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"You're not here for the right reasons!" From *The Bachelorette* to Instagram Influencer

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ABSTRACT

Despite vast research on reality television (RTV) and *The Bachelor* (2002) franchise specifically, most scholarship focuses on its appeal or negative impact on viewers. The inclusion of social media analysis is under-used in research on the series or any of its offshoots. Our work, however, analyzes how the women of *The Bachelorette* make the transition to influencer status on Instagram. Through critical visual analysis, we build on the theoretical concept of postfeminist nirvana, and show how this idealized, gendered state manifests across platforms. Our findings indicate that postfeminist nirvana has evolved in its aesthetic output and the women's digital labor practices. This research demonstrates how postfeminist ideas are perpetuated across media platforms and intersects with studies of RTV, social media influencers, and postfeminist media texts.

Introduction

ABC's widely popular reality television (RTV) series *The Bachelor* (2002) spans 19 years, 25 seasons, and five spin-offs (*The Bachelorette, Bachelor Pad, Bachelor in Paradise, Bachelor Winter Games*, and *After Paradise*). *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* in particular have dominated broadcast network ratings and re-shaped the television platform, making it a more accessible avenue for ordinary people to acquire fame. These series follow a weekly elimination format, where the lead goes from dating 25 people, to getting engaged over an eight-week period. Both series have continually foregrounded conventionally attractive, heterosexual, cis-gendered, white people. Only in the last few years has the franchise consciously sought to hire Black leads, casting Rachel Lindsay (2017) and Tayshia Adams (2020) as *The Bachelorette*, and Matt James as *The Bachelor* (2021). Like many RTV series, the franchise filters contestants through a meta-lens that makes whiteness the ideal (Dominguez, 2015). Contestants are thus positioned to align or contrast with this meta-lens by producers and editors who work with them to construct a public persona for the show.

One potential reason for the franchise's continued relevancy is due to the social media presence of the individuals who compose "Bachelor Nation." In the past decade, the show has become less about dating and love and more about an opportunity for participants to become influencers on social media. In many ways, their carefully crafted personas from

the series seamlessly translate to social media after their time on the show is complete. A common trope on *The Bachelor/ette* is when contestants question whether or not someone is on the show for "the right reasons." The right reason being to find a partner, which makes using the show as a launch pad for influencer status, the wrong reason. The latter, however, gives people incentive to participate in the series. Contestants who only receive a few minutes of screen time on the show can capitalize on that time and build a massive following on social media where they brand themselves and act as "mini-brand extensions" (Hugh Curnutt 2011) of the franchise.

While each contestant has the opportunity to build a brand for themselves online after appearing on the show, the most successful contestants appear to be those who are cast as the lead. For instance, Andi Dorfman, a former district attorney, initially appeared on Season 18 of *The Bachelor* and was later cast as the lead *Bachelorette* in 2014. Andi quit her job post-show, published a book about her time with the franchise, and used social media to self-brand (Juju Chang, Erin Brady and Alexa Valiente 2016). With one million followers on Instagram, Andi parlayed her persona from *The Bachelorette* into lifestyle and fitness expertise. In 2020, she launched a subscription based running app, Andorfins, for $9.99/month to motivate beginners (Kaitlyn Frey 2020).

It is important to study contestants' use of social media after their time on the series because social media analysis is relatively absent from research on these shows. Additionally, their image from the series can be used for capital gain on social media, which also benefits the franchise. Given the franchise's longevity and economic success, a multitude of scholars have researched *The Bachelor/ette* (Lauren Vandenbosch and Steven Eggermont 2011; Suzanne Shedd 2013; Sarah Vannier and Lucia O'Sullivan 2017). While these studies demonstrate how the franchise creates idealized relationships, other studies have highlighted the construction of stereotypes (Annie Specht and Brooke Beam 2015) and revealed how women, in particular, are presented to align or contrast with idealized notions of femininity (Rachel Dubrofsky 2011).

Using a Foucauldian approach to surveillance, Rachel Dubrofsky (2011) found that certain women on *The Bachelor* were framed as striving for "postfeminist nirvana," which is an ideal feminized state where women "have it all" at work and home while espousing amplified, traditional notions of femininity. In this article, we focus attention on the women who have starred on *The Bachelorette* and build on Rachel Dubrofsky's (2011) conceptualization of postfeminist nirvana by using it as an analytical lens to evaluate how former *Bachelorettes* present on Instagram.

We argue here that these women align their image on social media with their portrayal on the series by embodying the characteristics celebrated on *The Bachelor/ette* (i.e., they are white, conventionally attractive, with idealized body types). We will show how aesthetic models and idealized mentalities of postfeminist nirvana have been reified through carefully curated Instagram posts. By analyzing the online labor practices of these women, our work bridges a gap in research on the franchise by showing through a political economy of media how the ideals from the series can be repurposed on a newer platform.

In our analysis, we show that women from *The Bachelorette* use postfeminist nirvana as a meta-lens for their personal brand to gain sponsorships and opportunities. Each woman engaged with different forms of online labor that emphasize: (i) interpersonal relations, (ii) explicit branding, (iii) insta-labor, (iv) self-love, and (v) *Bachelor* promotions. These

practices coalesce to present these women as exemplars of postfeminist nirvana, which makes them walking advertisements for the franchise. The article concludes with a critique of the amplification of representations of postfeminist nirvana online, a concept detailed in the literature review.

Literature review

Most RTV research is conducted by way of media effects or a uses and gratifications approach. Media effects studies primarily focus on RTV's negative impact on viewers, uncovering correlations between viewing and relational aggression (Sarah M. Coyne, Simon L. Robinson and David A Nelson 2010; Bryan Gibson, Bryan Gibson, et al. 2016), body image issues (Nichole Egbert and James D. Belcher 2012), stereotypes (Tia Tyree 2011), and consumerism (Nicole Cox and Jennifer M. Proffitt 2012). While uses and gratifications studies show people consume RTV out of envy (Steven Reiss and James Wiltz 2004), voyeuristic tendencies or vicarious engagement (Lemi Baruh 2009), for "humilitainment" (Brad Waite and Sarah Booker 2005), therapeutic experiences (Mark Andrejevic 2004; Rachel Dubrofsky 2011), and to feel social (Lisa R. Godlewski and Elizabeth M. Perse 2010).

We argue that research should move towards analysis of *The Bachelor* franchise on social media. Our work does this by focusing on representations of postfeminist nirvana, from RTV show contestant to social media influencer. In the literature review, we first discuss the political economy of RTV, which situates our examination of RTV participants transitioning to social media. We then provide an overview of postfeminist nirvana.

Political economy of RTV celetoids

New media development, the rise of neoliberalism, the deregulation of industry structures, and network's cost-cutting objectives formulated the rise of RTV (Chad Raphael 1997; Andrew Ross 2014; Alison Hearn 2014). Ownership and these institutional arrangements inform studies using a political economy of media. This approach focuses on the structural components of media: finances, contracts, ownership, labor, compensation, policy, authorship, and regulation (Miranda Banks 2015; Des Freedman 2015; & Felicia Henderson 2015), while also taking into consideration texts and audiences, distribution and use, production and consumption, culture and people, and economy and polity (Luis Albornoz 2015). To effectively examine *The Bachelor* franchise and representations of women, we must first understand the larger media ecosystem the show is situated in.

The Bachelor franchise airs on ABC, which is owned by entertainment and mass media conglomerate, Disney. Given the fact that this is a major broadcast network, *The Bachelor* brings in a large number of viewers, advertisers, and revenue. ABC first began as a radio network in 1943, and in 1948, broke into the television arena, deeming itself "America's Network." ABC was eventually bought by Walt Disney Television, a division of Disney General Entertainment Content of The Walt Disney Company in 1996. Largely covering the U.S. and Canada, ABC has over 232 affiliated and eight owned-and-operated television stations spanning both countries.

In its appeal to advertisers, ABC's website reads, "ABC delivers consumers, not just viewers. From upscale homes to educated viewers to top market residents and families, ABC is unmatched when it comes to delivering both scale and composition of audiences that buy brands" (2021). *The Bachelor* franchise and its associated brand legitimized ABC's place in the realm of reality television programming when it first aired during the 2001–2002 season. In total, ABC reached an average of 4.52 million viewers in 2020 (Michael Schneider 2020), and the individual *Bachelor* episode that aired on Monday, February 22, 2021, reached a season-high, drawing in 5.49 million viewers, up from 5.25 million from the previous week (R. Porter 2021). The delivery of such significant numbers of consumers to advertisers through the franchise tracks with the overall neoliberal framework that created RTV.

Neoliberal ideologies and the development of new technologies place power in the hands of networks and production companies, resulting in decreased worker's rights. This exploitative environment is characterized by the continual dismantling of entertainment unions and new labor regulations. *The Bachelor/ette* is an ideal example of this because it "enjoys great economic legitimacy" because of its low-cost economic model and easy to replicate format (Jean Chalaby 2011, 502). This makes contestants easy to exploit.

RTV contestants are expected to work long hours with little to no compensation, required to have flexibility in a precarious working environment, and can be terminated at any point (Alison Hearn 2014; Andrew Ross 2014). The gambling approach of neoliberalism informs how RTV contestants are valued and rewarded (Andrew Ross 2014). RTV has shifted the structure and organization of the television economy, specifically in terms of who is doing the labor, behind the scenes and in front of the camera. Put simply, there is a proliferation of ordinary individuals in the media industry. Media's use of ordinary people is a reflection of the "demotic turn" to the ordinary, which refers to interest in celebrities' backstage moments and the use of regular people in media (Graeme Turner 2006; Joshua Gamson 2011). Turner's analysis of the demotic turn is based on the notion that media generate ideas that "enforce its commercial power" and "cultural centrality" through the production of celetoids, a term coined by Rojek (2001), which refers to regular people who have obtained their 15 min of fame. This idea is visualized by contestants from *The Bachelor* franchise. The franchise boasts over a thousand former contestants and refers to this labor pool of ready participants as Bachelor Nation.

Per their contracts, contestants must promote the show. In this way, contestants operate as "mini-brand extensions" of the franchise and the ABC network (Hugh Curnutt 2011). This contractual agreement creates a marketing strategy that promotes both contestants and the franchise, with their social media appearing as a natural extension of their time on the show. RTV stars, like individuals from *The Bachelor/ette*, successfully promote the franchise because they appear more authentic than trained actors and actresses. This shows that the political economy and success of the franchise is driven by contractual obligations and contestants' ongoing social media engagement.

From reality star to social media influencer

Brands view social media influencers as ideal sponsors for their products because brands look at the cross-channel media experience viewers are engaged with to maximize their impact (Mike Proulx and Stacy Shepatin 2012). This makes RTV participants useful to

brands as they can garner influencer status in the digital realm since RTV enables them to make the transition with a built-in audience (Alison Hearn 2016). RTV influencers from Bachelor Nation are the ideal candidates to work with brands across platforms because they are precarious, flexible, and therefore primed for this kind of labor and microcelebrity status.

Teri Senft 2008 coined and defined microcelebrity as "the commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good" (p. 1). Alice Marwick 2013 builds on this term, defining microcelebrity as "a type of internet-enabled visibility" that refers to both "the state of being famous to a niche group of people" but also a behavior "that presents the self as a celebrity regardless of who might be paying attention" (p. 114–115). After Instagram's inception in 2010 it became a popular site to present the self as a microcelebrity.

As of 2019, Instagram had over a billion active users. Women utilize the platform more than men, and young adults, ages 18–29, living in urban areas use it most frequently (Pew, 2019). Instagram is now an ideal space to launch a more specific version of "microcelebrity," scholars call "Instafame" (Alice Marwick 2015). In her textual and visual analysis of Instagram users with 10,000 plus followers, Alice Marwick (2015) found that those who achieved Instafame did so by mimicking celebrity culture. This subsequently reproduces dominant status hierarchies. Reality stars cannot be classified as A-List celebrities or microcelebrities who gain fame on the internet, yet they exist amidst both. Instafame, we argue, is easier to obtain when an individual has pre-existing fame from another, wider-reaching platform, like RTV, which is still considered "ground zero" for self-branding (Alison Hearn 2016).

Reality stars use social media to build a following, a brand, and to reject the ephemerality of their fame (Evie Psarras 2020). Features like stories, reels, and videos on social media applications make RTV celetoids highly accessible. Social media enables immediacy and real-time engagement between brands and consumers (Tony Meenaghan, Damien McLoughlin and Allen McCormack 2013). Celetoids further the visibility of the RTV franchise, interact with fans via comments and private messaging, and consistently post content that reflects the packaged persona the show created for them. The constant accessibility and interaction allow for deeper engagement and trustworthiness between consumer and influencer.

Microcelebrities create more personalized relationships and interpersonal ties with their followers in comparison to traditional celebrities, which allows for increased sponsorship and digital labor opportunities (S. Venus Jin, Aziz Muqaddam and Ehri Ryu 2019). Participants on RTV shows, such as *The Bachelor/ette,* take the persona crafted for them by the show and the visibility from the series to engage in digital labor via brand sponsorships. Contestants who are employed before being selected as a cast member, usually leave their job to become social media influencers because their pre-packed persona from the show, built-in brand, and following afford them the space to regularly create and share content for money.

As mentioned previously, RTV participants curate their online personas and brands by adopting the public identities crafted for them by show producers. Social media analysis of contestants from *The Bachelor/ette* is crucial for deeper understanding of celetoid-celebrity and the social influence of RTV (Sofia Pereira Caldeira, Sander De Ridder and Sofie Van Bauwel 2018). Next, we show how *Bachelorette* contestants are presented on the

series through the lens of postfeminist nirvana. Given the franchise's popularity and longevity, we argue that *Bachelorette* contestants evoke elements of postfeminist nirvana on their own as a self-branding strategy to capitalize on their fame from the series and to gain sponsorships in the digital realm.

Postfeminist nirvana across platforms

Rachel Dubrofsky's (2011) critical analysis of *The Bachelor* franchise reveals how the women of the series are packaged for the audience to either align or contrast with an idealized image of womanhood. The author conceptualizes this representation as post-feminist nirvana. The term refers to a "peaceful," "utopic," "un-conflicted state" that women "strive to achieve," but never truly accomplish (p. 124). To achieve postfeminist nirvana is to have it all. Having it all here refers to marriage or an engagement along with a satisfactory career. The women cast as the lead on *The Bachelorette* are often women who have been positively portrayed on *The Bachelor*. We argue here that the women who star on *The Bachelorette* are packaged as exemplars of postfeminist nirvana.

Positive portrayals on *The Bachelor* are grounded by successful "emotional identity performances," which require participants to first accept that they are being filmed and then contour their actions to appear as if they are unaware of the presence of cameras (Rachel Dubrofsky 2011). Emotional identity performances are considered successful if they convey authenticity. Two features of authenticity, according to Dubrofsky, are white-ness and achievement of career goals. When women of color expressed intense emotion on the show, they were typically framed as being crazy, not in control of their emotions, or "performing for the camera" (Rachel Dubrofsky 2011, 21). Secure employment and white-ness are therefore essential to packaging these women as being ready for love and marriage.

Postfeminist nirvana is part of the evolving conversation about the "new gender regime" (Angela McRobbie 2009) or a "postfeminist sensibility" in media (Rosalind Gill 2007). The feminism in postfeminist nirvana refers to individualized choice; women are presented as though they are completely free to choose to stay home and raise children or empowered by self-objectification through the male gaze. Postfeminist media texts, like *The Bachelor* and its offshoots, acknowledge the feminist movements of recent history, but undercut that progress by making anti-feminist ideas, (i.e., idealized Hollywood romance, traditional gender roles, heterosexist courtship rituals, or women needing men to feel complete) more salient. In this sense, feminism can now be either a comedic punchline or ignored, since its tenets have been modified to align with dominant neoliberal ideologies and consumer-capitalist culture (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2018; Rosalind Gill 2017; Angela McRobbie 2009).

Feminist media scholars have been analyzing reactionary postfeminist media texts for decades (Maria Adamson 2017; Amy, S Dobson 2015; Jess Butler 2013; Jane Arthurs 2003). Postfeminist nirvana gives a name to this mediatized ideal that says successful women find ways to balance between having it all at work and home, and also manage to amplify a conventional, ultra-feminized aesthetic. While some may argue media has progressed past this (Jessalynn Keller and Maureen Ryan 2014; Hannah Retallack, Jessica Ringrose and Emily Lawrence 2016) others argue that postfeminist ideas have become hegemonic and entrenched in media (Rosalind Gill 2017). Gill argues that the postfeminist sensibility

"10 years on" is so deeply ingrained in culture today that it has become a "psychologized register" built around "cultivating the 'right' kinds of dispositions" for success in neoliberal society (p. 610).

Such dispositions include the idea that women must demonstrate aspiration, confidence, and resilience in order to be successful (Rosalind Gill 2017, 610). Regular people fashioning these ideas through celebrity mimicry in their own strategies of self-branding provide tangible examples for how these mediated dispositions absorb deeply into public consciousness. Brooke Erin Duffy and Emily Hund 2015 analyzed how fashion bloggers perpetuate new ideas of "having it all" by combining tropes of "carefully curated social sharing" that include staged glamour and talk about being "predestined" for and "passionate" about their work (p. 9). "Having it all" (or postfeminist nirvana) is thus evoked in traditional media and borrowed by individuals using social media to brand themselves. Analyzing this type of postfeminist messaging across platforms is necessary for understanding (i) how these ideas become entrenched in public consciousness and (ii) how RTV stars transition to influencer.

The rise of social media has made it easier for RTV stars to build a branded-persona with longevity (Evie Psarras 2020). We demonstrate here that people who have been on RTV, especially people who are part and parcel of the Bachelor Nation machine, have an advantage on Instagram because they come to the platform with a large, ready-made audience that expedites their path to Instafame. Rachel Dubrofsky's (2011) work focused on the women of *The Bachelor*. We argue here that the women who lead *The Bachelorette* were originally packaged to embody postfeminist nirvana on *The Bachelor*. They now evoke the principles of this ideal on their own as part of their self-branding strategy online. In sum, our research is guided by the question: Does the concept of postfeminist nirvana manifest on Instagram, and if so, how?

Methods

Using (Gillian Rose 2012) critical visual methodology we analyzed the public Instagram accounts of six former *Bachelorettes'*: Trista Sutter (2003), Deanna Pappas (2008), Jillian Harris (2009), Andi Dorfman (2014), Kaitlyn Bristowe (2015), and Jojo Fletcher (2016).[1] This approach requires serious interrogation of production of the image, the image and subsequent visual content, and the image's "audiencing." Borrowing Alice Marwick's (2015) collection methods, we recorded user account names, biography, number of followers, likes, comments, captions, and hashtags used in the posts. Posts were categorized according to Johnny Saldaña 2013 elemental methods of descriptive topic coding. We then conducted three rounds of deeper qualitative thematic pattern coding.

Analysis

Analysis indicates that *Bachelorettes* use Instagram primarily for 1) Interpersonal Relations, 2) Explicit Branding, 3) Insta-Labor, 4) Self-Love, and 5) Bachelor Promotions. Each woman capitalizes on and enhances the utopic ideas of postfeminist nirvana. Using postfeminist nirvana as an analytical lens to study their social media revealed the labor these women conduct for online capital and influencer status. These findings emphasize

how newer *Bachelorettes* online personas have evolved from the original *Bachelorette* contestants, particularly in terms of labor tactics and in how they espouse postfeminist aesthetics.

Interpersonal relations

Each woman analyzed presents their interpersonal relations through images that are highly feminized, filtered, and hashtagged. Hashtags like #blessed or #grateful become gendered when they are used to associate being blessed and grateful with "having it all." For example, numerous Instagram posts in this sample featured the women with spouses, children, friends, in flattering poses and lighting, against aspirational backdrops, with these hashtags, all of which works to espouse postfeminist nirvana. In one post, Trista Sutter (August 2, 2018) shared a picture with her husband Ryan (whom she met on *The Bachelorette*), with the caption: "He makes my heart happy," and the hashtags "#mylove, #grateful #thankyou." The couple is standing in a casual embrace on the beach with big smiles. A picture as such accompanying the above-mentioned hashtags helps produce a curated image designed to represent the bliss of having achieved postfeminist nirvana.

One notable difference between early *Bachelorettes* and the more recent *Bachelorettes* in terms of depicting their interpersonal relationships has to do with the frequency with which they posted about or with their partners. Capitalizing on their romantic relationships from the series is one way newer *Bachelorettes* seemingly propel their brand and increase promotional opportunities on Instagram. Two recent *Bachelorettes* were with their partners from the show at the time of data collection and posted numerous pictures together. Posts about their romantic relationships generally garnered more likes, which can increase social and economic capital. JoJo Fletcher, for instance, posted selfies with her partner from the show almost daily, many with captions that simply read "my love" or "mi amor." These typically received more likes than solo shots of Jojo or promotions. The women's interpersonal relations are therefore being used to formulate an authentic image for branding opportunities.

Explicit branding

While the Instagram posts analyzed here are an assemblage of the women's total branded-persona, posts were classified as explicit branding if they spoke directly to the women's entrepreneurial endeavors by promoting products featuring their name. Products range from podcasts, books, wines, to clothing lines. Earlier generation *Bachelorettes'* explicit branding posts featured only the women. In comparison, newer generation *Bachelorettes'* explicit branding endeavors promoting podcasts, books, and other products were more often cross-categorized with interpersonal relations, because they included their romantic partners from the series. For example, Jojo Fletcher and Kaitlyn Bristowe were promoting clothing lines and podcasts, respectively, during data collection. In several posts, they shared pictures with their fiancés from the show to promote these ventures.

For the promotion of Jojo's fashion and beauty line, Fletch, she posted a picture with Jordan against a backdrop of roses as an homage to *The Bachelor* franchise. In the caption, Jojo wrote, "@shopfletch launch party!! So. Beyond. Happy." While this was

Jojo's own branding and business endeavor, Jordan was still included in the picture most likely because pictures of the two of them together tend to receive more attention on Instagram. Attracting more likes and follows is beneficial for Jojo's new fashion and beauty line. This example underscores how newer *Bachelorette's* savvy exploitation of people's interest in their love lives from the show can be used to benefit their brand.

This digital strategy reflects a generational difference in labor prospects. The women of the earlier generation came on the series with existing careers, independent from their relational partners. Women like Jillian Harris have sustained their careers over time. Harris' time as *The Bachelorette* occurred pre-Instagram (2009). The idea that one could use the series as an opportunity to commodify relationships from the show for capital gain on social media did not exist. The newer generation of women on *The Bachelorette* have this option. Explicitly branding themselves with their relational partners demonstrates a new way for these women to legitimize their brand. Legitimating a branded persona is key to a substantial livelihood from Instagram.

Insta-labor

The *Bachelorettes* can make a substantial living through Insta-Labor, which also legitimizes their transition from RTV persona to Instagram influencer. Insta-Labor refers to the promotion of other products on Instagram for monetary reward. It also speaks to the work involved in becoming an influencer on Instagram, specifically in terms of how the *Bachelorettes* obtain money from posting content for retail and fitness brands. These brands are seemingly endogenous to the Instagram platform (e.g., Diff Eyewear, Fab-Fit-Fun, and weight loss teas like Teami Tea and Flat Tummy Tea). Fab-Fit-Fun is a box of products delivered every month to subscribers and only recently has it been advertised, by RTV stars, on television. Amy Kaufman explains in her *New York Times* Bestseller *Bachelor Nation* (Amy Kaufman 2018) that people from *The Bachelor* make anywhere from $250 to $10,000 for one single post promoting these products. Posting this sponsored content on Instagram is a visual representation of the labor these women conduct for financial gain. Insta-labor tends to be related to diet, fitness, and beauty, which makes this type of work highly gendered and aligned with a postfeminist sensibility.

In the last couple of years, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has created rules for promoting products. Hashtags like "#ad," "#advertisement," or #sponsored" are required for posts where influencers receive financial compensation. These women complied with FTC rules at the time of data collection, however, newer *Bachelorettes* appeared to work around these regulation policies. Andi Dorfman frequently posted pictures that looked like candid paparazzi shots of her walking down the street. A legitimate paparazzi shot would include a watermark from the photographer. In one post (March 20, 2018), Andi is walking down the street with her arms crossed from the cold, wearing an oversized winter coat, hat, and sunglasses, carrying mail. Included in the caption is, "first day of Spring, my ass." There are no hashtags or mentions, however a designer is tagged in the post. While the photo attempts to present as a candid (Andi appears unaware of the camera), the tag informs us that the photo is a promotion. It is difficult to discern if Andi receives compensation for these posts, however, we argue this subversive product promotion

marks the transition from RTV fame to influencer status on social media. Posting solo pictures, without reference to the series or a partner, to solicit attention for designers and to project celebrity status is the work of many influencers (Alice Marwick 2013).

Self-love

Each of the newer *Bachelorettes* attempted to display a sense of empowerment through self-love. Empowerment is evoked here only in terms of a superficial confidence. On the surface, ideas of empowerment across accounts came through in talk about self-love, which was also evoked with terminology like being "real," "unapologetic," and "brave" enough to go "make-up free." *Bachelorettes* often acknowledged their physical flaws on Instagram but discussed accepting themselves in the process. The empowerment espoused by self-love here is performative, appearance based, and perpetuates dominant, unrealistic beauty standards.

Take for instance Kaitlyn Bristowe's Instagram post from March 11, 2018. In the photograph, she's sitting on a couch during an interview, her body toned and ideally healthy, with a styled face, hair, and outfit. In the caption she says she, "was not going to post this picture, due to the cellulite on my legs," but, she ends the caption, "I'm not sorry for my cellulite in this photo, therefor[e] I refuse to edit it out." In addition, the hashtags #realstagram and #unapologeticallyher are used, which conjure up ideas of authenticity and discourses of empowerment. Drawing attention here to perceived flaws is intended to evoke an empowered stance towards body acceptance, however, calling attention to cellulite reinscribes dominant beauty standards. The caption from Kaitlyn's post also clues followers in to the fact that she tends to post edited pictures, i.e., "I refuse to edit it out," to also adhere to dominant beauty standards.

All six women's Instagram accounts discussed going "#makeupfree." The act of posting a make-up free photo with this caption demonstrates the constraints of being an influencer and the vanity required for the job. Drawing attention to unedited, make-up free faces on Instagram is another example of empowerment being defined by surface-level aesthetics. For example, Andi Dorfman's Instagram post from August 22, 2018 shows her in a bikini, with long tousled hair and uses the hashtag "#makeupfree." The flattering picture is also part of the performance of naturalness required for an authentic image (Rachel Dubrofsky 2011). Going #makeup free is considered empowering here, but only in that it affords women the opportunity to flaunt an idealized "natural" attractiveness. The overt disconnect between what is textually presented in captions and what is visually presented in the images conflates empowerment with normative beauty standards.

In Jojo Fletcher's Instagram post from August 29, 2018 she writes in the caption: "remember to be kind to yourself. Late night thoughts: I actually have Jordan to thank for reminding me of this. So often we . . . begin nitpicking away at our 'flaws' . . . we strive to always be kind and respectful to all those around us, yet unknowingly, sometimes fail when it comes to our own self love." Jojo is fresh faced and seemingly flawless in the photo. Self-love, as shown in this example, comes in talking about your flaws, but still presenting an image to the world that is not flawed. This post is also similar to many of Kaitlyn Bristowe's that give credit to their male partners. Empowerment here manifests in women's appearances and by having those appearances validated by men.

Bachelor promotions

Bachelor promotions overtly promote the franchise and typically feature the women on the set of *The Bachelor/ette*. These posts are clearly the product of ABC advertising because they either have *The Bachelor*/ABC logo or use hashtags associated with the show to amplify promotion. These posts usually occur on Mondays, when *The Bachelor/ ette* airs live. The women also posted throwback pictures from their time on the series to promote important episodes of the current season. Additionally, the women would promote the franchise and new episodes by posting pictures with each other. For instance, Katilyn Bristowe shared a picture (May 30, 2018) with Trisa Sutter, and two other former *Bachelor* contestants with the caption: "I'm with the band . . . " The hashtag #thirsty was also used. While the caption does not overtly promote the series, the picture featured three former leads of the show and was shared during the run of the recent season of *The Bachelorette*. Such tactics draw attention to the series and remind the audience of the new season.

As mini-brand extensions (Curnutt, 2011) of the network, the women's social media profiles, whether intentional or not, promote the franchise because their influencer status acts as an aspirational message to future participants. We classified other posts as *Bachelor* promotions if images depicted participants from Bachelor Nation spending time together outside of the series, and if those images were shared on days that are not associated with a current season. For instance, Andi Dorfman shared a picture with two former contestants from her season on *The Bachelor*. The picture depicts the three women standing poolside, in bathing suits, holding drinks. The caption reads, "I like it, I love it, I want some more of it #stagecoach." The hashtag refers to a music festival that is unrelated to the franchise. Cross-categorized with interpersonal relations, these posts market an idealized social life to future contestants. When women posted pictures with former cast members, those posts received a substantial number of likes and comments from fans. Such posts are a representation of the microcelebrity community of Bachelor Nation and demonstrate that the women are always part and parcel of the ABC franchise.

Overall, our analysis tracks the online postfeminist performances and labor practices the women engage with to become influencers. The women's postfeminist displays of interpersonal relations, proclamations of empowerment by way of self-love and explicit branding endeavors, make them coveted online sponsor partners (insta-labor). The women's success on Instagram benefits them financially and socially, which translates to positive and free PR for the franchise.

Conclusion

Our research goals were to (i) analyze reality stars' processes of self-identification on a platform where they have more agency in formulating their persona, and (ii) to understand how postfeminist nirvana manifests across popular media. Our findings indicate that gendered ideals and postfeminist mentalities salient in *The Bachelor* franchise are borrowed and reconfigured by individuals curating "Instafamous" personas (Alice Marwick 2015). Postfeminist nirvana manifests on Instagram through the women's depiction of their interpersonal relations, explicit branding endeavors, gendered forms of insta-

labor, *Bachelor* promotions, and proclamations of self-love. All five categories described here assemble a branded persona connected to the franchise and informed by a postfeminist sensibility.

Importantly, this research reveals how postfeminist nirvana and the ideas it espouses are established from television to Instagram. In this way, our work details how tenants of popular (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2018) and neoliberal feminism (Catherine Rottenberg 2014) are perpetuated across platforms. Tracing the trajectory of postfeminist nirvana is one way to understand how this mediatized ideal has become "entrenched" in popular culture and part of a "psychologized register" for living successfully as a neoliberal citizen (Rosalind Gill 2017). While each *Bachelorette* analyzed here uses similar methods of self-presentation, they have their own identities and personalities and therefore offer individualized interpretations of postfeminist nirvana online. These individualized representations reify postfeminist nirvana, which consequently might present this aspirational goal as doubly obtainable for the average woman following online.

On a related note, our findings show how these women take the postfeminist edit they have received on RTV and embolden it on social media. One postfeminist ideal amplified online is self-love. In our analysis, it appears that self-love is being conflated with feminism. Feminism is a collective effort that aims for equity and to dismantle systems of oppression. On Instagram, among former *Bachelorettes*, loving yourself in a postfeminist culture is presented as a strictly individual endeavor, composed of an embrace of body positivity and an unself-conscious orientation to aesthetics. Here, self-love appears to be touted as a form of feminism sans any action necessary for feminist progress. For instance, the women here, particularly newer *Bachelorettes*, embrace their flaws as an act of self-love, not as a rejection of patriarchal beauty standards. Put simply, self-love operates as a safe offshoot of postfeminist ideas. It does not disrupt patriarchal systems of oppression, and is instead packaged online as an individualized act that is easy to perform, commodify, and brand.

This research is also notable because it demonstrates how postfeminist nirvana on *The Bachelor* has evolved, particularly in aesthetics and labor. In terms of labor, career objectives for women have shifted, with women no longer needing to have a job before becoming *The Bachelorette*. Having a developed career was once central to the packaging of women striving to have it all on the series. In contrast, today, newer leads do not need traditional career goals. If they do have careers prior to the series, they will likely end once the lead achieves fame from the show. Rachel Lindsey and Andi Dorfman exemplify this career transition. Both women traded their law careers to become microcelebrities after appearing on the show. Such career transitions track in the time of the gig-economy. Our findings would support the notion that being a microcelebrity influencer is a more lucrative career option than any other job the women may have when initially cast to be on the show. The women's career goals have been reshaped over time to include self-branding and insta-labor. Insta-labor is the work involved in building a brand, but it is primarily a path to increase revenue and social currency on Instagram. Today, the new *Bachelorettes* evoke having it all by loving themselves unabashedly on public forums and by being entrepreneurial enough to leave behind the career they had before the show.

In terms of aesthetics, newer *Bachelorettes* online will textually boast empowerment and self-love by embracing their flaws. In reality, they depict a contradictory, normative, idealized Eurocentric image characterized by whiteness, thinness, and beauty

enhancements like fake eyelashes, hair extensions, and filters. Another difference between original *Bachelorettes* and the most recent *Bachelorettes* are in the types of pictures they post. Pictures that were categorized under self-love had visual markers depicting the *Bachelorette* engaging with vanity and egocentrism. In addition, newer *Bachelorettes* posted more pictures with their partners to promote their explicit brand and products. Newer *Bachelorettes* appear to understand that showing their romantic relationship from the series leads to a larger following and more promotional opportunities. A potential underside of this is that the women's branded-personas are dependent on their partners and the series.

The relationship between the franchise and the women is both exploitative and beneficial. The franchise gives the women a platform, microcelebrity status, and compensation. At the same time, the women have to market the franchise and seem tied to their pre-packaged identity. It is apparent from our visual analysis that each woman has built a huge following on social media with help from the series. The newer generation of women monetize their image from the series most effectively by tying their public face on Instagram to their character on the series. They do this through promotions of the franchise and pictures of them with their partners from the show. Still, the franchise benefits from contestants' use of social media just as contestants benefit from the series.

This speaks to the mutually exploitative and transactional relationships that are typical of reality stars and the network that employs them. For instance, Trista Sutter was the first *Bachelorette*. Twenty years later, it appears she understands her name and any monetary gain on social media is tied to the series. The women may lack autonomy over their public identity, however, they also benefit in terms of sponsorships by using the persona created by producers and editors online, which could provide an inadvertent form of protection from the network. One wonders if it may be worth exploring whether the women employ postfeminist framing because it is easier for their image promotion or because they genuinely desire these qualities.

This work makes contributions to theory, methods, and research on RTV and Instagram. First, we expand Rachel Dubrofsky's (2011) theoretical concept of postfeminist nirvana by looking at former *Bachelorettes* in the age of social media. Second, our method provides a model for research on constructing Instagram personas. We demonstrate how individuals engage with gendered insta-labor and the implications that this type of work has for identity formation on public platforms. This work also extends research beyond the show. It exemplifies how mediatized ideals are perpetuated across platforms by providing textual and visual analysis of how postfeminist nirvana manifests outside the series on Instagram to become embedded in popular consciousness. Like Duffy et al. (2015), who showed how fashion bloggers' content reifies capitalistic conceptions of femininity, we show how former reality stars mimic dominant ideas about gender from traditional media for their own capital gain on social media.

While this research intersects a multitude of spaces related to RTV, *The Bachelor* franchise, Instagram, influencers, and postfeminist media representations, it is limited by whiteness. While we did not focus on race, this study demonstrates the power of the franchise, particularly how it empowers people who uphold dominant ideologies and gendered ideals. This is important since the franchise is currently facing a racial reckoning. Our findings point to the fact that the franchise has effectively relayed negative representations for years. Future research should analyze *Bachelorettes* Tayshia Adams and

Rachel Lindsay, the first two Black leads in the franchise's 16-year-history. At the time of data collection, neither Rachel nor Tayshia had been cast as the lead. We recommend studies turn toward analyzing changes in representation alongside the series' expanding diversity and inclusion efforts.

Note

1. We analyzed the first 100 posts of each former *Bachelorette's* Instagram. The data collection period was from March—September 2018.

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