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Examining Bachelor Nation

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Racism in *The Bachelor*

When watching *The Bachelor*, it is impossible not to realize the systematic racism on the screen unless you are a person of color. I have indulged myself in the pleasure of watching the show since Kaitlyn Bristowe's season aired. I would not consider myself a die hard fan because there are some people in this class that have watched for far longer than I have, but I'm a fan. Over the seasons I have watched, I never really realized how deep the racism ran even on the screen. The audience, I believe, is like myself. They are used to seeing characters or particular races and traits that it rarely rings a bell that something is not correct. Even when a person of color is cast based on racial misconceptions, most audiences miss it, think it is normal, or maybe even imagine they are getting enlightened about a specific race. Okay, I knew that was blatant racism on the show, but I never knew how deep these issues actually are because I'm white and not as educated as I want to be. Of course, I'll never fully understand, but I can, and have, done better.

A good example was the producers' reactions when they learned from Rachel Lindsay that there are black men who are never interested in black women. As a result, they went ahead to explore the idea with Rachel and Will Gaskin, and even they had to admit it was a complete disaster due to apparent disinterest from Gaskin (Lindsay 5). However, reading through the different articles on racism on screen and offscreen has made me realize how much racism the

show propagates and enables through its casts and producers. More surprisingly, I have identified racial discriminations and undertones the more I've watched the show and critiqued it.

Systematic racism has been the backbone of *The Bachelor* from its cast, the lack of enough Bachelor and Bachelorettes of color, and the racist undertones that dominate the casting of people of color.

I think a lot of this has to do with the lack of representation in the media in general, ignorance, our surroundings and how we were raised. We didn't start seeing racial diversity in TV shows and movies until recently. If you really think about it: we really never saw it until the second half of the 2010s. Then, when George Floyd happened and everything with the BLM movement, everything seemed to amplify. More diverse casting with the show, black leads, and just entertainment in general. Was it genuine? A knee-jerk reaction? Do they even care or do they just want to look good for the media? These are all questions that I'm constantly thinking about when things like this happen.

With me, I was raised well. I have great parents who taught me the important value of right vs. wrong. I don't think they had to teach me how to treat people with respect and how everyone regardless of how they identify are people, too. I just knew. Obviously, it was because I'm physically disabled, so I knew what it's like to have a stereotype and/or prejudice against me because of something out of my control. Also, it was my exposure to people. When I was in fifth grade, my fifth grade teacher was a white woman who was married to a black man. I know this because I'm friends with her on Instagram, but she would show us pictures of her family and two daughters in class. I could tell they were biracial. Looking back, it was so nice to see at such a young age because it taught me that it's okay and it's normal. It normalized that people fall in love with a different race and there's nothing wrong with that.

Anyway, the problem with systematic racism is that it is often so disguised that it is impossible to call out the people propagating and enabling it because then you become the individuals causing unnecessary drama or being disrespectful. Rachel has been called all types of names for calling out the show on the racial stereotypes and systematic discrimination that they continue to propagate. However, the audience, Unaware of how much racism is in the show, has lashed out at Rachel for being ungrateful and attacking the show, which gave her the platform to become an influential person and somewhat of a celebrity.

This next example, I know I briefly brought up in my last ARE, but I wanted to expand on it more, especially with this week's topic. For instance, when Rachel had an interview with Chris, who went on to defend Rachael Kirkconnell, a potential winner for the show who had, in 2018, gone to an antebellum-themed fraternity formal while still in college, Chris Harrison defended Kirkconnell without pausing to listen and understand what the weight of her actions meant for the black community in the show and the black audience. He did not accept the insult or disrespect to the black community. When Lindsay called him out on it, he denied defending her, and the viewers felt Lindsay was a troublemaker and the number one enemy of Bachelors nations as she was viewed as the individual who "bites the hands that feed her" (Lindsay 2). Even though she was fighting for racial equality, a noble cause that you would expect the fandom would appreciate, she received backlash and threats to the point that Lindsay hired security and had to disassociate from the franchise after 100 episodes as she viewed the fandom to be toxic.

Rachel, while the most attacked for speaking out against racism, she is not the only one who has been vocal about it. Matt, through his Instagram page, expressed his dissatisfaction and disappointment at how Harrison handled the issue of Kirkconnell, he explains how Lindsay patiently explained the history of blatant racism in the Antebellum South and how it was

important that Kirk be held accountable for her actions, but instead, Harrison dismissed her (Zhou). He also notes with concern that if the face of the show has such a racist attitude, how then is the show supposed to be inclusive and enhance diversity when individuals who should be stopping racism are propagating it?

The women of color who starred in season 25 also came out to condemn Kirkconnell's action and Harrison's dismissive and somewhat racist attitude towards such a critical and significant issue. Even though they acknowledge the backlash Lindsay has been getting for speaking out against racism in the franchise, they pledged their support to her. Bachelorettes from season 16 also spoke against racism and supported Rachel's initiative to expose and fight racism in the franchise (Zhou). They acknowledged that even though they were in the most racially diverse season, the conversation on racial discrimination and systematic racism was long overdue and, therefore, should be brought to light and discussed with the seriousness it deserves.

Kirkconnell is not the only contestant in the show caught up in racist scandals. However, her issue sparked the conversation of racism that had been dominant in the show for over two decades. In the episode where Rachel was a contestant, Lee Garrett, another contestant, faced scandals over multiple racist tweets he had posted. Garrett Yrigoyen, Season 14 winner, received backlash for liking posts that mocked survivors of the Parkland school shooting and immigrants (Zhou). The Bachelorette's lead in season 15, Hannah Brown, was criticized for using the n-word while singing on her Instagram Live.

While all these people have apologized, I feel an apology is insufficient. It should have a proper plan to change the systematic racism within the franchise. More importantly, it should be accompanied by a policy that demands all individuals behave respectfully towards every race, enforce racial equality in every aspect of the show and have a rule that supports racial diversity

and inclusivity. The producers casting the contestants should also do proper vetting to ensure that they select only contestants that are respectful to every race. I honestly find it difficult to believe that the directors did not know about Lee Garrett's racial tweets since social media is a big part of their vetting process. Such confidence to openly disrespect, mock, and despise other races on social media makes one wonder how much worse it is for the contestants of color within the show. It speaks volumes about the disrespect they have to endure and the producers who enable it. Sadly, it took a class action against the franchise in 2012 for them to reconsider and cast the first lead of color in 2014.

The show's producers should also not be left out of systematic racism. Rachel speaks about the portrayal of her character during her time as a contestant. When the tension between Venessa and Rachel over the bachelor became apparent, the producers urged them to discuss it. However, during the filmed conversation, Rachel says that they made Venessa, the troublemaker, appear like the bigger person. During the conversation, she accused Rachel of being a bully, and when she explained that it was not bullying but setting boundaries, Venessa started to cry on camera. The black stereotype is that they are angry and violent people. By accusing Lindsay of being a bully, the producers automatically feed into that stereotype of an angry black female, which Rachel describes (Lindsay 4). At this point, it is evident to the black audience that Rachel is facing racism even on camera, while the white audience is angry and probably hates her for being a bully. Even when Rachel explained the racial stereotype and Venessa's unconscious bias, the producers, who are primarily white, did not understand the weight of their actions and how much their actions in propagating black racial stereotypes affected Rachel's life and the black audience.

I 100% emphasize and relate to Rachel with this. Being physically disabled, society has such a long way to go in regard to accepting us and seeing us as human. Because of my physical disability, people automatically think that it's cognitive. In some cases, yes it definitely can be. In my case, it's not. I remember my freshman year of high school, I was put in really easy classes. I struggled academically up until high school, and I didn't know where I would be once high school classes. I get why they made that move. But, once I realized how easy those classes were for me, how I wasn't being challenged and asking to be put in high level classes, I wouldn't have had to fight as much and as hard as I did if it wasn't for my disability.

Also, another thing that comes to mind is how people think we won't make valuable romantic partners and only deserve to be in relationships with other disabled people. Will we have a shared communality? Yes, of course. It will definitely give a sense of security. Does that mean we're going to get along and click? Nope! First off, they are completely wrong and that's ableist in itself. Just because of our physical limitations doesn't mean we're completely unqualified to have a happy and satisfying life and romantic relationships. Check out Abigail and Noah who came out of *Bachelor in Paradise*. One of my favorite couples from the franchise. Anyway, I know she's hard of hearing and uses cochlear implants. I remember her saying in an interview that he takes her longer to process what someone is saying and they have to talk slowly and be patient with her. Noah does just that. They make it work for them and clearly, they are doing something right because they still seem so cute and happy together. People with disabilities make our situations work in a society that roots against us. I'm biased, but we are the most brave and strong people out there!

Back to systematic racism, it has had a toll on the mental health of the contestants. For instance, Rachel says that she had to disassociate from the franchise due to the backlash and

toxic fandom, which obviously affected her mental health as she felt exhausted (Lindsay 2).

Echard talks about mental health during his time on the show. He does not feel worthy of being the Bachelor, which takes a toll on him (Echard xiv). More importantly, viewers labeled him as trash, a gaslighter, and manipulative.

Matt James also speaks about the way the producer casts him. James was the first black male to stir in the show as the Bachelor. He states that he wanted the viewers to see an essential aspect of his life, such as the fact that Matt was biracial, he had faith, he was a brother and a son, a southern boy from North Carolina, a tireless striver and ambitious dreamer who reached the biggest stage in America. Instead, this quality was drowned by the racial drama that was going on in the show (Matt xxiii).

This bugs the living heck out of me! This is the exact same thing with the disabled community. In every show we see with disability representation (give or take a few) the entire show is centered around the fact that they are disabled ie. it's their whole personality trait.

A MINORITY COMMUNITY YOU IDENTIFY WITH IS NOT A PERSONALITY TRAIT. IT'S A PART OF WHO WE ARE, BUT NOT ALL OF IT.

We are so much more than the things we can and cannot control. Are we proud of the community we identify with? Absolutely. But, we are people and we have interests outside and people don't highlight that. The show wanted to show that they are diverse and inclusive by having Matt as the lead, but because all they marketed him as was strictly about his race, it made it worse, ignorant and racist.

Michelle also talks about her experience with racism and how the black contestants fought against it in the show. She highlights the unfortunate racial discriminatory event that

happened with Chris and Rachel when she interviewed Harris on the racial scandal surrounding Korkconnell ("2 Black Girls, 1 Rose: The Michelle Young Interview on Apple Podcasts" 30:35). She also talks about contesters such as Natasha who had to step away from non-productive conversations because the racial issues were not getting the attention it deserves. She further explains that racial discrimination and systematic racism were a source of pain for actors of color in the show ("2 Black Girls, 1 Rose: The Michelle Young Interview on Apple Podcasts" 30:38). Understandably so, contesters such as Rachel have had to endure pain, threats, and backlash from the fans for speaking out against racism in the show while racists contesters had only to give an apology and move on with their lives without realizing how much damage and pain they are causing others.

It is even more complicated when more producers and staff on the show are white and therefore do not understand the extent of damage that a little act of racism leaves behind for the victims. The producers could also not cast a black male as the Klan white audience did not like the narrative of a black man going to white homes and sleeping with their daughters (Lindsay 4). Instead of the producers changing this narrative, they feed into it, thereby propagating racial discrimination, which I find unfair and sickening.

In conclusion, *Bachelor* has played a significant role in propagating and enabling racism in the show. The producers have failed to vet the right contestants who respect minority races leading to various racial scandals. Secondly, the casting depicts systematic racism in which only a particular race has played a specific role for decades. Failing to treat people of color with respect and portraying them just as well as their racial stereotype has also propagated racism in the franchise. While the producers are unaware, this has caused pain, suffering, and backlash to

individuals of color. Unless the show changes its policy to accommodate diversity and embrace inclusivity, systematic racism will continue to be a problem for years.

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