

CHAT, Would You Accept This Rose?

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Reality TV shows are a guilty pleasure for many of us since they are often very dramatic—making them addicting to tune in to week after week. In this article, Addie McMullen analyzes the popular reality TV show *The Bachelor* through CHAT and the use of a survey in order to understand the complex genre of reality TV.

I hear my friend shout, “Oh my gosh!” from across the room while her boyfriend chuckles. I’m curious. I look over at the computer screen they’ve both been intently staring at to see what the commotion is about. I’m not exactly sure what I’m looking at so, naturally, I ask, “What are you two watching?” “The Bachelor,” she responds. I’m not sure whether I should be ashamed or proud of what I’m about to tell you, but . . . I was hooked from the start.

The Bachelor is a reality TV show where one single guy sets out on a journey to find true love. During the first episode, he’s introduced to 25 beautiful, single women who all want the same thing: to spend the rest of their life with him as his wife. As I watched the season unfold, the concept of the show became more and more fascinating to me. I wanted to know more.

Genres, Genres, Everywhere

The 20th season of *The Bachelor* aired while I was enrolled in my English 101 class at Illinois State. This helped me to identify it as a genre of its own;

although, after further examination, I realized it isn't quite its own genre but it does fit into the genre of reality TV. Before that class, I thought a genre was just a way to classify things like movies, books, and music. What I didn't know was that genres are practically everywhere. This article that you're reading right now fits into a genre. In preparation for this article, I created a survey for my friends to take—that's also a genre. A **genre** is a category that has certain similarities in not only subject matter, but also in form and style. For example, let's look at surveys. Generally, surveys are set up a certain way. There should be at least one question followed by either several responses to choose from or a blank space where one is supposed to write a personal response. If I were to create a survey that was formatted like a *Grassroots* article, it would no longer be a survey because it wouldn't conform to the typical characteristics found within the genre of surveys. Now that I have defined what a genre is, let's look at how to analyze one.

CHAT, Would You Accept This Rose?

In order to understand the complex genre of reality TV, I would like to take this time to look at *The Bachelor* through the lens of CHAT, or **cultural-historical activity theory**. Using several different aspects, CHAT helps us analyze writing as a whole and consider what happens to a genre once it's out in the world (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). While there are a total of seven aspects of CHAT, I decided to focus on only four in this article. I looked to the ISU Writing website when defining each of these aspects.

The first aspect of CHAT I want to focus on is **production**, which is how a text is produced (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost, p. 1). This aspect is somewhat simple. The show itself is produced through the camera men that film everything. Then they have editors that sort through all of the footage and choose the best takes to include in the final product. The show also has producers who oversee every aspect of video production—they usually have the most say in what stays and what goes. The producers of *The Bachelor* also consistently structure the show the same way each season it's aired, which follows along with the definition of a genre (where it is described as a category that has certain similarities in form and style). I have noticed that not only is *The Bachelor* always structured the same way, but so are most reality TV shows.

This brings me to the next aspect, **activity**, or the actual actions that people engage in while creating a text (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1).

Throughout the season of *The Bachelor*, the contestants, along with the bachelor, travel to amazing destinations and go on various dates. There are the “group dates,” when a large group of the girls go on a date with the bachelor. As you can imagine, these dates can get pretty heated since there is more than one girl fighting for the same guy’s attention. Then there are the “two-on-one” dates, which are pretty straight-forward—two of the girls go on a date with the bachelor. These dates can also be intense because one of the contestants is typically sent home at the conclusion. And, finally, there are the “one-on-one” dates. The bachelor usually chooses a girl that really stood out to him to go on these. All of the contestants long for these dates because they’re typically quite extravagant—they’re not your normal dinner and a movie kind of date. They also give the lucky girl the bachelor’s undivided attention, which is rare. Did I mention roses?

Every episode of *The Bachelor* ends in a “rose ceremony.” During the rose ceremony, the bachelor is given a certain number of roses to hand out to the contestants. Each time he hands someone a rose he asks, “[Name], would you accept this rose?” Contestants who receive a rose are safe and will return the following week, while contestants who don’t receive a rose are sent home. In addition, there is one rose given out on the very first night, coined the “first impression rose.” There is also a rose given out after each type of date. Whoever receives a rose in these situations is safe for the week and safe from the anxiety caused by the rose ceremony. Then the finale, called the “Final Rose” episode, is where the bachelor is supposed to decide which woman he can’t live without and get down on one knee. As you can see, activity is a very important aspect to look at when analyzing a genre.

Representation, or the way that the people who produce a text think about and plan it, is a little more complicated in terms of *The Bachelor* (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). Technically, the show is reality TV, so nothing should be planned out ahead of time. Unfortunately, that isn’t exactly the case. I don’t think the producers go so far as to script things exactly, but they definitely do have quite a bit of control over what happens on the show. When the bachelor meets all of the women during the first episode, they each have a short amount of time to make their first impression after exiting the limo they arrived in. According to *Bustle* journalist Martha Sorren, former “bachelor” Sean Lowe revealed that the producers actually plan the order in which the contestants exit the limos. They pick the two women that they think have the best chance of ending up with the bachelor to be the first and the last contestants out of the limos. The order in which the contestants are called during the rose ceremonies is also planned out by producers because they want the most obvious choices to be called first so that the ending is more

suspenseful (Sorren 1). I've only included in this article a couple of examples of how the producers control what happens on the show, but there are certainly many more. After all, their goal is to make the show as dramatic and as entertaining as possible.

One thing I find fascinating about the show is the fact that the contestants and the bachelor himself aren't allowed to talk about the show until it's aired on TV. Talking about it would give things away, and nobody wants that. That's why socialization is an important aspect to consider when analyzing *The Bachelor*. **Socialization** is defined as how people interact as they produce, distribute, and use texts (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). After the final rose ceremony aired this past season, the newly engaged bachelor, along with his fiancé, could finally be seen together in public. He talked about how nice it would be to finally not have to be "in hiding." If they had been seen together before the last episode of the season had aired on TV, people would obviously know how the whole thing ends. In addition, while the show is being filmed, contestants aren't allowed to talk to the bachelor unless it's on camera because the producers don't want anything to be left out. They want every step of the bachelor's journey documented (Sorren 1). Contestants have also mentioned several times that they aren't allowed to have cell phones, books, music, or anything else that could possibly distract them while the show is being filmed. I don't know about you, but that would make me go crazy!

Finally, how viewers feel about the show relates to its **reception** (Sharp-Hoskins and Frost 1). *The Bachelor* is intended to entertain its audience members. In order to understand how viewers feel about the show, I decided to conduct a survey.

True Love or Scripted Entertainment?

My survey consisted of several open-ended questions because I didn't want to limit my respondents to only a few options to choose from. I wanted to learn their independent views. I created the survey on Survey Monkey and posted the link to it on my Facebook profile, hoping to appeal to my friends who have either seen the show or, at the very least, heard about it. By the time my survey expired I had fourteen respondents, but, after reviewing the responses, I chose to only focus on five of these in this article due to repetitiveness. The five I chose showed the greatest variation in responses and stood out the most by bringing up interesting ideas that I thought would be beneficial to this article.

For the first question of my survey, I simply wanted to know what comes to mind when people see or hear about the popular reality TV show *The Bachelor* (Figure 1).

Respondent One: A hot guy looking for love.

Respondent Two: Drama, but I love seeing all the awesome places they get to visit during the show!

Respondent Three: I think it's a fake kind of show that doesn't produce love, but infatuation. It's easy to fall in love with beautiful people in beautiful places with no real problems. It never lasts.

Respondent Four: Women who are desperate to find a man who will commit to them.

Respondent Five: There is NO way people are there to find love. It's all about ratings, sex, and fame. It's a bunch of people seeking attention.

Figure 1: The five responses, from the respondents I chose to focus on, to my first question.

While analyzing the responses to my first question, I couldn't help but notice a trend: drama. Most of the respondents seemed to believe that the show creates lots of drama between the contestants. Since I have seen the show, I can definitely understand why they would say that. There's quite a lot of drama and tension during the first couple of episodes in particular since there are more girls trying to make time with the bachelor. This drama relates to the socialization aspect of CHAT because feelings are often hurt and rumors are spread. It can get pretty ugly.

The next question I asked on my survey was, "What do you like/dislike about the show?" (See responses in Figure 2).

Respondent One: I love everything about the show.

Respondent Two: I like when the bachelor is a faithful individual and doesn't only make their decision based on looks.

Respondent Three: I don't like that it is one person who basically dates 25 other people simultaneously. Also, they are always beautiful, thin women and handsome, thin men. The people seem fake, like actors.

Respondent Four: I don't like the show. It's a competition that is televised.

Respondent Five: That it isn't real. It's helping to bring our society down as a whole. I think it gives a demoralizing ideal of dating.

Figure 2: The five responses to my second question.

This question was focused on the CHAT aspect of reception. I wanted to understand what people thought of the show. Responses to this question

showed the most variation. The responses I received from Respondents Three and Five, in particular, stood out to me. They both saw the show as being “fake” in some way, even though it’s claimed to be “reality TV.” Respondent Three viewed the show as being fake because the people on it all look the same—they’re all thin and beautiful. I would have to agree. It wouldn’t hurt to add a little diversity to the show.

Next, I wanted to know if viewers believe participation in the show is an effective way to meet your future spouse (Figure 3).

Respondent One: I’d say it’s up to the person. If you find it easy to fall in love and trust someone, it is probably very effective.

Respondent Two: No. You need more time to focus your feelings on one person at a time.

Respondent Three: Definitely not. You can’t fall in love if you force 25 people to date one person over a few months. The odds that the marriage actually works out are very, very slim.

Respondent Four: No. I don’t believe participation in a TV show is an effective way. It’s a competition. People attempt to provide TV entertainment.

Respondent Five: Absolutely not. It’s never worked out yet. There is nothing real about it. Things are staged for better ratings and they play upon the contestants’ emotional states.

Figure 3: The five responses to the third question of my survey.

When asked if the show is an effective way to meet your future spouse, all but one of the respondents were not convinced. Personally, I agree with the respondents that said no. Only a few of the relationships have lasted after the show, so there must be better ways of meeting the love of your life. Respondent Five brought up an interesting point when they said, “Things are staged for better ratings and they play upon the contestants’ emotional states.” A widowed contestant on the 19th season of the show was made to look like a terrible person when producers “made it appear that she was callously using her tragedy to get ahead in the game” (Yahr 1). This kind of behavior from producers was soon confirmed when a former producer, Sarah Shapiro, confessed that she “had somehow become an expert at manipulating female contestants behind the scenes to get ‘good television’ for the reality dating show” (Syme 1). The manipulation the producers often use to make the show more entertaining relates to the CHAT aspect of representation. Learning about that kind of manipulation makes me sick. I guess I should have known. Reality TV is never REALLY “reality.”

For my final question, I was curious to learn viewers' opinions on dating on the show, since that is, in fact, what the show is all about (Figure 4).

Respondent One: I wouldn't really call it dating. The contestants and the bachelor really only finish their first date throughout the show.

Respondent Two: I don't think it is realistic, and there isn't enough time for a person to get to know someone well enough for marriage.

Respondent Three: **Chose not to respond.

Respondent Four: Seems like dates need to be TV worthy. Dates don't seem like "reality" to me.

Respondent Five: It's a joke.

Figure 4: The five responses to my final question.

In response to my last question, all of the respondents said that dating on the show isn't "real dating." Some believed that they don't have enough time to really get to know each other, which I can agree with. The entire show is filmed over a few months, which is not much time to get to know someone enough to propose to them. Not only that, but the bachelor also isn't just getting to know one girl in this short amount of time; there are several in the mix. It's all very complicated and rushed.

All in all, in terms of the CHAT aspect of reception, Respondents Three, Four, and Five definitely hinted at the fact that they didn't like the show very much. They claimed that it's fake, which isn't completely false considering the fact that producers control certain things that happen on the show. Personally, I enjoyed watching season 20 of the show. While it may not be "reality," it did keep me entertained.

A Final Rose

Now I hope you have a better understanding of the complex genre of reality TV shows that *The Bachelor* belongs in. Looking at the show through the lens of CHAT and the survey I conducted really changed the way I think about the show. The show that drew me in from the start might not be as genuine as I had once thought, but now I know what makes it, along with other reality shows like it, so entertaining for myself and many others. Reality TV is truly a fascinating genre to look at. If you have never seen *The Bachelor*, I hope I've at least made you a little curious about it so that, when the next season airs, you'll try it out yourself.

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