Black man, to conceal their intellect.

In another episode, “Champs and Chumps,” Lyle and four other men leave Trump Towers for an excursion on the town. Their exit is discovered by Trump security and Omarosa holds a mediation to grill the men that left without permission. Prior to the mediation, in a one-on-one confessional with the camera, Lyle does not shirk responsibility for his actions or the consequences that he potentially faces as a result of leaving. He states, “I was aware that we had been caught leaving the night before. We’re gonna have to face the music.” During the mediation, Michael questions Lyle’s integrity by insinuating that because Lyle is an attorney, he cannot be trusted and that Lyle was the only man to leave the hotel room. Rather than allow Michael to disparage his character, Lyle responds by questioning Michael’s manhood. He tells Omarosa to “look at how he is dressed” and that “[Michael] is a clown.” In the background, the audience can hear one of the bachelors say that Michael “threw [Lyle] under the bus.” Lyle admits that he was one of the four men that left and apologizes for breaking the rules. He takes

responsibility for his part but does not share the names of any of the other men, including the name of an undisclosed fifth person. Not “selling out” the other bachelors and apologizing, as Omarosa put it, positions Lyle as a man of personal accountability and integrity. Michael’s assertion that Lyle was the only one to leave (despite evidence proving the contrary) made Michael look weak and like a “snitch.”³⁹ This brief exchange between Michael and Lyle creates the opportunity for Lyle to protect his character and assert his masculinity.

While there are moments that Lyle comes across as domineering and combative, the audience also has an opportunity to see a “softer” side of his personality. In the episode, “Mommy Issues,” is apparent that, at some point, Lyle discussed with the other bachelors that he has a troubled relationship with his mother. While Omarosa’s mother visits the bachelors, Lyle starts to cry. Isaac comforts him by placing his hand on his shoulder and Ray tells Omarosa’s mother that she “needs to talk to him because he has an issue with his mom.” Turning to Lyle, Ray continues, “And, I think you need to talk about it, Lyle.” What is particularly interesting about this scene is that Omarosa’s mother remarks that “there is no better love than a man and his mother” and that “sometimes it can be hard [to express emotions] because, you know, guys...they gotta be strong.” Understanding the dichotomy of either being perceived as weak or strong in Black communities, Mama O acknowledges that Black men are in a difficult position.⁴⁰ Lyle shares with her (and the audience) that he fears for the safety of his mother. The audience learns that despite Lyle’s individual success, his mother is addicted to drugs. He says that, “Every day, even when I am here, I think about getting *that* call...she is a woman that takes care of everyone else but can’t take care of herself...and every day I fear that I’m gonna get the call that my mother is dead.” Seeing Lyle’s breakdown, as Al B. Sure! intimates, gives the audience

³⁹ Al B. Sure! says during the “Champs and Chumps” mediation that his loyalty to her does not involve snitching on other men.

⁴⁰ The bachelors call Omarosa’s mother “Mama O” during the “Mommy Issues” episode.

an opportunity to see a Black men who is concerned about the welfare of his family and his willingness to disclose his fears allows the other men to be open about their own relationships with their mothers. Al B. Sure! states that “it struck a chord with everyone” and made them “want to check on their mothers.” Opening up about his family gives the audience an alternative image of Lyle which helps to illustrate the complexities of Black masculinity.

Lyle’s insistence on forming a friendship before developing a physical relationship also helps to dispel the stereotype that Black men are sexually aggressive. In an elimination round, Lyle makes no excuses about “placing the physical part last.” He explains that “this is about a merger and the ultimate merger is more than physical.” Omarosa also tells Lyle that she heard about his visit with her mother and that he could have shared that with her. Lyle responds that “it’s not the kind of information that I am going to talk about in a nightclub or a hot tub or while giving you a backrub.” In “Roughin It,” Omarosa questions Lyle’s love for her. Lyle appears to be honest when he says they (the bachelors) came into the competition “blind...not knowing who she was or if there would be a connection.” Omarosa then asks why he has not taken their relationship to the next level. Lyle answers that they had only been on three dates and “they [the bachelors] may move at different pace than him... [and that he] could not speak for them.” He also points to her kissing other men as one of the reasons that he cannot have “lovey dovey feelings” about her. Addressing the pastor, he says that he makes no apologies for putting sexual intimacy last. He adds that “we aren’t talking about a booty call... [the merger] is a prize.” Lyle alludes to the previous dates as not being romantic or conducive to sharing intimate feelings. His explanation also indicates that he wants something more than a sexual relationship with her. This exchange positions Omarosa as the sexual aggressor and Lyle as the person more concerned with romance and love.

Javis, an entrepreneur, has a different background than the other men on the show. In the episode, “Verbal Combat,” Omarosa visits the bachelors in order to spend one-on-one time with a few of the men that she has not had an opportunity to get to know. She asks Javis about the hardest thing he has ever faced in life. He reveals to Omarosa that he spent seven years in federal prison for guns, drugs, and armed robbery. In a one-on-one interview with the camera, Javis states that he was sentenced to eight years and one month for an armed bank robbery charge. Javis shares that what he “regrets most are the people that he hurt, [his] family, [his] friends, and those people that believed in [him].” He continues that most importantly, was the impact it had on his son. He articulates that he “cannot put into words the hurt and the regret that [he] has for leaving [his] son out there to the world.” Javis acknowledges that he made an error in judgment that cost him not only his freedom but also limited his ability to protect his child. This admission by Javis allows the audience to see a Black man who has made a mistake but is acutely aware of what that mistake cost him. His self-made success as an owner of a record label and a moving and storage company demonstrates the possibility of redemption. And, while Javis acknowledges that what he did in the past is a part of him, he contends that it is not the complete picture of who he is as a man.

It is clear in another episode, “Blizzard,” that Javis holds the idea of family in a high regard. In a one-on-one interview with the camera, Javis states that he was “happy to learn that Omarosa came from a large family because [he] came from a large family too.” He believes that, based on their similarity in terms of family size, it gives them an immediate connection. On a group date with Michael, Sterling, and Javis, Omarosa asks the bachelors if they have children. Javis discloses that he has two children, ages fourteen and one. Omarosa tries to clarify his response by asking him if that means that he “has a baby mama from last year.” Javis responds,

“Such is a term that I don’t use.” Preferring to use the term, “the mother of his child,” Javis privileges a more positive image of unwed mothers. By correcting Omarosa, he also shows his commitment to not allowing anyone to denigrate his family or extensions of his family.

Throughout Javis’ time on *The Ultimate Merger*, the bachelors and Omarosa talk about how quiet he is and that he is hesitant. He is never shown being boisterous or jockeying for position next to Omarosa. Because he does not proactively pursue Omarosa, it encourages her to create the opinion that Javis is more of a follower. In the mediation room during the “Mommy Issues” episode, Omarosa asks Javis to explain his contribution in the failed challenge. He responds that he was responsible for the fragrance and collaborated with the AI B. Sure! and Isaac on the remaining parts of the competition. Following his response, Omarosa questions Javis’ ability to be a leader. Explaining that the challenge “wasn’t about finding the weakest link,” Omarosa states that it was about her finding the “strongest person” for her. Because he did not demonstrate leadership skills in the task or assertiveness in their interactions, Omarosa eliminates him. After checking out of Trump Towers, Javis shows understanding when he discusses the fact that Omarosa felt that he was not as committed to the process. However, Javis also deduces that Omarosa will not end up with anyone because “she’s found a flaw in every person and continuously brings that flaw up.” His assertion that all of the men left are great men indicates that he is a team player and that he has bonded with the men but it also places the blame for Omarosa’s inability to find a partner squarely on her shoulders.

Ray, an up and coming recording artist, is the last man left at the end of the series. Throughout the time that he is on *The Ultimate Merger*, his image is constructed as interested in romance and winning Omarosa’s heart. From the beginning of his interactions with Omarosa, he refers to her as his wife. In the “Roughin’ It” episode, Ray invites Omarosa into his tent. After

sharing some kisses, Ray tells Omarosa that he wants to be the man in her life. Their chemistry, according to Ray, is undeniable. In a one-on-one interview with the camera, Omarosa shares that she feels that Ray is sincere and there to win her heart. In that same episode, Omarosa asks if Ray is always romantic or whether it is calculated. Ray responds, “I’m a hopeless romantic...I saw the bonfire there. I saw the stars. And, I’m a country boy.” Rather than being framed as purely interested in sex, Ray is framed as romantic who creates a contradictory image from the commonly held stereotype of Black men being overly concerned with sex and incapable of demonstrating love or romance.

He is framed in a positive image throughout the season; however, Ray discloses during the mediation session that he is still married but going through a divorce. He explains that when he initially started the show, he had no idea that he would develop feelings for Omarosa or that he would fall in love with her. He also states that he “doesn’t blame her if she sends him home.” In a difficult position, Ray steps up to the plate and takes responsibility for being in his current state. Ray’s response and his body language makes him come across as sincere and honest despite the dishonest way in which he withheld his marital status. Al B. Sure! tells Ray that he has respect for him because it took courage for him to “come clean.” Ray explains that there were intimate times that he shared with Omarosa when he wanted to tell her but that he did not want to ruin the moment

The Ultimate Merger shows a variety of men from various backgrounds that can be argued as a reflection of the diversity found in Black communities. The show illustrates the numerous ways that Black men have achieved financial success. It also helps to exemplify the range of emotions and personalities that Black men have. While previous RTV competitive dating programs played on stereotypes, *The Ultimate Merger* did not fall into that overdone

constructed view of Black men. It shows each of the bachelors negotiating their masculinity and defining what *that* masculinity meant for them.

There are implications for both Ali and Omarosa. By sanctioning a particular form of White masculinity, *The Bachelorette* continues to promote an image of manhood that Ali must accept. In Ali's case, she selects Roberto as her bachelor. Normally, as a minority, he would not be included in what would be considered the culturally accepted "idealized man." However, the show works hard to construct his image as close to idealized as possible for a minority. *The Bachelorette* helps to explain how Roberto was given entry into the "good ol' boys' club." The fact that Roberto is fair-skinned, plays down his ethnicity in every way except when he is trying to be romantic, and is a former athlete gives him access. It also implies to the audience that only certain types of minorities are able to get the "girl of their dreams" (which is a code phrase for the idealized White woman) and it hinges on their ability to fully assimilate into dominant American culture.

In terms of patriarchy and negotiating Black masculinity, *The Ultimate Merger* advances the notion that Black men and Black women are incapable of having loving relationships. Omarosa becomes the scapegoat for the reason why Black men and women cannot experience canonical narratives of love. *The Ultimate Merger* shows the bachelors and the range of emotions and personalities that gives them a feeling of authenticity. With Omarosa, the audience does not have an option to peel back the layers of her personality. She is either framed as sexually aggressive or as domineering. Her intellect is not shown to be an asset. It is a hindrance to her ability to connect with the bachelors. By demonstrating the diversity of Black masculinity and the necessity of patriarchy in the "taming" of Black womanhood, *The Ultimate Merger*

reinforces the stereotypical notion that Black women are undesirable and that their inability to form cohesive, lasting, and loving relationships is their fault.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Canonical narratives of love can have powerful and long-lasting effects on the way that people view or experience love and relationships. They help to “make sense” of gender roles, how men and women should behave in loving relationships, and who is excluded from achieving “happily ever after.” These messages have the ability to help sustain racial and class-based ideologies.

Because RTV dating programs are considered to be canonical narratives of love, *The Ultimate Merger* and *The Bachelorette*, offer the potential to rupture the socially constructed notions of who can experience loving relationships. Rather than being “rescued” by a prince, these modern day canonical narratives of love (that feature a singular bachelorette who chooses from a group of eligible bachelors) offer an opportunity for women to reverse the stereotypical gender norms associated with dating. Upon closer examination, however, both of the shows

continue to reinforce the same standards of beauty, behavior, and gender roles of traditional canonical narratives of love. Unfortunately, for minorities, they are excluded from experiencing loving relationships. “From the beginning, unscripted dating shows have operated under the same unspoken rule: Mr. Right Must Be White...and so should nearly all the women who vamp for his attentions” (Pozner 163). This RTV dating show template spells disaster for minority women and as well as potential constraints for White women.

Ideal White Womanhood

In *The Bachelorette*, Ali is constructed in ways that position her as the cultural ideal. Because of her social class and race, she is able to leave her career in order to find her “prince.” This willing relinquishing of financial independence speaks to the assumption that she can find someone who is able to support her financially. This hearkens directly back to the premise of traditional canonical narratives of love where the prince is expected to take care of the princess. The show does not consider where Ali and the bachelor will live, if he is able to support Ali on his own, and if she is expected or encouraged to have her own career. Rather, the program promotes the idea that when Ali had a job, she was incapable of finding love. A career and having a loving relationship are apparently incompatible for women and they must choose one over the other.

The constant mention of her physical beauty is also problematic. The bachelors fail to mention of her intellect and only reference her physical appearance, saying that she is adorable, cute, and beautiful. This focus on her physical beauty implies that she has nothing to offer beyond her looks. And, as a blond physically fit woman, who is a self-proclaimed “California

girl,” Ali fits a very small and specific category to which most women, even White women, do not have access.

The selection of her wardrobe also works to project a particular image of beauty. Throughout the elimination rounds, she is shown in dresses that all have flowing, gauzy, full skirts with a fitted bodice which gives Ali an angelic and ethereal appearance. This angel-like appearance makes her sexually inaccessible to the men. In *White*, Dyer notes that one of supreme exemplars of feminine whiteness is the Virgin Mary (74). Photographed in flowing white robes with “fair hair and complexion,” the Virgin Mary epitomizes what it means to be an idealized (White) woman (Dyer 74). Ali’s billowy dress (and the absence of on-screen sexual intimacy) promotes the idea of purity and virginity that is often associated with the term “white.”

Black Womanhood

In *The Ultimate Merger*, Omarosa is never positioned as the “ideal.” The bachelors have no idea who they are meeting and the first description made by a bachelor references her body. Sterling, the only White bachelor on the show, motions with his hand and says the first thing that he noticed was “her...um...curves.” Interestingly, he is the only bachelor that is given one-on-one camera time to talk about his initial reaction to meeting Omarosa. The highlighting of Sterling’s comment by the formatting of the show is problematic given that Black women have been traditionally reduced to sexualized bodies and objectified by White men and others (Collins 135-137). Although the bachelors’ participation on *The Ultimate Merger* indicates their acceptance of competing on the show prior to meeting Omarosa, once they realize who she is, it appears that her previous RTV exposure and reputation does not position her in a favorable light. In fact, one of the bachelors, Michael, researches Omarosa’s background and asks individuals in the entertainment business about her and not one Internet source or person has anything positive

to say about her. From the very beginning, *The Ultimate Merger* frames Omarosa as a difficult person who is domineering and sexually aggressive which prevents the bachelors from bonding with her on a personal level.

Reinforcing the opinion that Black women and men do not have loving relationships, *The Ultimate Merger's* set location of Las Vegas leaves little room to build romance. Her sexuality (along with the bachelors) is put on display. Rather than shroud their trysts in black screens, they are front and center for the audience to observe. This is in sharp contrast to *The Bachelorette* which features romantic locales and never shows Ali in sexually intimate ways. Through Omarosa's own language and theirs, she is "getting it on" with any of the men who are assertive (code word for aggressive) enough to "get it." When a bachelor fails to make sexual advances toward her, the problem is not that the pace is too fast, the problem is that there is something wrong with the bachelor. This perpetuates the misconception that Black people lack the psychological ability to build intimacy so there are no opportunities to express love only sex (Brown "I am Who I am"75-76). Based on popular culture and mass media's insistence that Black people are only capable of being sexually promiscuous, the idea that "three dates is too soon to take it to the next level" is met with skepticism by Omarosa (Brown "I am Who I am" 75).⁴¹ While Ali has to suppress her sexuality, Omarosa has to put her sexuality on display in order to fit what is culturally accepted of Black women (and men).

The Bachelorette and *The Ultimate Merger* work to construct and privilege particular ways of performing womanhood. By analyzing Ali and Omarosa's conformity to ideal White womanhood and the Black Lady and Jezebel controlling images, respectively, along with their sexuality, opens up the chance to expose racial and gender performances on the RTV shows that function to favor the stereotypes and expectations set forth by dominant culture.

⁴¹ Lyle, one of the bachelors, explains to Omarosa and Dr. Bryant his reasoning for taking things slow on their dates.

In addition to evaluating Ali and Omarosa, my study also examined the construction of the male participants on both of the shows. *The Ultimate Merger* and *The Bachelorette* sanctioned specific ways that reify patriarchy and promotes distinct forms of masculinity.

Patriarchy

Using Trump as the person in charge of selecting Omarosa's potential partners is also problematic. From a colonial context, the selection of a Black male slave to mate with a Black female slave had more to do with producing offspring (and hence additional capital for a slave owner) than it did establishing a relationship between a man and a woman (Collins 202). With respect to Trump, choosing Omarosa's potential partners represents an opportunity to generate revenue for similar reasons that the slave owner selected a "stud" – money. Positioned as the benevolent patriarch, Trump selects men that he believes she deserves despite the obvious fact that he has not consulted Omarosa to find out the types of men that she finds desirable. Because of this, it opens up the potential argument that his interest in Omarosa is limited to the ways in which he can continue to "cash in" on the image that he has helped to mold into a Trump brand.

White Masculinity

All of the bachelors, except for one, on *The Bachelorette* are White men. The winner, and only one that is not a White man, is constructed as White through the construction of hegemonic racism. This helps to explain why she chose Roberto. Because *The Bachelorette* scripts his character as White and renders his Latino ethnicity invisible, he is rewarded by winning the princess. This bolsters the idea that only under special circumstances – such as, fair skin and features, complete assimilation into American dominant culture, occupational success, and athletic prowess – can a minority be allowed entry into White American culture. Because White women are considered the pinnacle of beauty and the standard by which all women must

measure, his success at winning her heart has more to do with his conformity to hegemonic masculinity than beating other White men (Dyer 70). Because Roberto conforms to standards of hegemonic masculinity, he may transcend his raced body to become more palatable to the audience.

Negotiating Black Masculinity

In the end of *The Ultimate Merger*, there is no bachelor left. Omarosa ends up alone because the man she chooses, Ray, is still married. Omarosa's discovery of his marriage comes at the end of the series because she decides to read his dossier. Ray chose to withhold his marital status because, in his own words, he had no idea who Omarosa was or that he would develop strong feelings for her. *The Ultimate Merger* has a diversity of men who are educated, financially successful, and willing to expose a range of intimate emotions and feelings. Prior to this RTV show, audiences had very narrow images of Black men. The stereotypical images of Black men being violent, sexually aggressive, or the comedic buffoon are noticeably absent. Consistently, the bachelors shared that even though the bachelors are great men, they do not believe she will end up with anyone. In essence, she sabotages her ability to find a mate because she finds a flaw in every man, is combative, and privileges sexual intimacy over building friendships. Because of this, *The Ultimate Merger* subtly implies that the inability for Black women to experience canonical narratives of love is due to the faults of Black women not Black men.

Analyzing both of the RTV programs using the theoretical frameworks of Whiteness, black feminist thought, critical race feminism/patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and Black masculinity provided an opportunity to unpack the ways that race and gender are informed, reproduced, and substantiated in popular culture. Although this analysis utilized two television programs and placed them in opposition, there is more than enough rhetorical significance in

each individual program to warrant more in-depth study. The analysis adds to the growing scholarship that investigates the implications of race and gender in popular mediated channels. Because popular culture is a “form that creates, reproduces, and sustains racial ideologies,” it is important to actively engage and question the messages that it conveys which speaks to the utility of studying RTV (Brown “I am Who I am” 68). Scholarship such as that of Dubrofsky, Dubrofsky and Hardy, Orbe, and Pozner (among others) explores the dynamics of race and gender on RTV and how those shows work to situate particular ways of understanding racial, ethnic, and gender differences based on social constructs that privilege individuals who are a part of dominant society. While their research focused on RTV programs that placed White and Black people in contentious ways, my study sought to interrogate those stereotypes and provide a polysemic way for alternative voices to understand, identify, or reject the images by laying bare the problems in “unscripted” mediated channels. And, it is precisely these “unscripted” moments that we have to uncover in order to expose the “constructed” messages of producers and advertisers.

While my study did not focus solely on issues of class or age, I found that the social and economic levels of the bachelorettes and the bachelors could hold some rhetorical significance. The social and economic classes of the bachelorettes and bachelors could potentially make them more desirable. This desirability may affect the options that a White or Black women may have in terms of dating. Along with affluence, there could also be an expectation of education that could be an interesting dynamic when comparing the two RTV programs.

Another area for consideration for future study is the implication of age. How old is too old to be a bachelorette? And, at what age would a bachelor be off limits to a bachelorette? Ali, who is ten years younger than Omarosa, has a fairly mixed group of men in terms of ages.

Omarosa, on the other hand, at 35 only had two bachelors who were older than she was. The emphasis of age could prospectively speak to the lack of eligibility of older Black men or the desirability of older women who proactively date younger men.

In conclusion, *The Bachelorette* and *The Ultimate Merger* contain a wealth of material from which to craft analyses. It may be useful to compare the treatment of race on male versions of RTV dating formats to determine what, if any, themes emerge. It is likely, given the template that both of the shows seem to follow, that similar typecasting will be uncovered.

As a Black woman scholar, who is a critic and a fan, the study of RTV is particularly salient (qtd in Orbe 35). For me, the lure of RTV is the ability to gaze into the lived experiences of individuals who do not share my racial background or gender. And, for those that do share my racial background and gender, I am fascinated by the ways in which their stories unfold. There are moments where I can see a glimmer of myself and there are other times that I shake my head in disbelief. Stereotypical images depicted in RTV continue to position Black women in an unfavorable light and provoke questions about my own “authenticity” as a Black woman because I cannot relate to those images. Because it makes me question my “Blackness,” that speaks to the hegemonic forces at work in RTV. If I cannot see myself in those images and those are the only ones available, then there needs to be greater interrogation of the images in RTV.

As McKerrow and Klump and Hollihan suggest, deconstruction is not enough. As a social actor, one must take the next step and offer solutions in its place by looking at the people who are impacted by people of power. “The critic that emerges – the interpreter, the teacher, the social actor – is a moral participant [who is] cognizant of the power and responsibility that accompanies full critical participation in his/her society” (Klump and Hollihan 94). It is this critical participation that can lead to the rupture of the power of dominant cultural norms and

empower alternative voices to “resist the imposition of cultural meanings that may not fit one’s own social identity” (McKerrow 108). It has been discovered, through *The Bachelorette*, that some canonical narratives of love do come true. Seemingly, they only come true for a few deserving heterosexual White women who preserve their purity and embody the ideals of White womanhood. Because Black women are incapable of being White, they are unable to experience loving relationships. As such, the script mandates that Black women should recognize and accept their position at the bottom of the desirability totem pole and stop worrying about finding their “happily ever after” with a Black man, especially since *The Ultimate Merger* says that their Black prince does not exist. Uncovering the ways that Ali, Omarosa, and their respective bachelors are constrained, opens up the potential to disrupt the power of canonical narratives of love and RTV programs to insinuate that only a select few achieve happiness with a life partner. And, in so doing, it allows subaltern voices to define and create their own canonical narratives of love.

As social actors, educators, and scholars, it is our responsibility to encourage people to become more critically engaged in the messages that they consume. One way that this can be done is through classroom instruction. By fostering an environment that is conducive to active participation in the deconstruction of hegemonic ideas, this should allow students to peel back the layers and interrogate what those messages might mean for their own identities and the identities of others. Another way to encourage critical consumption is by making scholarship like this available outside of academia. Participating in online forums and uploading the documents to search engines should make this available to a more diverse audience who may not otherwise have access to this type of material. Taking these steps can help to dismantle hegemonic images

that are portrayed in RTV and, in so doing, give subaltern voices the power to reject stereotypical depictions and define their own space and positionality.

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APPENDIX A

THE BACHELORETTE

The sixth season of *The Bachelorette* premiered on May 24, 2010, featured Ali Fedotowsky, who was previously a contestant on *The Bachelor*. As the spinoff of *The Bachelor*, which airs on NBC, all of the women selected to appear in each of the seven seasons of *The Bachelorette* have previously been cast members on *The Bachelor*. The bachelorette chooses from a group of 25 men, pre-selected by the producers of the show, who will compete to try to win her heart.

Although *The Bachelorette* features many different locales, the primary set location is the bachelors' house. It is this location that the men are picked up from and where the elimination round takes place.

At the end of each episode, Ali hands out roses to the men who will remain in the house. The handing out of roses is done during the elimination round which is referred to as the "rose ceremony." To determine who stays and who leaves, Ali and the bachelors go on a series of dates. Some of the dates are one-on-one and some are group dates. During the one-on-one dates, the men have to earn the rose by the end of the date. If they do not earn the rose, they are automatically sent home before the rose ceremony. Any bachelor, who does not receive a rose during the ceremony, is eliminated from the competition.

*The Bachelorette's Bachelors*⁴²



Frank is a retail manager from Bartlett, Illinois. He was one of the final three men on *The Bachelorette*. Because he was one of the final three contestants, he (along with the other two finalists) was invited to a fantasy date in Tahiti. Before leaving to join Ali, he visits his ex-girlfriend in Illinois. Discovering that he still loves his ex-girlfriend, he goes to Tahiti in order to tell Ali and withdraw from the competition on the tenth episode.



Jay is an attorney from Barrington, Rhode Island. Very career-oriented, he was one of the few men who openly admired her decision to choose her career over Jake, a previous contestant on *The Bachelor*. He was one of the first men to be eliminated in episode one.



Craig M. is in dental sales from Sarnia, Canada. He, at the age of 33, was one of the oldest contestants on *The Bachelorette* during the sixth season. He was labeled a “troublemaker” and “evil” and was not well-liked by the other bachelors. He was eliminated in the second episode.

⁴² Image Source: “Episode 601”; *The Bachelorette*; iTunes.com; 20 Jan. 2011



Kyle is an outdoorsman from Highlands Ranch, Colorado. An avid hunter and fisher, he believes that Ali's love of the outdoors makes him the perfect bachelor for her. He is eliminated at the end of the first episode.



Justin is an entertainment wrestler from Toronto, Canada. Justin introduces himself as "Rated R" to Ali on the first episode. The other bachelors quickly determine that Justin is not on the show to meet Ali. They believe that he is there to promote his career. On the first episode, Chris Harrison (the host), asks each of the bachelors to place the name of the bachelor that should not be in the competition because his intentions were dubious. Justin's name garnered the most votes. After talking with him one-on-one, Ali decides to give him a chance and allows him to stay. He is eventually eliminated during episode six after his girlfriend calls the show alleging that Justin only went on *The Bachelorette* to advance his wrestling career.



Phil is an investment manager from Elmore, Ohio. He is eliminated at the end of the first episode.



Jonathan is a weatherman from Houston, Texas. Craig M., another contestant on the show, constantly antagonized Jonathan because of his small stature. Confiding in Ali, Jonathan tells her that Craig M. is “evil” and is not looking out for her best interests. He is eliminated at the end of episode four.



Ty is a medical sales representative from Booneville, Mississippi. He is the only bachelor who had been previously married. Ty states that his divorce was final a few months prior to the start of the show. He is eliminated at the end of episode seven.



Chris L. is a landscaper from Cape Code, Massachusetts. A former math teacher, he moved back to Cape Code to help take care of an ailing mother. Chris L. is one of the final three contestants. Because Frank withdraws from the competition, he and Roberto become the final two contestants. Ali goes to Chris L. before the final rose ceremony to tell him that she is not going to choose him as the bachelor. He is eliminated at the end of episode ten.



Chris H. is a real estate developer from Campbell River, British Columbia. He is eliminated in episode two.



Chris N. is an entrepreneur from Winter Park, Florida. Throughout the time that he is on the bachelor, he “flies under the radar.” He does not get into any confrontations with the other bachelors and is seldom seen on camera. He is eliminated in episode five.



Craig R. is an attorney from Langhorne, Pennsylvania. He is one of the first bachelors to accuse Justin of being on the show to promote his wrestling career. He is eliminated in episode six.



Derek is a sales manager from Warren, Michigan. He is eliminated at the end of episode one.



Derrick is a construction engineer from Manhattan Beach, California. When he meets Ali for the first time, he tells her that his nickname is Shooter. He promises to tell her the story behind his nickname if she finds him inside. Unfortunately for him, the story behind the nickname was a bit awkward and he was eliminated at the end of episode one.



Hunter is an Internet account executive from Fair Oaks Ranch, Texas. He serenades Ali while playing the ukulele during the first episode. He is eliminated at the end of episode three.



Jason is a construction consultant from Johnson City, Tennessee. He is eliminated at the end of episode one.



Jesse is a general contractor from Peculiar, Missouri. He is the youngest bachelor on season six. He purchases his first (and only) suit for his appearance on *The Bachelorette*. On a one-on-one date, Ali purchases him another suit for their date. He is eliminated at the end of episode four.



John C. is in the hotel business from Mukilteo, Washington. He is eliminated in episode three.



John N. is an engineering software sales representative from Wichita, Kansas. He is eliminated at the end of episode one.



Kasey is an advertising account executive from Fresno, California. He is infamous for saying that he will “always guard and protect her heart.” He also gets a tattoo of a heart on his wrist to demonstrate his sincerity. He is eliminated at the end of episode five.



Kirk is a sales consultant from Green Bay, Wisconsin. He created a scrapbook of pictures that he felt were important to him and gave it to Ali as a gift. As one of the four remaining contestants, Ali visits Green Bay to meet Kirk’s family. Kirk is eliminated at the end of episode eight.



Roberto is an insurance agent from Tampa, Florida. He received the first “impression rose” that made him safe from elimination at the first rose ceremony. Roberto, who is a Latino, is the first minority to be the last remaining bachelor. At the end of *The Bachelorette*, Ali accepts his proposal of marriage.



Steve is a sales representative from Chesterland, Ohio. He is eliminated at the end of episode three.



Tyler M. is a catering manager from Helena, Montana. He had very little opportunity to interact with Ali and is subsequently eliminated at the end of episode one.



Tyler V. works in online advertising and is from Chelsea, Vermont. He is eliminated at the end of episode two.

Summary of Episodes

Episode 601. In the first episode of season six, the audience is introduced to Ali and twenty-five eligible bachelors who are all competing to win Ali's hand in marriage. The episode begins with a recap of Ali's first appearance on *The Bachelor*, and then gives a glimpse into the lives of some of the men, and, finally, the bachelors meet Ali for the first time at the bachelor house. At the end of the episode, she eliminates eight men and gives Roberto the first impression rose.

Episode 602. In the second episode, Ali goes on two one-on-one dates and a group date. She takes Frank on a Hollywood tour, including spending time underneath the famous "Hollywood" sign. Jesse and Ali go on a date in Las Vegas. Although she is scared of flying, they fly to their destination. By the end of both one-on-one dates, she feels that she has chemistry with both men. Both Frank and Jesse receive roses at the end of each of the dates. On the group date, the men don beachwear for a "sexy guy calendar." Craig M. begins to start arguments with Jonathan and Jesse. He patronizes both Jonathan and Jesse based on size and younger age, respectively. Jonathan goes to Ali to tell her that he believes that Craig M. is dangerous. Despite her reservations, she gives Craig M. a chance and does not eliminate him. At the end of episode two, she eliminates three men.

Episode 603. This week, Roberto and Hunter go on one-on-dates. After Ali's date with Roberto, she gives him the rose. On Hunter's one-on-one date, Ali said that it is "make it or break it" for them. Hunter admits that he moves slow in relationships which prevents Ali from being able to see if they had any romantic chemistry. At the end of the date, she does not give Hunter a rose. He leaves immediately following the date. The group date is the filming of a music video. Each of the men has scenes with her. Frank becomes jealous when he realizes that

she is kissing so many of the men in the music video scenes. At the end of the day, Ali tells Roberto that Justin came to visit her at her house. Roberto, in turn, tells the rest of the men who confront Justin. Justin is labeled the outcast. At the end of episode three, Hunter, Steve, and John C. are eliminated.

Episode 608. In episode eight, Ali visits Kirk, Roberto, Chris L., and Frank in their respective hometowns. She bonds with all of the families. They introduce her to their cities and the people most important to them. Frank reveals that he lacks confidence when it comes to Ali. She expresses that she is not sure that she can reassure him that that they will be together at the end. At the end of season eight, Kirk is eliminated.

Episode 609. Down to the final three guys, Ali's next destination with the men is Tahiti. Both Chris L. and Roberto profess their love for Ali while on romantic dates. Frank, on the other hand, goes back to Chicago to rekindle his relationship with his ex-girlfriend. When he meets Ali in Tahiti, he tells her that he is in love with someone else and withdraws from the competition. At the end of the episode, Ali gives roses to Chris L. and Roberto. She stresses to them that it is important for them to accept the rose as a sign that they are willing to move forward and that she is confident that Frank was not the one for her.

Episode 610. In the season finale, Ali is down to the final two men – Chris L. and Roberto. They each spend their last date in Bora, Bora meeting Ali's parents. Because both of the men consider themselves family-oriented, her family's approval is very important. Chris L., who is from Massachusetts, automatically has a bond based on the shared background. (Ali's family is from Massachusetts.) Both men talk to Ali's father one-on-one and to her sister and brother. At the end of Roberto's date, she is convinced that he is the one that she loves. Before

the final rose ceremony, she goes to Chris L. to tell him that she is not going to select him as the bachelor. Roberto proposes to Ali and she accepts.

APPENDIX B

THE ULTIMATE MERGER

The first season of *The Ultimate Merger* premiered on June 17, 2010 and featured Omarosa Manigault who was previously a contestant on *The Apprentice*. Created by Donald Trump, *The Ultimate Merger* is a competitive dating RTV program. Trump selects twelve men as potential suitors for Omarosa. Each man has a dossier completed on their credentials, including (but not limited to) work history, known associates and friends, marital status, and creditworthiness. Additionally, each of the contestants are asked to sign a prenuptial agreement.

The primary set location is Trump Towers International. It is this location that the men receive information about upcoming competitive challenges to compete in each day. The men who win the day's challenge are rewarded with a date with Omarosa and immunity from elimination. The elimination round takes place in the "mediation room" located inside of Trump Towers.

At the end of each episode, all of the men convene in the mediation room. Omarosa and a "guest" judge are seated at a table in front of the room. To the right of Omarosa is a paper shredder. Facing Omarosa and a guest judge are three "O" chairs. These chairs are reserved for the men who will be eliminated. Trump has given Omarosa the option of eliminating all of the men so there are times when more than three men are up for elimination. Once she decides who she is eliminating, she shreds their prenuptial agreement and tells them that to leave Trump Towers.

*The Ultimate Merger's Bachelors*⁴³



Ray is 33 years old and an R&B singer from Monroe, Louisiana. Ray has several children and it is revealed on the show that he is still married to his wife, although he alleges that they are separated. Despite being the last man left, Omarosa eliminates him in the final episode because of his marital status.

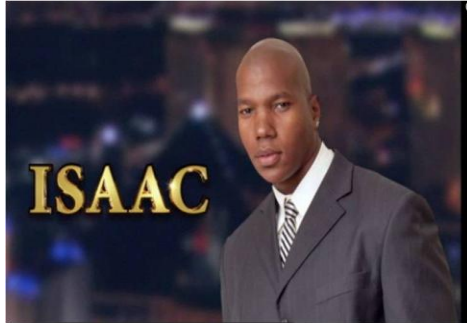


Al B. Sure! is 41 years old and an R&B singer from Mount Vernon, New York. Because Al and Omarosa dated previously, she uses their friendship to gain information about the men. When Al refuses to give her any information, she questioned their friendship. Omarosa eliminates him the final episode.



Charles is a 43 year old foreign currency trader from Washington, D.C. He previously dated Omarosa. Surprised to see him as one of the bachelors, Omarosa said that he is known throughout D.C. as the “playa with a passport.” He voluntarily leaves during episode four due to personal reasons but returns during the final episode and is eliminated.

⁴³ Images Source: “Blizzard”; *The Ultimate Merger*; iTunes.com; 20 Jan. 2011



Isaac is a former national football league player from St. Louis, Missouri. He is 32 years old. Omarosa discloses to Isaac that another contestant, C.J., was observed by security leaving another suite in Trump Towers. Isaac relays the information to C.J. so that he could prepare for the mediation room. Because Omarosa believes that she shared this information with him in confidence, his betrayal ultimately decides his fate. Isaac is eliminated in episode seven.



Lyle is an attorney and originally from New Bedford, Massachusetts. He has one child and another child that he has raised as his own since meeting her mother. He is known for his aggressive verbal attacks and gets into multiple arguments with another contestant, Mike. His desire to “win at all costs” becomes a major obstacle in getting to know Omarosa. Citing a lack of romantic feelings, Omarosa eliminates him in episode seven.



Jarvis is 34 years old and an entrepreneur from Jersey City, New Jersey. On the first episode, Jarvis tells Omarosa that he has two children – one is fourteen and the other is one. He also spent seven years in prison. After unsuccessful attempts to find chemistry with Jarvis, Omarosa eliminates him in episode six.



C.J. is a 27 year old model and author from Los Angeles, California. While on the show, he communicates a sense of empathy for Black women. After learning that Mike left Omarosa, C.J. talks to him about how a Black woman would perceive his actions. Despite the advice he gives Mike, C.J. is caught on video surveillance leaving another suite at 4:00 am. The woman who stayed in the suite dropped off his bracelet and a personal note. Omarosa eliminates him in episode five.



Michael (also known as Mike) is a 29 year old concert promoter from New York, New York. He gets into contentious arguments with another contestant, Lyle, and with Omarosa. He cooks and straightens up the hotel room which earns him criticism from all of the contestants and Omarosa. Omarosa says that she wants a “man’s man” and his cooking and cleaning behind all of the men was a turnoff. Omarosa realizes that they would make better friends than partners so she eliminates him in episode four.



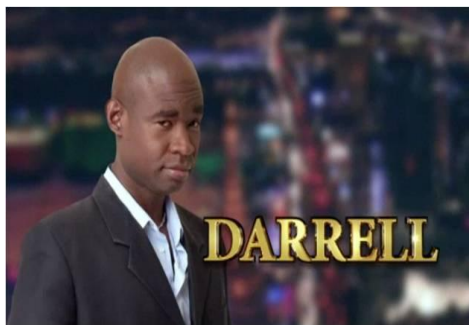
Eddy is a 30 year old Christian rapper from Miami, Florida. After a series of awkward conversations with Omarosa, she eliminates him in episode three.



Sterling is 41 years old and a fashion designer from Los Angeles, California. It is clear through their interactions that there was no chemistry. Omarosa eliminates Sterling in episode three.



Jason is 30 years old and a massage therapist from New York, New York. After failing miserably in the athletic challenges, he went up for elimination. However, four other contestants joined him – Lyle, Charles, C. J., and Isaac. They left Trump Towers without permission to have a “guy’s night out.” Lyle, Charles, C. J. and Isaac admit to leaving the hotel. Jason, the fifth person observed on camera leaving, did not own up to leaving the hotel. Because he did not reveal that he was one of the five men and failing the challenge, Omarosa eliminates him in episode two.



Darrell is 40 years old and from Memphis, Tennessee. He is infamously known as having never dated a Black woman. He alleges that he is a movie producer and author. While it was confirmed that he did write a book, during elimination it was uncovered that the last job he received payment was as a deejay at a party. At the end of episode one, he is eliminated.

Summary of Episodes

Episode One: Blizzard. In the first episode of *The Ultimate Merger*, the audience is introduced to Omarosa and the twelve men competing to win her heart. The Trump brand name is shown prominently on the buildings and is said frequently throughout the show. Trump calls Omarosa to his office to give her a dossier of twelve men that he believed could be potential partners. The men arrive at the Trump Towers and meet Omarosa for the first time. She dated two of the contestants – Al B. Sure! and Charles – previously. She challenges to the men to an “O”-Harmony test. The test ask questions ranging from their sexual prowess to whether they would surgically enhance a body part. The men that won the challenge – Mike, Jarvis, and Sterling – go on a group date with Omarosa. Before the date is over, Mike decides to leave the bus and walk back to Trump Towers. Despite his departure from the date, the first person to be eliminated is Darrell.

Episode Two: Champs and Chumps. In the second episode, the men participate in track and field sports. Omarosa loves track and field so she puts them through “Lady O’s Track and Field Challenge.” They participate in the high jump, the discus, and eight hundred meter power walk. Jason performed the worst in the challenge. Isaac, Ray, and Lyle won the challenge so they are rewarded with a group date. At the end the group date, Omarosa has chemistry with Isaac and Ray but is unsure about Lyle. During the same episode, several men sneak out of Trump Towers to go out. Omarosa invited Al down to find out if he knew who the four men were that left the hotel suite. He avoided answering the question, which draws criticism from her during the elimination. Because Jason performed the worst at the challenge, he was automatically up for elimination. It is revealed that he is the fifth person who left the hotel and Jason is eliminated from the show.

Episode Three: Verbal Combat. In the third episode, Omarosa sets up a verbal debate as a challenge for the men. She gives them various topics to debate: “natural hair” versus weave; affirmative action; unusual names; “Kanye West: genius or insane;” and the public health care option. The winner of the challenge has to debate Omarosa. Lyle wins the challenge and debates Omarosa. The guest judge rules that Omarosa is the ultimate winner. Charles and Lyle are rewarded with a spa date with Omarosa. Because Omarosa and Charles dated previously, she questions his sincerity which is the reason she asks him on the date. Again, Lyle and Omarosa lack chemistry. However, during elimination she does not choose Lyle. She selects Mike, Eddy, and Sterling. Omarosa eliminates Eddy and Sterling because they never connected.

Episode Six: Mommy Issues. In the sixth episode, the men are challenged to design a fragrance for Omarosa. They needed to develop the fragrance, name, slogan and logo, design bottle, compose a jingle, and a marketing campaign. The remaining men were divided into two groups. The winners of the task are rewarded with an outing at the Playboy Club. Lyle and Ray won the challenge but since Omarosa believed that they all did well, she invited all of the men to go to the Playboy Club. During this episode, it is discovered that Lyle had some issues with his mother. Omarosa asked Lyle why he did not open up with her. He explained that he did not feel comfortable talking about his personal struggles in a nightclub or spa. Omarosa eliminated Jarvis at the end of the episode because she felt that there was no chemistry.

Episode Seven: Roughin' It. The men are given a challenge to put together a tent. Isaac, Ray, Lyle, and Al put up their tents with the help of one of Omarosa's friends and former contestant on *The Apprentice*, Troy McClain. Lyle was very business-like. He did not talk to Troy at all and he hoarded all of the supplies. When Omarosa comes to the location to judge the tents, they decide to pick two winners. Lyle's tent was built the best so Omarosa selected him as

the winner. Troy believed that, although Ray's tent did not look the best, he had the best personality so he selected Ray as the winner. As winners of the challenge, Lyle and Ray get to spend an evening with Omarosa in the tent. Throughout the season, Ray and Omarosa have had very good chemistry but she and Lyle have been unable to connect. On their one-on-one date, Lyle comes across as very focused on winning and not focused on building a relationship with Omarosa. During the elimination round, Isaac, Ray, and Lyle are called to the "O" chair. Because of Isaac's initial betrayal and the lack of chemistry with Lyle, Omarosa eliminates both men. It is discovered that Ray is still married. She, however, does not eliminate him.

Episode Eight: Merger. During episode eight, Ray and Al are the final two men left. Charles, who departed during episode four for personal reasons, returns to join the competition. Each of the men are given an opportunity to create a one-on-one date. Al plans a date at a recording studio. Ray plans a dinner and spa date and Charles creates a date themed around weddings. Charles places a variety of wedding dresses, shoes, and wedding cakes for Omarosa to model. Despite the romantic dates, Omarosa realizes that Al is married to his work and that she is unsure that Charles has changed from his "playa with a passport" past. The final man left is Ray. However, because he is still legally married, Ray is eliminated as well. At the end of the season, Omarosa is left with no one.