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REALITY TELEVISION THROUGH THE LENS OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL
TEACHING AND QUINTILIAN

An Essay Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
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Part I: A Review of Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to develop practical ethical considerations for competitive reality television shows through the lens of Catholic social teaching and the common good as seen by Quintilian. Ultimately it will provide some insight into the ethical status of this and similar shows, and make suggestions for areas of weakness.

Significance

A large body of work exists on reality television and ethics, but none of it has related RTV to Catholic social thought (CST). CST provides a comprehensive “treasure trove of moral wisdom” (Wishloff 2004, 15) specifically designed to protect the marginalized. Pope Francis’s popularity and recent emphasis on CST makes it an increasingly popular method of social evaluation, making this paper’s topic relevant to modern communication managers. Furthermore, CST has become increasingly more important in marketing and communications education, as can be seen in the work of Rankin (2012), Laczniak (1999), and Santos (2009). Quintilian, a rhetorician whose excellent contribution to communications philosophy and timeless understanding of the common good and the moral orator, dovetails with CST unexpectedly to provide a solid backbone in communications theory. The two philosophies are similar in that they both revolve around the common good.

Catholic social thought has already been applied to social work, immigration, health care, education, marketing, economics, business, bioethics, and many other disciplines to make both suggestions and actual changes for preserving human dignity

(Clark 2004; Rankin 2012; Santos & Laczniak 2009). There is little evidence that it has been used in the communications field or that its philosophies have been shown to lend themselves specifically to communications theory, giving this paper a unique viewpoint that could offer some valuable insight. This essay intends to fill that gap.

To that end, a review of literature is necessary to demonstrate the body of work that has been completed on RTV thus far, and to discover where further study and analysis should be completed. A review of literature which details existing commentary and research on RTV and ethics provides a foundation on which original research and analysis can be completed.

Television and Ethics Literature Review

Reality television (hereafter known as “RTV”) closes a gap in time: audiences perceive that they and contestants alike do not know ‘what will happen next,’ and it is this thrill of sharing in the immediacy of often shocking plot twists and turns along with contestants that draws many audience members in. Primetime audiences are not the only ones interested in RTV. The genre is a very popular topic among ethicists and media academics, but for different reasons. Researchers argue that the increasingly blurred lines between entertainment and reality and the tactics used to catch attention spans have created a climate with dangerous implications for RTV participants, audiences, and our culture. A significant amount of RTV criticism is of an ethical lean, suggesting a heightened state of concern for this area especially as the quickly-changing genre continues to take shape.

This review is organized by topic, specifically covering the common RTV research themes of privacy, humiliation, audience interest, stereotypes, and gender and race issues, with special concern for the harm these programs may inflict on individuals and the public.

A large portion of academic RTV critique is dedicated to issues of race and gender. These two particular issues are not included in this review but are represented through Cooke-Jackson and Hansen's 2008 article on stereotypes and classism. Those two issues will be explored in-depth at a later point in this essay.

This review focuses on RTV in the United States to avoid the broad topic of international RTV. (From a brief appraisal, literature on RTV in other countries focuses on the impact of RTV shows on political issues specific to those countries. Additionally, RTV shows in Northern America and sometimes the UK are of a distinct nature, and impact Americans more directly than RTV from abroad.)

What is "Reality"?

RTV as a genre is not new. Many researchers place the origins with the advent of documentaries. But it is an ever and rapidly evolving genre of television. Many researchers begin by attempting to define RTV.

Overwhelmingly, academics are skeptical about RTV's reality claims; using quotes or offering an alternate term because the idea of RTV as reality seems inaccurate and misleading to them. Mills (2004) states that the term "humiliation TV" is more accurate than "reality TV", because strictly speaking reality TV would show people going about their daily business. Bratich (2006) prefers the term "gamedocs" for

competition shows (Big Brother, The Amazing Race). Conversely, many claim that RTV is not a genre but a concept for programs that use both “authentic” film (surveillance cameras, etc.) and contrived footage (interviews, confrontations), focus on the emotions and reactions of non-actors, make some claim to reality, and are in some manner descendants of the documentary (Biltereyst, 2004; Bratich, 2006; DeRose, Fürsich, & Haskins, 2003; Jagodozinki, 2003.) RTV is usually outwardly simplistic, with a similar format in each episode and a simple premise (Harry, 2008). Biltereyst adds that unlike documentaries, RTV does not intend to inspire audiences to act, nor does it further their wealth of information, and also that specific reactions are invited or provoked and not merely observed.

Savvy RTV producers are aware of this skepticism. The program *Cheaters* attempts to one-up the competition as self-proclaimed ‘real’ RTV, since the show documents the drama unfolding in real-life relationships after infidelity is discovered (Harry, 2008). However, Harry also points out that the situations are largely provoked, further disfiguring any semblance of reality, rather than providing an example of “real” RTV.

Many critics are concerned about the impact on audiences these reality claims may have. Bratich (2006) says that like many art forms, television has always tried to encapsulate what is real, but etymologically, the word ‘reality’ means ‘property of the king’: “This etymological lineage means that reality has been less a matter of truth and veracity than about [having] the authority and power to make things happen. In other words, reality as an issue of representation is only a recent historical development” (68-9). That concept of “reality” has always been open to interpretation by the powers that

be make it less of a surprise when RTV producers try to pass off a twisted reality as an untouched peek into private lives, but it is also important to be mindful of what most modern viewers understand “reality” to be.

Harry (2008) cites Baudrillard’s 1988 claim that the necessary distance between what is real and what is rational has been lost, thus taking away some power for the viewer to determine authenticity. Due to the increasingly intimate nature of RTV (from detached game shows to Big Brother, e.g.), this blending of real lives with manufactured meaning and scenarios will continue to create confusion for contestants, audiences, and academics alike, forming fertile ground for ethical dilemmas and debate.

The Paradox of RTV: Underneath the Surface

RTV has long been entertainment for the masses--an escape like so much of television. Part of the reason it has the potential to be so influential is precisely that most entertainment is perceived to be innocuous. For instance, the show *Blind Date* thrives on the prevalence of bad dates, so one could argue that it presents a realistic view of the dating world. There are also no “expert opinions”, allowing the daters’ opinions to prevail. *Blind Date*’s supertextual pop-ups, however, subtly assign meaning for the consumer (DeRose, et. al. 2003). Researchers suggest that an in-depth reading of RTV programs will provide an understanding of the true rhetoric imparted on viewers.

Cheaters is a textbook example of the clash in ethical standards RTV presents. Harry (2008) calls attention to some of the inconsistencies in this program. At face value, *Cheaters*’ tone is virtuous and looks down on falsity. At the beginning of each episode, a billboard-like screen states un-ironically, “This program is both dedicated to

the faithful and presented to the falsehearted to encourage their renewal of temperance and virtue". Although the show advocates near-Victorian morals, its structure is amoral at the same time. It uses histrionics, sensationalism, and embarrassing and painful situations to bring vindication – to victimize the cheaters.

Additionally, although *Cheaters* appears to promote virtue, it also allows viewers to engage in the guilty pleasure of watching others in their intimate moments of pain and shame, which often involves violent language and assault.

Furthermore, Harry points out that sexually active unmarried couples in *Cheaters* are not judged until they become unfaithful: thus promoting stringent morals in one regard while selectively ignoring others. Although *Cheaters* ridicules those who break certain ethical boundaries, it also relies on the breaking of an ethical code for material. In a similar manner, Harry says, much of RTV claims to perform one noble function while actually degrading real-life human beings.

Supertext, Subtext, Context, and Catalysts

Although in Harry's view, certain RTV programs are degrading, it is especially difficult to accurately read RTV's tone because of its unique evolution and subtleties. One reason for this, says Jagodozinki (2003), is that ethnographic documentaries are considered a predecessor to modern RTV. Audiences still take these programs at face value, but the very essence has been altered – in the transition from actual documentary to RTV – through elements of style. For example, a documentary's authoritative voice-over distances the audience, and the slower-paced documentary includes high-intensity

moments but is not dependent upon them. Though they are slight, Jagodozinki and others agree that these elements are the key to decoding the true intent of the show.

In RTV days gone by, competition shows created a clearly separate sphere of reality, as seen in *Hollywood Squares*, *Wheel of Fortune*, and *Jeopardy*, says Bratich (2006). This was accomplished by placing contestants in a stage-and-audience environment, the testing of trivial skills like price estimation and trivia knowledge, and clear boundaries for contestants as everyday people. But modern “gamedocs”, Bratich says, attempt to integrate the game as part of contestants’ lives, using personal relationships and interpersonal conflict in lieu of meaningless challenges.

DeRose, et. al. (2003) add to this: modern RTV shows like *Blind Date* are a blend of subgenres: RTV footage, dating game show, and VH1’s Pop-Up Video, which uses pop-up “info nuggets” to provide diversionary information and commentary every few seconds as a music video plays..

On the surface, *Blind Date* defies mainstream ideals of attractiveness. With its bare-bones screening process and wide representation of races, ethnicities, economic class, and physical appearance, it seems that a “real” - not glamorized - version of the dating scene is presented (DeRose, et. al. 2003). But the diversity proves fertile ground for derisive commentary: a pop-up supertext comically ridicules participants when they deviate from anticipated norms. The pop-up supertext can influence the audience’s attitude toward the subject. Therefore in DeRose, et al.’s view, *Blind Date* actually strives to reinforce gender, class, and ethnic stereotypes by using pop-up supertext commentary – while operating under the pretense of simply representing “real” people in “real” situations, and helping them “find love” at that.

Harry (2008) identifies the importance of advertisements to providing context. *Cheaters* ads are not for counseling services or self-help books, but for anti-balding treatments and diet pills. Harry says this indicates that the audience is not one of ethical inclination but focused on self-interest and short-term satisfaction.

Another major area for observation is the show hosts. Traditionally, the host is meant to be a sympathetic foil and an unbiased emcee for the production. However when read carefully, the host's tone and attitude toward participants can be like a barometer for the program's sincerity and good intent. Every host plays a role. In *Cheaters*, host Joey Greco acts as a moral authority, using comments and questions to place each cheater in the role of evil-doer (Harry, 2008). Furthermore, he offers the cheated-upon an opportunity to confront his or her partner at a nearby location immediately after viewing video evidence of infidelity, priming the waters for explosive interpersonal drama to occur. Clearly, in this case the host is the sole catalyst for the "meat and potatoes" of the program.

Jagodozinki (2003) backs up this claim: RTV show hosts at face value are often neutral commentators and facilitators (*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*), "in effect representing the 'dumb' witness of the jury as Everyman so that the full judgment of the Law can be parceled out, the sentencing of the players and/or guests appears just and impartial" (320). But the important 'moral' of the story for hosts, Jagodozinki adds, is that audience ratings are high: prizes are doled out and snatched away in the careless fashion of a natural disaster, without much genuine remorse from the host, who can maintain that "it's only a game" at the end of the day. Contestants are transformed into

mere pawns of entertainment, and they can become winners or losers, depending on feedback from fickle audiences.

Invasion of Privacy

Voyeurism is a popular topic in media studies. It becomes complicated in RTV analysis - specifically in gamedocs, game shows, and in other cases involving willing contestants.

In *Cheaters*, one half of a couple is aware and willing to invite an audience into their personal debacle. The other half is not aware that they are (and have been for several days) under video surveillance until after the fact - as opposed to shows like *COPS*, where videographers are in plain view and participants are aware of the footage. A signed waiver is required for participants' faces and names to be revealed, but *Cheaters* also offers up to \$2,000 for permission to reveal a cheating party's identity. Often enough, even the guilty participants are willing to be publically identified (Harry, 2008). Harry also says that a large portion of *Cheaters* participants have limited income, indicating that they would not be able to afford private investigative services on their own without the show. Harry indicates that although many agree to take part in the show and expose their private lives to the masses, many may feel pressured, and have little option to stop the process because it moves so quickly once infidelity is discovered.

As counterargument, *Cheaters* (and other programs) often cite the journalistic 'right to be informed' to justify the invasion of privacy and personal space that participants endure (Harry, 2008).

Much of RTV demonstrates what Calvert (2000) [from Harry 2008, 241] calls the “voyeur nation”: the socially-sanctioned preoccupation with observing the intimate details of another’s life. But most critics agree that this is not simply a case of curiosity-driven voyeurism, but a taste for another person’s painful situation.

The Public’s Enjoyment of Private Pain

Harry (2008) argues that voyeurism is not an end in RTV programs such as *Cheaters*. Revealing real-life, intimate issues and situations to the masses as a form of entertainment, tells audiences that there is no place for real compassion and empathy in these situations, priming the waters for guiltless enjoyment of the brawl that takes place during confrontation. “...By commodifying infidelity as a spectator sport, the program devalues whatever any particular individual may attempt to conceive of as a genuine ethics of romantic trust and commitment” (244-5). Harry states that this spreads cynicism and the concept of public humiliation as mere entertainment rather than an invasion into private emotions and lives.

In Jagodozinki (2003), hosts in *Judge Judy* and *The Jerry Springer Show* masquerade as stewards of contestants’ best interests, yet they insert nasty quips wherever possible, scolding and sometimes provoking participants in a satirical ‘parent’ role: they are less interested in resolving the issues of the participants before them than in satisfying an audience’s need for high-drama entertainment. Here, says Jagodozinki, not only is the participant’s painful personal problem secondary to the audience’s enjoyment of it, but if someone can “twist the knife” for extra effect, all the better.

Many researchers focus on the invasion of privacy and humiliation that RTV participants endure, but Biressi (2004) take a close look at programs that involve risk (or certainty) of physical harm. The popularity of shows like *Survivor* and *Fear Factor* proves that mainstream RTV audiences sanction and take some kind of pleasure in watching contestants endure physical and psychological pain, says Biressi. “The convening of the public around scenes of violence...has come to make up wound culture: the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and open persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound (Seltzer 1998, 1) (Biressi 2004, 345).

Both British and American audiences proved receptive to shows such as *Fear Factor*, *Survivor*, and *Scare Tactics*, which feature contestants facing extreme bodily and psychological pain, including starvation and being untruthfully told that a loved one has died – as a prank. Shows like *What Would You Do?* take psychological pain a step further, according to Biressi (2004): the show uses actors to orchestrate various unacceptable social situations, while show hosts observe and rate unsuspecting bystanders’ reactions from a hidden location. Often, the situations result in heated confrontations, ultimately causing intense fear and distress for the innocent passers-by. Mendible (2004) opposes Biressi’s view in theory, saying that while it is true that RTV contestants are frequently portrayed in a negative light, to them negative attention is better than no attention. The contestant, an ordinary person, is being watched by audiences worldwide, so ultimately even if the participant is in pain, “how can you feel ‘put down’ if millions of people think you’re worth watching?” (336).

Biressi attempts to explain the allure of pain, citing illusionist David Blaine's stunts (which include ripping his own bloody heart out of his chest with his bare hands): Pain is a private matter that affects the intimate space an individual inhabits. It cannot be seen or felt by others. It can only be understood by others through some sort of expression – analogies or artwork, for example – often turning it into a graphic exhibition. Thus, pain is transformed into a public spectacle.

The Role of Humiliation

While Biressi, Bratich, DeRose et. al., Harry, and Jagodozinki focus on the audience's experience of RTV and the wider implications of such programs, Mills (2004) seeks to understand the hostile conditions contestants face beyond the cheers of audiences and smiles of hosts.

According to Mills, using people's weaknesses as entertainment has been a part of television since its beginning, as seen in programs like *Candid Camera*. Mills argues, however, that there is a difference between catching others in sometimes unflattering behavior and modern RTV programming. Financial stakes and rewards have risen dramatically, as has the amount of exposure participants receive. Contestants are also confronted with their weaknesses and failures publicly, causing an intense and personal experience of humiliation.

Mills (2004) believes that the theme of meanness and ridicule in such shows originates from the likes of *Howard Stern* and *Jerry Springer*, and echoes DeRose, et. al.'s sentiment that the crux of so many shows is to laugh at, criticize, and condemn show participants. Mills builds on this as well: Paradoxically, so many RTV contest-type

shows offer up those who fail to make it to the finish line as the main entertainment. “Humiliation TV shows are contrived from start to finish, and what they feature are not winners so much as losers to whom the viewing audience can feel superior” (79). The point is not to see who wins the ultimate prize, but to judge, dismiss, and exclude. To prove his point, Mills cites *The Apprentice*, where the climax of each show is the build-up to and moment when one contestant is excluded: Contestants compete ultimately for a job with Donald Trump by completing a series of challenges in groups, and one contestant from the losing team is fired by Trump each episode. Mills points out that the challenges are simplistic and do not portray the business world in a serious light, nor do they offer much dimension or texture other than the drama of waiting to see who will be cast off at the conclusion of each challenge.

However, Mendible (2004) argues that rejection alone is not a solid argument for inflicted humiliation, which occurs when an individual’s self-respect is diminished or injured. Self-respect and self-esteem are two very different things: A rejected woman on *The Bachelor* may suffer a loss of self-esteem, but she would need to accept someone else’s criteria (the audience’s, the bachelor’s, the other contestants’) of personal worth in order to have her self-respect lowered. She may feel rejected, but cannot be humiliated if she is living by her own set of ideals.

Mills also contends that not only are losers created during the course of the show, but contestants are also cast (unknowingly) as losers from the beginning. The difference is that they are “exposed” as “losers” during the course of the show. In *Joe Millionaire*, female contestants are told that they will be paired up with a millionaire. After the relationship has progressed to a serious level, it is revealed that that the

“millionaire” suitor works a blue-collar job. The women are embarrassed at having been tricked, but will also be perceived as gold diggers if they reject the man. Mills (2004) concludes that “many [RTV programs] are openly contemptuous of the feelings of people they have recruited” (80).

Mendible (2004) in theory would disagree that the women on *Joe Millionaire* have been humiliated: In order to be humiliated, victims must be rendered passive (having some kind of injury forced upon them) and conscious of the act. Additionally, the humiliating party must willingly take part in and derive satisfaction from the humiliation. In other words, the experience of humiliation is the same for the victim, whether the perpetrator’s delight in humiliating is real or imagined. Humiliation is a two-way street, a willing participant cannot be humiliated. Although the women in *Joe Millionaire* are taken by surprise at one point in the show, they continue to participate and contestants in well-known programs (*Big Brother*, *Survivor*) could never claim humiliation by ignorance of what the shows entail.

Mills specifies one more type of loser, not of a competition but in the “game of life”: Some program participants are rendered pathetic because of their physical condition and state of mind. In *Extreme Makeover*, the bulk of each program contains footage of participants explaining the numerous ways they hate their bodies. But Mendible (2004) counters with this: It is widely understood that betrayal, gore, insecurities, and character flaws offer the quality of “reality” that audiences crave. RTV contestants are aware of this as well when they choose to participate. Mendible would probably argue that *Extreme Makeover* contestants have a symbiotic relationship with

their audiences: they seek attention and some help for whatever ails them, and in turn will provide audiences with an open look at their self-doubts and deepest fears.

Mendible says that contestants do not necessarily have to experience humiliation, or if they do, they are responsible for the experience. Decidedly, many do experience humiliation as a result of the shows, but the contestant's motives (fame, notoriety, etc.) and compliance with the embarrassing situation further blur the ethical lines.

Exploitation of the Innocent

By arguing compliance, it is easy to dismiss the impact involvement in an RTV program can have on participant. But can a participant be fully complicit when they do not understand the true essence of the show, or the ramifications of becoming a star?

Sheffield (2013) says that there is no such person: Audiences have completely bought the "myths of our own national innocence" (Sheffield, 2013) so that they overlook the fact that much of RTV is scripted, staged, and heavily edited. Sheffield points out the paradox in programs like *Buckwild* and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* featuring Southern stars: "What is more authentically Southern than bullshit? Con men have been hustling suckers by pretending to be country rubes since the invention of snake oil. If these kids are playing up their hillbilly act to get some cash, that just makes them more authentic. And if you think for a minute they're not in on the *Buckwild* joke, take another sip of that snake oil."

Cooke-Jackson & Hansen (2008) refute this with an example: A 2002 CBS RTV show proposal to be called *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* ended abruptly amid controversy. Producers launched a search in poor areas of the South offering up to

\$500,000 for a multigenerational family willing to stay in a Beverly Hills mansion for a year. Appalachian advocacy groups, labeling the search a “hick hunt”, launched a campaign of their own and managed to halt production of the show. According to Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* is just one example in a long line of RTV programs to portray impoverished Appalachian communities as the subject of ridicule, emphasizing stereotypical characteristics such as toothless, lazy, and ignorant. The author argues that these portrayals overshadow serious issues – social, health, and economic - faced by Appalachian communities. “Perpetuation of the poor white stereotype permits dominant culture, as represented by the mass media, to justify the marginalization of this sub-group while validating its own status” (Cooke-Jackson and Hansen 2008, 184).

Cooke-Jackson & Hansen also add that while works of fiction may cast characters in a stereotypical and negative light, the artist can easily tailor the characters and storylines for the purpose of moral instruction. Nonfiction is not as moldable, resulting in the exploitation of a specific individual.

Some contestants recognize that their role in reality television is not to be taken at face value, but have plans of their own to capitalize from the publicity. Many programs promise personal advancement, and many contestants genuinely bring their hopes and dreams to RTV hoping to receive help, exposure, to find love, or to advance themselves in their chosen career path. As noted previously, *Cheaters* is seen by some “clients” as a cheap alternative private investigation (Harry). The show receives about 100,000 requests each year (as of 2008) from people possibly hoping for validation and closure in their romantic lives. Possibly, many contestants did not anticipate such a

painful confrontation. Even the cheater undergoes ridicule, suffering, and betrayal when the former party decides to publicly expose his or her mate, evening the score but also bringing shame and pain to a person who did not choose to inform his or her partner of the infidelity in this manner.

Shows like *American Idol* purport to uncover the next ‘big thing’ in the music industry. But the popularity of the show lies in the verbal brutality of judges like Simon Cowell as he puts down the rejected lot each week (Mills, 2004). The focus of the show, again, is not to uplift but to ridicule hopefuls who dare to make themselves vulnerable in an attempt to chase a dream career.

DeRose, et. al. (2003) claims a particular victimization of those in lower economic and social standing, echoing Harry and Cooke-Jackson & Hansen: “...Characterizations of the professionals are devoid of the stigmatizing venom present in the characterizations of the working-class individuals. The supertext tends to depict the working-class participants as undesirable social outcasts and pushes these individuals further toward the fringes of society” (182).

Audience Attraction and Engagement

If the majority of media ethicists and analysts have a negative view of RTV, it is not for lack of appeal to the human psyche, especially for certain types of people. Vicarious viewing of acts of revenge is highly valued by RTV audiences, and these audiences may also associate their pleasure at the sight of vengeance with a desire for competition (Harry 2008).

Reiss & Wiltz (2004) expound on this, conducting a study based on sensitivity theory which holds that people seek satisfaction for basic motives, and individuals may prioritize various motives differently. RTV enables viewers to experience joy and satisfaction vicariously. Vicarious experiences allow viewers some catharsis, allowing a viewer to purge excess energy through viewing.

According to the Reiss & Wiltz findings, people who place a high value on vengeance are more inclined to watch RTV programs. The desire for vengeance and competition are closely related, so it follows that those who enjoy and value vengeance would be drawn to RTV, which is often highly competitive.

Another finding was that the more RTV shows an individual likes, the more status oriented the person is. It may be that viewers feel more important than RTV show participants, owing to the perception that the participants are 'real' people. Additionally, showing ordinary people who have risen to fame makes it more accessible to status-hungry viewers (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). Vengeance and some forms of status-seeking are considered negative social behavior, so RTV appears to be an outlet for these needs. The researchers named one caveat to this supposition: Vicarious experience is less intense and does not fill a long-term need for satisfaction.

According to Biltereyst (2004) the appeal of RTV may be more global than Reiss & Wiltz' findings suggest, speaking to every individual by way of the modern human experience. Because of the erosion of the family unit and overall societal solidarity in the past three decades and the consequential lack of strong relationships, audiences are drawn to experience intimacy and communal living vicariously through RTV (*The Bachelor, Big Brother*).

Researchers will continue to debate the cause, but it is clear that RTV is not simply a fad. With growing demand and increased interactivity it is evolving to become more and more a part of everyday life for the average American.

RTV's Role in the Identification of Self and Others

Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) point out that all television has a profound and complex impact on viewing audiences: it does not simply provide images and information but is a forum that assigns meaning on behalf of a whole culture (cited in Jensen & Helles 2010, 518). RTV, therefore, also has the power to assign meaning to audience members, shifting their understanding of and attitudes toward countless topics. This subtle but constant influence can have a phenomenal impact on the perception of self and others, even for contestants.

“Who am I?”

In a world that faces a lack of up-to-date models of the working person in the aftermath of rapid social change, contemporary workers may look to *The Apprentice's* cutthroat overtones as an example for integrating these changes into their behavior as successful employees (Lair, 2011). According to Lair and Mills, RTV programs often reward a lack of empathy and normalize ruthless competition. “Indeed, the overriding lesson that humiliation TV offers is that people will do anything for money, and that we are living in an America in which the only way to get ahead is to behave as ruthlessly as possible” (Mills 2004, 81). Lair and Mills also conclude that if modern workers and individuals become completely self-interested and eagerly participate in the destruction of others, then the state of modern society will disintegrate rapidly.

Cooke-Jackson & Hansen hold that individuals should not be used as a means to an end. Using participants in RTV as objects of entertainment and as cash cows normalizes this treatment. Cooke-Jackson & Hansen fear that this will make it more likely that other individuals, such as viewers, will allow themselves to be used in that manner (2008).

Biltreyst (2004) takes a more neutral role in asserting the part RTV plays in identity politics: individuals come to understand who they are as a person in the context of the culture and society around them. In a network society – with the guidance and influence of media such as RTV – the avenues are endless. This can, however, produce negative results if an individual is not grounded by family, tradition, and actual physical environment (neighborhood, social class). Bratich (2006) presents a positive outlook, saying that “...shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* highlight personal growth through self-knowledge” (68). Bratich acknowledges the potential for personal transformation offered through RTV, with a plethora and wide variety of makeover shows and the ability to turn “ordinary people into celebrities (*American Idol*, *I Want a Famous Face*) and celebrities into ordinary people (*The Osbournes*, *Newlyweds...*)” [67].

“Who are you?”: Stereotypes.

By and large, experts on the topic look upon RTV as a poor and misleading source for understanding others in the surrounding world. Cooke-Jackson & Hansen (2008) make a few strong points in this area: No one – including media producers – knows every intimate detail about a person or group and what defines him or her. Therefore, it is a violation to provide a definition of another without giving the individual a voice in how they are represented. RTV participants may define themselves

through their behavior and are even sometimes granted interviews (within a show) where they may explain themselves more fully, but they have little to no control over how they are represented through editing, subtext, context, etc. in the final product that is aired to millions. Thus a caricature can easily be created where a genuine personhood once was.

Moreover, using stereotypes to portray fictional characters negatively impacts perception of a group, but does not target specific individuals as seen in RTV (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008). Humorous stereotypes as applied to poor Appalachians, for example, is an ethical violation because the targets of the humor do not find these same predicaments (pain, lack of education, etc.) humorous. Not only is the general Appalachian population harmed, but RTV provides a unique opportunity for individual people with no experience as public figures to have their reputation harmed long-term.

Finally, stereotypes are generally seen as negative because they cast others in a less-than-human light and prevent individuals from being understood as unique or set apart from a group. Stereotypes can be used by the dominant culture to diminish other groups, thus maintaining control (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen 2008).

Harry and Jagodozinki add that neither party in *Cheaters*' storylines is ever fleshed out past the context of the infidelity, allowing the focus to be on the dramatic encounter, and not on the personhood of participants. So participants are reduced as people. They are no longer a human being, but a set of symptoms (Harry, 2008; Jagodozinki, 2003).

Mind control and formation.

In addition to the impact it can have on the masses, the climate seen in much of RTV climate has the potential to change a contestant's personhood. Much of RTV tests character, often through physical means (*Fear Factor*, *The Amazing Race*) and pushing contestants physically results in a psychological reaction as well, such as breakdowns, extreme stress, and exhaustion. Participants are broken down and reconstructed to allow for greater receptiveness and openness to the purported end goal of the show (self-improvement, overcoming obstacles), but also leaves contestants psychologically incapacitated and vulnerable to the will of others (Bratich, J. Z. 2006).

Does RTV Encourage Unhealthy Behavior?

The poster child for poor health, energy-drink guzzling "Honey Boo Boo" is an archetypal modern show of the RTV exposition genre. "The series is a ratings hit... But the show has also drawn criticism for what many see as promoting southern stereotypes and an unhealthy lifestyle" (Tauber 2012, 1). Shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* have been criticized for promoting unhealthy habits and stereotypes, but Tauber also acknowledges that many of the family's activities predate the show. We are still left to wonder whether RTV participants, under pressure to gain high ratings, put their antics before health and safety considerations. Other programs add to this effect: *Buckwild's* contestants engaged in risky driving, *Survivor* and *Naked and Afraid* contestants deal with unnecessary starvation, exposure to the elements, and lack of nutrition, and *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant* normalize teen pregnancy. Even if audiences do not see

participants of these shows as role models, their behavior still endorses dangerous, attention-seeking behavior for impressionable audience members.

RTV as an Under-the-Table Social Experiment

In the quote “We can think of RTV less as a genre than as a loose assemblage of techniques and experiments” (Bratich 2006, 65), Bratich was referring to the inadvertent “experiments” which occur in RTV when producers intervene in reality rather than simply representing it. The viewer’s involvement in “co-discovery” is at the core of RTV’s attraction. Both participants and audiences wonder alike, “What will happen next?” This is the same question that scientists ask themselves when conducting a legitimate experiment. RTV shows are reminiscent of the Stanley Milgram and Stanford prison psycho-social experiments (Biressi, 2004). More concerning, the BBC network produced a show that actually attempted to repeat the Stanford prison experiment: *The Experiment*, in 2002. Two researchers oversaw the show and collected data, believing that it would lend valuable insight into the psychology of racism, oppression, and terrorism. This type of research was especially urgent, they argued, in light of the September 11th attacks. Also compelling was that the funding would be provided entirely by the producing network.

With fears that entertainment will become the overriding concern for the show, Zimbardo himself refused an offer to take any part in the show, stating, “There is no question in my mind but that the BBC and their consultants are hoping for something dramatic to erupt, to make it riveting for viewers.” He also cautioned the researchers that a high risk of danger presented itself to participants. Research team and producers alike

promised extensive safeguards for all participants. However, psychologist Peter Collet (who has consulted on other RTV programs) also said, “If we don’t get the phenomenon that Zimbardo observed, then the whole thing is pointless” (Shouse, 2001).

Despite the controversy and warning from Zimbardo that his experiment should never be repeated, BBC proceeded with the program. Not surprisingly, the RTV show ended similarly to Zimbardo’s original prison experiment: the show was ended a day or two earlier than its planned ten-day span, but not before a large amount of data was collected (Wells, 2002).

The Experiment caused its share of controversy, but what is more chilling are the run-of-the-mill RTV plots in which a group of people are put into high-emotion, high-stress situations so audiences can “see what happens” – but with no psychological backup, advocates, or safeguards.

RTV as an Extension of the Market

RTV competition and game shows are symptomatic of a control society or a microcosm of modern capitalism in which fierce competition reigns. The winners and losers are decided via often arbitrary challenges. Parallels between the current capitalist marketplace and RTV can be drawn: both are based in amorality, and morals are trumped by ratings and revenue. In turn, producers and directors make decisions based on ratings and income. They do not include any sort of ethical basis – considering whether they are taking advantage of an individual’s weaknesses or needs, for example (Deleuze [1990/1995b], in Bratich, 2006; Harry, 2008; Mills, 2004). This creates a

“moral and media panic” (Biltreyst 2004, 118), resulting in knee-jerk reactions instead of carefully deliberated action.

Some critics claim that all RTV content grows from television’s highly competitive nature combined with the market economy: controversy and freakishness are consistently given a platform, leading to an overall “atmosphere of controversy” (Biltreyst 2004, 117). From this viewpoint, only the conscienceless and the extreme outliers get enough ratings to survive in such a competitive atmosphere.

RTV’S Potential for Positive Social Change

Despite the seemingly endless list of shortcomings and dangers, Biltreyst (2004) offers some concluding thoughts on the potential American RTV provides by way of power and influence, the same traits that critics find suspect in the genre. “Critical consumer culture position.... accepts that commercialism often leads to trash, exploitative or socially conservative material. But it at least opens up the possibility that contemporary commercial culture may have the potential for empowerment at some occasion” (122). From this perspective, RTV is not the moral black hole that many critics fear, but a new way to experience the public sphere in a more democratic fashion (through the inclusion of everyday experiences and common knowledge).

“The stress on everyday life, on strong reality claims, authenticity, intimacy and first person speech has made it possible for RT to shed new light onto various kinds of social and moral issues” (119). Biltreyst identifies three main focuses here: the manifestation of the self (identity politics), the relationships between the self and another (interpersonal relations), and the relationship between the self and society.

In a pluralist sense, RTV can empower its audiences by providing a forum for discussion and debate, a new way to acquire information, with the ability to participate as some programs become increasingly interactive. However, balance and appropriate context are still necessary to make RTV an enlightening and not simply thrilling medium.

Part II: Research and Formation of a Lens

The History and Evolution of RTV

Because of its tendency to portray pop culture icons and include boundary-pushing characters with their style, jargon, and personal outlook on life, reality television constantly reinvents itself as a fresh and novel medium. Though often considered a more recent genre of television, its roots lie decades ago in sync with the dawn of broadcast television itself.

Allen Funt's well-known 1948 series *Candid Camera* is traditionally marks the beginning of reality television programming (Writer's Guild, 2015). Documentaries populated the channels of early television during this time as well, but distinct to this new genre of television is that the participant interacts with the medium: instead of merely being aware that they are being recorded, the participant moves, changes, and reacts to the presence of the camera when it is revealed to them. Still it would take two decades of evolution for the reality television genre to break apart from the documentary.

After *Candid Camera* came a handful of “guessing game” and “truth-or-dare” shows, such as *Truth or Consequences* in 1950. These shows were mostly filmed in-studio because of the technological limitations of the day, but during that decade *You Asked for It* took the viewer to see various sights and world phenomena. The late 1970’s and early 80’s took the camera outside of the studio regularly.

In 1973, PBS began to air *An American Family*, which presented an intimate look into the private lives of the Loud family. Their secrets pushed both the boundaries of what was considered socially acceptable for that era as well as the boundaries of the documentary genre. It is this same basic format and function that carries us into what we call reality television today, similar to *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (2007) and *Newlyweds* (2003). By the mid-1980’s, RTV had become a broadcasting staple and multiple sub-genres began to develop, such as “home-made” programs like *America’s Funniest Home Videos*. *America’s Most Wanted* and *60 Minutes* appealed to a more serious audience as some form of RTV seeped into nearly every channel and targeted most audiences (Writer’s Guild, 2015).

In 1992 came *The Real World* with its claim to a new level of reality where, through the use of secret cameras, candid and spontaneous reality is supposed to have actually been captured. This form of RTV takes us into a more current understanding of RTV in which participants appear to be observed unaware.

Today, RTV exists in a multitude of sub-genres, such as voyeuristic (*Cops*), competitive (*Survivor*), homemade (*America’s Funniest Home Videos*), video-based magazine show (*Dateline NBC*), and countless combinations of sub-genres. It has become so diverse that some program exists for every audience.

Several elements support the explosion of RTV. From a network standpoint, this type of programming is beneficial economically. Less equipment is required for most programs, and set and crew costs are low. Few of the performers are paid, and salaries are lower because the majority of participants are unknown.

For audiences, RTV serves some practical purposes, such as learning something new (a recipe, how to decorate), and by offering hope, inspiration, and motivation. On a deeper level, it reassures the masses that they are not alone in their personal struggles. Others have deeply complex and painful private tribulations, and we can witness those through RTV – both sharing in another’s pain and escaping our own. “We as viewers, hope, desperately, to find something relevant to our own lives.”

RTV is so heavily criticized, but its social contributions cannot be forgotten. For example, *Candid Camera* taught the public to question authority (Writer’s Guild, 2015), something that was especially important during the early days of television when audiences were less inclined to question facts presented through mass media. *America’s Most Wanted* has helped authorities catch hundreds of criminals, and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* and similar shows are dedicated to helping others who have endured unfortunate circumstances.

Audience’s curiosity about others’ private lives and their desire to connect with characters real-time has always been sated by television for most of television’s history. We are left to examine how modern reality television can satisfy both of these universal human desires in a way that is also edifying.

Quintilian and the Common Good

Speaking well has always played a vital role in the success or failure of every human being. This was an especially important part of a student's educational development in early times, when speech was the only medium available to pass information. An individual's skill could dictate the difference between fortune and ruins, or even life and death. Later, speech transitioned into the educational realm. We are left with bodies of thought on everything ranging from how to best teach speaking to pupils to a firm conviction that good speaking cannot be taught, and from speaking as an art of the emotions to speaking as a purely logical endeavor. Quintilian, born in 35 AD, had a special perspective on the relationship between speaking and goodness, vetted by his predecessors Domitius Afer and Cicero that offers a valuable look into another medium, RTV, whose goodness is often debated.

Quintilian's time came after the golden age of Latin literature, when the both empire and literature were in decline (Ryan, 172). After receiving their education, a group of young thinkers including came to Rome from Spain, and among them was Quintilian – thus begins what Ryan calls the “silver age of Latin literature” (Ryan 172). Quintilian toured as an educator then returned to Spain where he became a teacher of rhetoric and law practitioner, two professions that went hand-in-hand during his day. Eventually a local emperor called him back to Rome where he was appointed as the first professor of Latin Rhetoric and remained in Rome for the next twenty years, enjoying success despite changing politics and emperors. Staying in good graces with authorities in transitory political times was an accomplishment in itself, and is noteworthy in demonstration Quintilian's acumen.

Late in life Quintilian published his *Institutio Oratoria*. *Institutio oratoria* is a military term that means “the setting-up exercises” (Ryan, 174). The work covers technical training and examines the roots of fundamental problems in speech education. The book takes a unique but controversial stance on education by insisting that training an effective speaker must be the accumulation of a lifetime of work, contradicting our modern idea that skill can be accumulated in a few minutes of daily study and practice.

Quintilian left an unquantifiable amount of wisdom to the communications and educational fields. For our purposes of examining the goodness of a speaker, we will focus on what Quintilian has to say on this subject in particular (Bloodgood 2002; Brandenburg 1948; Katula 2003).

More so than the extensive time commitment required, in Quintilian’s view, to be a good speaker is the moral dedication demanded from the speaker: speaking is not simply a skill to be mastered but a virtue (Ryan, 180). The formation of the personality and personal value system comes first. Only when this is properly formed can a person be a good orator. Quintilian acknowledges that a person can learn and execute the technicalities of good speaking, may make factually sound arguments, and may even appear to be a good person outwardly, but an orator without a sound moral foundation, he argues, will not speak the truth and will not use his skill to the benefit of the greater good. An effective speaker ultimately is a true citizen, capable of administering businesses and counseling others wisely, and reforming the public according to his values (Ryan 176).

Other than goodness, what makes up the ideal orator? Quintilian holds that excellent speaking ability, intellect, and sound education complement a good orator’s mission to

be a citizen for others (Ryan 177). In other words, at the heart of a good speaker are good intentions and a well-formed value system, and so an orator cannot be considered good unless they have both skill and moral goodness.

In fact, Quintilian insists that the orator should always strive for moral perfection (Ryan, 175 – 6). Such perfection is not humanly attainable, but this ensures that a person who speaks for a living will always be functioning at their highest capacity – this is another desired trait of a good orator (Ryan, 180). In reaching for the ideal, he believes, an orator can hope to touch upon some permanency.

Oratory and Emotional Appeal

Quintilian acknowledged that emotions will always play a role in human interaction. Despite our best efforts it is nearly impossible to remove them from the equation. He understood, therefore, how to masterfully control the emotional atmosphere in a courtroom to the advantage of his legal clients.

With great power come great responsibility, and Quintilian holds that the highly trained orator must be discerning with the use of their finely tuned skills. For example, using emotion to persuade is not intrinsically ethical or unethical, but an orator should only use rhetorical techniques if he believes there is a valid reason to do so, specifically to achieve a good end that benefits the whole community.

Quintilian advocated six rules for presenting an emotional appeal. The first is to understand what emotions are and how to replicate a given emotion within oneself, and to be aware of ways a speaker may inadvertently transfer emotions to others. The second is to imagine and feel emotions sincerely, and the third is to have the empathic capacity

to describe an event as another has experienced it (useful when making a case in a court of law). The fourth is to be able to dramatize harmful effects from an event, in other words to be able to imagine and convey the pains a client has experienced. The fifth applies to both a client and an attorney, with the client as an advocate must be able to mirror the others' emotions and be in synch to create a contagious courtroom environment. The sixth and final rule is to develop an ability to speak in the voice of the client. The advocate must be moved and motivated by his client's plight, because when an advocate is acting for and acting like the client, a judge can more easily transfer his sympathies to the client. As rational yet emotional beings, having the upper hand on emotional manipulation can be the deciding factor in cases where the facts on both sides are solid. Quintilian's detailed assessment of each party can be transferred to RTV, with the client as participant, the speaker as RTV editors and producers, and the judge as the audience. Participants have the least power in this equation, while RTV staff has the power to greatly influence the audience's understanding of participants.

Quintilian's thoughts on the education of a young orator are also relevant to goodness in that he even contends that educators should exemplify what is good through their methods. When correcting pupil's faults, the teacher should avoid sarcasm and abuse as negative feelings between student and teacher discourage productivity. Professors must commit daily to saying things that are worth remembering, because the living voice is more powerful than the written word, according to Quintilian's writing on the ideal teacher (Ryan, 179). This moral method of instruction is so important because "No other subject in the curriculum can furnish more difficult teaching opportunities, or yield richer educational values... the primary purpose in teaching rhetoric is not so

much the acquisition of a body of knowledge as the development of the student's personality" (Ryan, 179). Knowledge changes through the ages, but character and personality speak to an objective reality. And ultimately, the orator's job is to "...[pass] truth through a personality" (Ryan, 179).

Quintilian's unprecedented expertise in communications theory and execution is most evident by the fact that he, as one so closely involved with politics in a tumultuous political environment, utilized his skills not only to preserve his own life (assassination was common in his time, especially for a man of his importance), but to thrive socially and professionally. If any great communication professional knows how to "swim with sharks" and emerge alive and well, it is Quintilian. Modern communicators are fortunate that he has passed on all of the tools he used to accomplish such phenomenal success.

Catholic Social Teaching and the Common Good

While Quintilian's brilliant contributions and insight into the heart of human nature makes his ideas timeless, Catholic Social Teaching (CST)'s contribution to the body of thought on the common good allows these situations to apply in a variety of practical contexts, as CST was initially developed to be applied to business decisions. The two veins of ethical thinking, one ancient and one much more modern, vary in many ways, but at the heart of each is a respect for the dignity of each individual, an idealistic striving for perfection, and a concern for the common good. Quintilian's moral guidelines root the lens firmly in communications theory, and CST adds specific direction on working toward human dignity and the common good. Ideally, adherence to the two philosophies would bring a transcendent quality to RTV programming, bringing

true beauty and goodness into audiences homes', and allowing RTV to become more than mere entertainment.

CST was first established by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 in his *Rerum Novarum*, and reinforced by Pope John Paul II later on. At its core, CST is a set of values that uphold the dignity of life in accordance with the Catholic understanding that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore are deserving of this dignity (Stabile, 9). The word "catholic" means universal education, or the education of an entire person. Out of this concept, CST provides a morally grounded education which differs from other lines of education which, while asserting some type of moral code or value system, lack an objective "bottom line" on right and wrong (Clark, 6).

Above simply presenting a set of values, CST combines faith and reason to form a practical foundation for decision-making (Clark, 6). CST prescribes a three-step process for decision-making: "see", or study real-world problems and their causes, to "judge" or filter through the teachings of the church for answers, and "act", or to perform the actions prescribed during the second step (Clark, 7).

CST consists of four basic principles: human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good (Stabile, 7). Broken down further, CST encompasses several sub-principles: 1. Human dignity – that each person, regardless of characteristics or merits, is inherently worthy of dignity and respect. 2. Respect for human life - consistent with human dignity, each person has the right to live. 3. Participation - each person has the right and duty to contribute to the common good. 4. Association – the right to engage as part of a social structure. 5. Preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable. 6. Solidarity – the responsibility to take care of others and recognize our universal one-

ness. 7. Stewardship - caring for creation. 8. Subsidiarity, which limits governing bodies to the lowest level of control necessary. 9. Human equality - each person is entitled to some fundamental human rights. 10. The common good (Byron, 8 – 12).

For our purposes, the focus is on the principle of the common good. Common good is defined as the sum of social situations which allow people to reach their fulfillment (Stabile, 8). CST states that each human institution is responsible for promoting the common good, and the good of each person, or ‘individual good’, is in direct correlation to the good of the whole (Stabile. 8).

Human beings can only thrive within a community, and both the group and the individual have a responsibility to contribute to the common good. The common good excludes no one, and the poor merit special consideration because of their lack of power (Stabile, 9). Finally, because an individual’s good is inherently and undeniably linked to that of others, the converse is true: what is not good for one person is not good for the rest.

Just as with Quintilian’s ideal orator, this concept of the common good may seem too lofty for human societies to attain. It is also worth noting that sometimes one must suffer for the good of others. For example, when an unproductive employee is let go, the entire company benefits. This idealism is part of what links this to Quintilian’s saying on the common good. A difference is that the idealism in CST’s common good comes from the Christian desire to emulate the perfect life of Christ.

The Convergence of Quintilian's Philosophy and CST

What do a social ethical system developed during the time of Pope Leo XIII and an ancient speech educator have in common? The ultimate focus of each of both the ethical system and Quintilian's philosophy is to serve the common good by fostering a discipline of virtue in individuals.

Both systems also provide a higher purpose for moral behavior, according to Ryan: "Just as the Christian religion is the best religion yet developed on this earth, because it gives to man an unrealizable ideal, so the teachings of Quintilian give to the teachers of rhetoric ideals which may become permanent contributions in their professional lives" (Ryan, 176). The purpose of teaching, in Quintilian's opinion, is to produce first a thinker and second a speaker. Speech should come from the quality of thoughts in a person's mind (Ryan, p 177).

The Lens

The lens under which episodes of *The Bachelor* will be analyzed to demonstrate its use was developed out of a set of common values seen in both CST and Quintilian's work. Even the most objective values are subject to the times to some degree, but the author attempts to identify and elaborate upon specific values in a manner consistent with modern definitions. The questions and definitions below are to be used as guidance in evaluating reality television through a moral lens using the two aforementioned ethical philosophies.

Honesty: Is it encouraged in this environment? How is honesty utilized? Is honesty rewarded or penalized?

In Quintilian's view sincerity, integrity, and good intentions are key to becoming an ideal speaker. The very basis of CST is truth: the teaching is built on the truth of what has been revealed to Catholics, in part which is that all are connected and deserving of equal dignity. Honesty is essential to the concept of human dignity in that all people deserve to live in a world unmasked of lies and deceit, so that all people may make the best decisions possible with the most accurate information at hand.

The “Optimal Person” – Does this environment bring out or cultivate the best qualities in each person? Is it a healthy and most life-giving situation for given individuals?

For clarity's sake, this paper will use the term “optimal person” to define this second value. The ancient philosopher upheld speaking as a virtue unto itself. Quintilian would consider whether an RTV program presents a person accurately in light of his or her virtues and vices. He would consider both whether a program brought about the most virtuous action from a person or a group, as well as how a program portrayed a person in light of their actions. For its purposes, much of CST is geared toward the act of and outcome of labor. The actions of RTV show contestants can be categorized as labor because it is well-known that participating in these shows offer perks, and some monetary incentive. Contestants put their careers on hold to participate in reality television, and the more successful contestants forge careers as reality television stars. According to CST, work should make good use of an individual's talents, and become a reward in and of itself.

Interpersonal: Does the RTV environment encourage positive or negative interactions?

Quintilian does not advocate the use of sarcasm, abuse, or humiliation in pedagogy or in relating to peers, while the Catholic teaching encourages a collaborative environment. By the very nature of competitive RTV programs there will be at least a healthy amount of competition and inevitable rivalries. These intense interactions between participants are a main draw and source of entertainment for audiences as it has been since the beginning of human history. Sports games are an early example of this. Even though the design of sports is to pit two or more parties against one another, there are always certain rules and regulations for fairness, decency, and safety. Do there appear to be some rules for fairness, decency, and safety in competitive RTV programs, or is it an unprincipled “free for all”? Is the competition healthy for all participants?

Emotional Experience: How are both the viewer and the contestants’ emotions influenced?

Quintilian is adamant that the moral orator can and should influence and manipulate emotions. The key to determining the ethical nature of this manipulation, as CST would see it, is to assess whether harm is caused to the influenced parties, as well as the ethical nature of the intended outcome. As it is applied to reality television, the impact programming has on its audience and participants is key. An analysis will consider what this means for high-drama programs like *The Bachelor*, in which contestants’ have a heavy reliance on emotions in their decision-making processes.

Productivity: What are the fruits of this work?

Both philosophies posit that a good person is an advocate for the community, and what is produced by work – whether it be public relations work or otherwise – should be for the betterment of the community. Community in the case of RTV includes

participants, viewers, and a wider audience of those viewers whose thoughts and behavior are impacted by their consumption of RTV.

The greatest good – Overall, does the program lend itself to the greater good?

Catholic Social Teaching would hold that the common good should be a primary focus for each individual and all group endeavors, indeed, that “The absence of concern for or sensitivity to the common good is an indication of a society in need of help” (Byron, 12). In an age of individualism especially, CST re-emphasizes that a strong community is formed when all are concerned for the needs of each other and the group, and that strong communities are necessary to the survival and wellness of all. Quintilian agrees with this viewpoint, adding that constant striving for the greatest good is the most noble of goals, and all should assist in creating the most ideal situation for one another.

The Bachelor Franchise

The Bachelor began in 2002 and is one of ABC’s longest-standing and most successful RTV programs, with a loyal fan base, who are well-known to watch the show in groups while drinking wine as a nod to the show’s heavy use of alcohol. Some spinoffs besides *The Bachelorette* include *Bachelor Pad* and *Bachelor in Paradise*, featuring alumni of other affiliated programs. Contestants are selected during a well-publicized, nationwide hunt and endure many screenings and interviews. The star of each season is a popular contestant who was eliminated during a previous season.

Each season contains its own twists, but follows a general established pattern. Seasons begin with an introductory episode for the contestants during which the

hopefuls, traditionally twenty-five of them in total, arrive at the Bachelor mansion in Southern California and are introduced to the star one by one. Concluding each episode is a “rose ceremony”, whereby the star chooses to keep contestants by handing out a preselected number of roses. Those left without a rose are sent home immediately.

Typical episodes include various competitions, challenges, and dates, whereby contestants are given the opportunity to win the affections of the show’s star. The star chooses participants for each date, but the producers arrange for all of the date content. Contestants and star travel to a new geographical location for each episode, where their activities are centered around the stereotypical cultural theme for that location. Participants are frequently featured in one-on-one interviews called “confessionals”, where they vent and discuss their true feelings.

Each season ends with the opportunity for the star of the show to choose from two remaining contestants by way of proposing marriage (*The Bachelor*) or accepting a marriage proposal (*The Bachelorette*). In general each season begins in a light, playful, and hopeful tone and becomes more competitive and dramatic as interpersonal tensions intensify.

The show’s long time host Chris Harrison has always vocally maintained that the reigning Bachelor or Bachelorette determines the outcome of the season. The most recent season began with two Bachelorettes, one of whom was eliminated in the first couple of episodes.

The Bachelor and *The Bachelorette* are in a special category of RTV as a competitive show. Ethically, a televised competition presents the challenge of

captivating viewers with the content while also limiting contestant's exposure.

Part III: Analysis

The Bachelorette Through the Lens

An analysis of Season 11 of *The Bachelorette* was complete to demonstrate application of this lens. The researcher has a reasonable amount of expertise on *The Bachelor/ Bachelorette* franchise, having viewed seasons 16, 17, 18 and 19 of *The Bachelor* and seasons 9, 10, and 11 of *The Bachelorette*.

This particular season begins with a unique twist. The final "bachelorette" has not yet been decided. Two candidates with very different personalities, Kaitlyn and Britt, get to know their twenty-five suitors during a cocktail hour before the contestants cast votes to determine which woman will stay. Kaitlyn, a tattooed Canadian who works in the entertainment industry, is selected.

After viewing Kaitlyn's season through the lens detailed in the previous section, the researcher has found some general weaknesses in the program. The show is not healthy for participants, because it pushes them to the edge of normal and appropriate behavior. Participants are manipulated to intense emotion throughout the season, not to further their quest for love but to increase the drama of each episode for the viewer. Interpersonal interactions between contestants are largely negative, and participants are punished for being honest. They are also frequently and publicly humiliated and misrepresented.

As for the audience observing, *The Bachelor* teaches rash decision-making and self-centeredness, especially regarding the treatment of others, which will be detailed in the examples below. It portrays relationships built on little substance to be "true love," and otherwise unrealistic views of what makes for a lasting romantic relationship. The audience is often presented with a one-dimensional, derogatory caricature of participants, which promotes rash and harsh judgment of others in general. *The Bachelor* helps neither contestants nor audience members form healthy dating relationships by promoting irresponsible relationship behavior and unrealistic social mores, and also through twisting the meaning of honesty. The show and entrenches audience members in intensely emotional scenes serving no higher purpose. Audience members' optimal personhood is not furthered by *The Bachelor*, in fact it likely detracts from this.

The below scenarios from Season 11 exemplify various violations of the ethical principles set forth in this paper. Each scenario offers examples from multiple ethical tenets as developed in this paper, and the infractions dovetail and compound one another. Because of this, they are organized by incident.

Personalities in a Competitive Atmosphere

On the opening night of her season, Kaitlyn announces, "I have no doubt that love is going to be in the air with this group". What she manages to ignore is the great interpersonal conflict and distress that will develop of the next several weeks of her romantic adventure, and that the show will inevitably be the cause of heartbreak and national embarrassment for the twenty-four men whom she will publically reject.

If the ultimate outcome of *The Bachelor* franchise is to produce a marriage, it could reasonably be assumed that participants would be facilitated in putting their “best foot” forward. Circumstances in *The Bachelorette*, however, push contestants to behave in ways they would normally not. Early on in Kaitlyn’s season, some of the men receive an invitation to a group date – a day-long boxing lesson followed by a boxing match. An accurate foreshadowing, Kaitlyn remarks early on: “I am concerned that some of my one-on-one time [with the men] is going to be in the emergency room later.”

The men are matched up and placed in boxing rings together, where Kaitlyn literally gets to watch men fight over her. The men are mismatched in terms of weight classes. For example contestant Jared, 170 pounds and already exhausted by the exertion of fighting is paired with Ben Z, the 225-pound ex-college football athlete. Ben begins punching Jared mercilessly and Kaitlyn shrieks with laughter.

As the “date” continues, Ben eventually lands a blow to the back of Jared’s head, giving him concussion symptoms. The mood quickly becomes dramatic as the cameras follow an unsteady Jared to the medical room. Jared is evaluated and sent to the hospital. The show’s producers offer no explanation as to how having the men literally punch each other unconscious will further their quest for “true love”, but they do take the opportunity to create a histrionic and dramatic scene for millions to observe.

Throughout the season, Ben Z reveals a gentle personality. As a seasoned athlete, it is unlikely that he would have continued to hit Jared when it was obvious that Jared was losing the match. The boxing date clearly was not just about winning the match, but also winning at love and reducing the number of competitors if possible. Under this type of competitive pressure, it is plausible that Ben Z acted out of character. The

circumstances of *The Bachelorette* pushed him to behave in a way he normally would have not.

“I wanted this to be fun. I feel terrible, like I mean I really didn’t want anyone to get hurt,” Kaitlyn cries as she watches Jared head to the emergency room. Kaitlyn may not have anticipated this at the outset of the date, but producers should have. They placed several highly-competitive men who are already fighting for one woman’s attention in a situation that quickly created high interpersonal drama and physical competition. The men were grossly mismatched, and risked losing out on the “date rose” if they did not impress Kaitlyn – if their true intention is to be with Kaitlyn, contestants were obligated to show no mercy to one another during the boxing matches. Often during the course of the show, contestants befriend each other and will even make concessions, such as sacrificing time with the star, for one another because of that bond. But this was the very first date of the season, and the contestants presumably did not have that bond of friendship yet to shield them from harm during this exercise. It is clear that producers intended to “strike a nerve” with all participants, causing suboptimal behavior, which resulted in negative interpersonal interactions.

On his way to the emergency room, Jared protests that he does not want to miss time with Kaitlyn. After he is evaluated and released from the hospital, Jared seeks Kaitlyn out at a bar where the rest of the date continues, even though the doctors tell him he needs to go home and get rest. Jared disregards his personal safety because of the competitive atmosphere. Kaitlyn meets Jared outside and kisses him, then gives Ben Z the date rose when she returns to the bar. As part of her reasoning, Kaitlyn explains, “Ben Z is a hunk of meat, he’s like, a manly guy.”

Throughout the date, Kaitlyn does not acknowledge any fault in Ben Z for his overzealous beating of Jared. In terms of productivity, it is harmful for the audience to observe Kaitlyn laughing as her suitors beat each other mercilessly and rewarding the winner. It indicates socially that physical aggression is desirable, and also the observing party's entertained level is more important than the participating party's safety. Kaitlyn is also evaluating these men on a purely physical level, indicating to her broader audience that there is ample room for objectification while in search of a meaningful relationship. Rationally, a healthy relationship is grounded in more substantial connections, such as trust. This lesson from *The Bachelor* in reducing one's date to physical qualities and performance in the first date does not benefit the greater good.

Don't Question Me: Honesty in an Imbalance of Power

A commonly used term throughout Kaitlyn's season is "questioning," a perception on Kaitlyn's part that a suitor does not trust her. One early episode opens with a confrontation between a contestant named Ian and Kaitlyn. Kaitlyn has asked that the men be brutally honest with her, and Ian seems to take this to heart. He questions whether Kaitlyn is shallow, and questions her genuine pursuit of a marriage. Kaitlyn is furious, and the contestant exits the show minutes later.

This incident repeats itself several more times, including once when another contestant Kupah simply asks whether Kaitlyn sees any potential for a relationship between the two of them. Kaitlyn snaps, "You came out of the gates questioning me," and Kupah too is soon ejected from the show against his will. Regardless of her request for honesty, Kaitlyn clearly only tolerates favorable feedback. Kaitlyn is beyond

reproach because of her star status, and the imbalance of power between star and contestants render many unable to share their true feelings without reproach. At its worst, this imbalance influences the more cunning contestants to tell Kaitlyn what they think she wants to hear in order to remain in the running. It is clear that openness is fatal to status on *The Bachelorette*, and that contestants are limited in what they can reveal about their true feelings. This does not set the stage for a healthy relationship dynamic to develop: If as a rule contestants cannot have open and candid conversation with Kaitlyn, then both parties are prevented from developing honest communication or show her their true selves, and she is only falling in love with a construction.

Initially it would seem that the star, at least, can be honest, as one could assume that she is free to share her true feelings with both the contestants and the cameras during her many mid-date interview sessions. Kaitlyn freely and bluntly questions her suitors' intentions without repercussion. She questions her eventual fiancé Shawn's sexual reputation and confronts him, calling him a "player."

However, observers soon notice that the show's star is exempt from "playing by the rules." Shawn alleges that Kaitlyn told him that he is "the one" off camera, but then promptly disappears with another man, Jared, for two days. The men refer to her as their girlfriend, but Kaitlyn does not denote any of the men as her boyfriends. In fact, she is cheating on all of them with each other. Yet after all of this, Kaitlyn declares, "I'm over people questioning me. I want [the men] to be over it so that we can move forward and stop staying in this place of uncertainty." It is an unsaid expectation that dishonesty is tolerated as long as the perpetrator is the star.

Dishonesty on Kaitlyn's part is not only permitted, it is mandatory (Cherry 2009, Ford 2013). The audience should at least be able to expect Kaitlyn to be honest with them during her confessionals, but *The Bachelor* franchise stars are not permitted to declare their love for contestants by name until the marriage proposal at the end of each season (Ford 2013).

It is easy to blame this double-standard on a character flaw of Kaitlyn's. The degree of agency she has over her behavior is debatable, however, when revisiting Biressi's likening of RTV to the Stanford prison experiment. It brings into question whether Kaitlyn is completely responsible for her dishonest behavior, or whether she has been swept up by the psychological high of the sudden power she wields.

This skewed take on honesty is detrimental to audiences as well, who are being influenced in their behavior by this program which posits itself as reality. The audience observes contestants plunging into a relationship and revealing too much about themselves on the "first date". They become more vulnerable than is healthy in the early stages of a relationship for the sake of honesty, instead of respecting their own boundaries and safety. This method of getting to know someone does not promote the common good, the producers who encourage this are acting unethically, and the audience will not be enhanced in their own lives by being influenced by this behavior.

Portrayal of Character

Each time contestant Tony speaks, the scene is overlaid with "clownish" and "outer space" themed music, cutting to the uncomfortable expressions on other men's faces as they react. Tony has a unique life philosophy, but is candid and sincere. He is

invited on a group date which requires that each man develop his own comedy act and perform for a live audience. The footage for this date focuses heavily on contestant Tony, and the voiceover from another contestant, JJ, sets the scene for the date: “Tony is....this peaceful creature that’s all about giving and life. You also have [his] other side, which I think is feasting off of live chickens. I couldn’t even hear him because my own brain was shutting down. It just was like a human instinct to protect your awkward sensor. That dude’s going to be back in the Ozarks in [expletive] fifteen minutes.”

During his comedy routine, Tony is clearly uncomfortable being the center of attention. He gives a kind and heartfelt speech detailing his affections for Kaitlyn, but tells no jokes, as circus music is again overlaid in the background. Tony’s only real offense is that he is a bad comedian. Through manipulative use of the voiceover, the selection of clips and quotes portraying Tony in a less than favorable light, and the musical overlay, Tony as a whole person is ridiculed, demeaned, and made to seem less than human. It’s clear that nice, transparent guys do not win here.

Tony describes the point succinctly when he says later, “It’s completely inappropriate to manipulate anybody who’s dedicated this much of their life and this much of their time to this process, only to just disregard any kind of basic respect.”

It is the producer’s responsibility to ensure that participants are portrayed fairly and accurately, and in this and many other cases they have disregarded that obligation. Participants are taped non-stop, so there is enough material to construct any of the participants as villain, victim, or hero. There was no real “drama” during this date to provide entertainment so it was manufactured through editing, and the target was Tony.

This viewpoint encourages audiences to form a caricatured, one-dimensional view of other human beings, which does neither that other person nor the relationship the honor that it deserves. It also does not serve the common good to serve up humiliation of another as entertainment for the masses as it fosters incivility and does not press the public to see the best in people they may initially view as “different”.

Emotional Manipulation

One of Kaitlyn’s first one-on-one dates is an underwater photoshoot with contestant Clint. Precedent to the date, Kaitlyn discusses the importance of having a “connection” or “chemistry” with her suitors. She says, “This isn’t just a photoshoot, this is a test of our chemistry today”. According to her logic, she and this man, who have just recently met, have one chance at determining whether they have “chemistry”.

Kaitlyn and Clint have no time alone on the date for discussing personal likes and dislikes, values, life goals and dreams, and other “getting to know you” topics that would typically be covered during a first date. They are thrown into a very public and high-pressure situation – at least five people are watching them in person during the date, and countless millions on television – as they are ushered through various wardrobe changes and poses for the photoshoot.

During Kaitlyn’s time on the show, all of the elaborate dates and experiences that seem to bond her so closely with her suitors have been designed specifically for her by the show producers – not thoughtfully planned out for her by her boyfriends. Her photoshoot date continues when she is surprised by her favorite band, which was obviously arranged well in advance of her inviting Clint out for a date. She gushes, “...I

get to [experience this date] with someone that I care about, and music...brings out a romantic side in me, and it was just a really beautiful moment.”

Kaitlyn and Clint are both on a high from their experience together, which can help them bond to some extent. However, they are more focused on the excitement of the “moment” than getting to know the one another, which would ground their bond in reality. And indeed, at the end of the date Clint attempts authenticity in their connection, describing Kaitlyn as “gorgeous and sincere,” but Kaitlyn assesses Clint as “just a hunk of man”.

Instead of allowing relationships to develop over an undetermined period of time in a natural, everyday setting, participants are forced to experience a series of unusual, highly emotional activities with their suitors and are expected to choose a suitable partner based on what develops within these situations.

Another example of this emotional manipulation for effect is when one particular contestant, who has just been eliminated from the show, receives his “post-discharge” interview within earshot of the remaining contestants as they erupt into cheers and toast to their next adventure. The contestant’s disappointment at leaving the show alone could have held enough melodrama to keep an audience’s attention without adding to the participant’s pain by placing him near the celebrant victors.

Meanwhile, Chris Harrison is often found standing by after intense moments, waiting to comfort Kaitlyn as she tearfully agonizes over her decisions. He poses as a neutral bystander, but in reality, Chris has masterminded the show’s construct and has large amount of control over the process. Chris has the power to change the circumstances of the show if they prove to be too painful for contestants, yet he watches

contestants endure heart-wrenching pain and humiliation, and takes no responsibility for having participated in its origin.

For the audience, *The Bachelorette* perpetuates the cultural myth that relationships are somehow predestined, that there is a pre-determined blueprint to be discovered and obeyed rather than about connecting with others on a meaningful level and making wise decisions. Furthermore, it denies that an individual has control over “love”. According to *The Bachelor*, love is not a choice but something that just happens. Kaitlyn expresses a perception of little control over whom she eventually chooses as a mate throughout the season which is glaringly evident when she says “I feel hopeful that I will wake up in the morning thinking [Ben’s] the one.”

Adding to the audience’s emotionally intense experience, music is always in the background – whether romantic, dramatic, or tense, the musical background never stops except for dramatic pauses. It is often used to create emotion where there is none, such as when one contestant casually shows photos of his family to Kaitlyn.

For the consumer, *The Bachelor* teaches poor and impulsive decision-making in dating. A program like this should be taken at face-value, and can be if not enriching, then at least innocuous when it is. But in a society where marriage is seen as an ultimate and necessary accomplishment in life, can the viewers help but begin to take behavioral cues from *The Bachelor*? Can producers be assured that their viewers will understand the difference between sensible advice for a lasting marriage and sensationalized television? It drugs the audience with constant melodrama, while concealing its true motives and methods.

A Rose, by Any Means

The pressure put upon contestants mounts as each episode nears its elimination round. Contestant JJ receives a rose early on in one episode. However, he boldly announces, he has “no intention of laying off the throttle” later on during a cocktail party, when other contestants attempt to speak with Kaitlyn in an effort to preserve their spot on the show. Despite the fact that he already has the rose, JJ continues to dominate Kaitlyn’s time. In reaction, the other men become much more aggressive with Kaitlyn, physically steering her away from conversations with others and abruptly pushing for an emotional commitment from her.

In this example, none of the contestants are acting as their optimal selves. They are all being more aggressive and demanding with Kaitlyn than is healthy in a relationship, and diminishing her freedom to get to know each contestant as himself.

There is no “control” for the contestants’ behavior, so it is unknown whether they would behave this aggressively in a less competitive situation. However, the high pressure to impress Kaitlyn and limited amount of opportunities to accomplish, all imposed by the parameters of the show, force the men to attempt a level of emotional intimacy within a small time frame. This is not healthy or safe for any of the participants, and the intense emotional situations they are put in are to pander to audience’s demand for drama.

Stressful elements such as sleep deprivation, isolation from the outside world, tight living quarters, constant observation (Klassen 2013) and alcohol are added to the highly adversarial atmosphere. Alcohol in particular is provided at nearly every “date” event, around the clock for those contestants who are left at home, and during the

cocktail parties shortly before each rose ceremony, as contestants cope with the prospect of being eliminated. This further leaves contestants vulnerable to humiliation on national television, and again models irresponsible relationship behavior to the audience.

The conflict between the men is at an all-time high as the season comes to a close. Contestants Nick and Shawn develop an intense hatred of each other, and spend as much of their time attempting to sabotage each other as they do attempting to win Kaitlyn's heart: Nick chooses to spend his time with Kaitlyn sabotaging her relationship with Shawn, while Shawn frequently asserts that Nick had ulterior motives for joining *The Bachelorette*. Again, both men are intentionally exposed to stressors that do not make for optimal behavior. The contestants are also emotionally manipulated by producers who control these circumstances for the sake of some "high-drama" television moments. To add insult to injury, after observing Shawn's behavior provoked largely by the situation he created, Chris Harrison asks Kaitlyn to consider whether Shawn has a problem with being possessive and jealous. Chris Harrison ignores that his own actions as a producer and show host are in large part to blame for the behavioral outcomes.

Right Reasons and Real Reasons

One theme that weaves throughout each season of the franchise is "right reasons": The phrase refers to whether contestants and stars alike are participating in the show for the right reason: true love. The concept was instituted by Chris Harrison. This concept is so integral that in a season prior to Kaitlyn's, contestants created a music video further distinguishing the right reasons for taking part in the show: for marital love, and not for fame, fortune, furtherance of an acting career, or other ulterior motives

(Preditor, 2013). Several times during Kaitlyn's season, contestants challenge each other, asking whether they are "here for the right reasons."

An initial observation of *The Bachelorette* Season 11 produces this season's unique "twist", which is that it began with two women with two very different personalities. Typically, contestants join the show knowing who the bachelor or bachelorette is. Why would producers intentionally lure men onto this season, only to have their choice of bachelorette leave the show, unless *The Bachelorette's* primary purpose is not to unite two people in marital love?

Acting schools for aspiring reality television stars exist, and some aspiring actors and actresses often participate in *The Bachelor* as a career move. But even if the contestants and star on the show are just there as actors, it would be impossible that some kind of feelings do not develop at some point during the show, whether they be friendships or romantic feelings towards the star. It is a safe assumption that authentic feelings are involved, and each participant is vulnerable to a significant extent during the course of their season. Some of the contestants genuinely seem to be in pursuit of a lasting and strong relationship, and end up investing a lot of time into something that sets them up for failure and hurt.

Confusion exists for audiences and participants alike as to what degree of reality *The Bachelor* actually is. With increased media awareness, audiences are no longer as trusting as they once were, and reality television in particular is generally viewed with an amount of skepticism. But ABC counters this perception in repeatedly asserting that *The Bachelor* is the "real deal". It is clear at this point that *The Bachelor* is not actually constructed to foster genuine romance between the star and his or her suitors, but it does

cater to audiences who want to observe the intimate conflict, dramatic highs, and excruciating lows inherent in a reluctantly polyamorous community.

Contestants even question whether their own experiences on the show are rooted in reality. Finalist Ben agonizes over whether his feelings for Kaitlyn would occur had he met her in daily life, or, he asks: “Is it just the situation?” Contestants and consumers alike question *The Bachelor*’s real objectives. For the audience, this show produces a reality containing real people’s emotions and personal investment, but under grossly distorted circumstances that force them to push ethical boundaries – or, if they manage to maintain sane behavior, they are edited to appear ridiculous - all for the sake of entertainment. *The Bachelor*, meanwhile, holds a double standard by demanding that its participants be innocent of ulterior motive, while having countless itself.

Analysis and Conclusion

Observing season 11 of *The Bachelorette* through this lens, the program proves to be overall detrimental to the well-being of both the audience and participants. Contestant behavior and circumstances set forth by producers fail to meet the standards of the first four values identified, resulting in unproductive outcomes that detract from the greater good.

The outcome of the emotional manipulation, toxic relationships, and humiliation is that contestants are damaged and changed for the worst after having participated in *The Bachelor*. Its effect on audience members likely degrades their character and interactions. None of this contributes to the greater good for the contestants or the audience. *The Bachelor* at heart does not honor the human-ness of both contestants and

audiences, disregards what is life-giving in exchange for a cheap appeal to the senses, and defies the greater good by guaranteeing that all but one of the original twenty-five contestants will leave in humiliation.

Final Conclusions

A wealth of existing research demonstrates many injustices in the modern reality television show, stemming from the increasingly blurred line between the version of “reality” as a product for entertainment and the real people who are affected by becoming entertainment.

An analysis of *The Bachelor* through Catholic Social teaching and Quintilian’s lens shows that “true love” is not the true intent of *The Bachelor* franchise. The constructs of the show create an imbalance of power, which produces stunted, unhealthy relationships. *The Bachelor* produces hurt, humiliation, and changes contestants for the worst, while it degrades its audience’s moral character and respect for others. Its main focus is to pander to the audience’s guilty pleasure of voyeurism, with no real consideration for the relationships or personal well-being or development of its participants or audience, becoming overall very destructive to the common good. Even more irresponsibly, ABC touts it all as true love and romance, while *The Bachelor* marches forward into prime-time television posing as a noble service to the men and women who are fortunate enough to land a spot on each season.

Quintilian urged orators during his time to strive above all to be the most moral individual possible. This is in stark contrast to observations on this particular program, where objective morality is apparently not a consideration. *The Bachelorette* turns its

star into a consumer of men and an infallible deity. The producers play god, giving generously in the form of lavish vacations and exclusive dates, then take away even more, while contestants are robbed of the freedom to make rational and safe choices for themselves.

Britt and Brady: An Alternative Ending

Season 11 followed the cast-off bachelorette Britt's story during the closing credits of the first several episodes. Contestant Brady excuses himself from the show soon after Britt is eliminated as the bachelorette, and goes in search of her. "The risk of love, whatever the consequence, is always, always worth it." Brady states that he joined the show for Britt, and intends to seek a romantic opportunity for her. The two agree to become an exclusive couple, and largely conduct their relationship away from the prying eye of the camera. Britt and Brady's relationship is the antithesis of Kaitlyn's relationships, yet it is the only relationship that stays true to the purported "love and romance" promoted by ABC. It also is a minor story line and receives relatively little attention. Producers had material at their disposal which they could have used for a more genuine "love story", but rejected the opportunity.

Dancing with the Stars is another one of ABC's popular competitive reality television shows. It is similar to *The Bachelor* in many regards in terms of exposing stars' personal lives, intense emotions, and vulnerable moments. However, *Dancing with the Stars* is more successful at maintaining the dignity of contestants because the focus of the competition is dancing skills, and it toes the line at the trickery and humiliation that has become a central device in *The Bachelor*.

Even more intriguing is the fact that *Dancing with the Stars* runs opposite of *The Bachelor*: Presumably, the audience for both is the very similar. The romantic RTV show's audience is somewhat to blame for their consumption of base television. If it were not popular it would be altered to better please the masses, or canceled. However, it is also a producer's job as an expert to evaluate how a product will affect the consuming masses. Consumers do not always have the training and awareness necessary to understand how the entertainment they consume impacts them outside of the pleasure taken. Given the opportunity, it appears that this same audience is just as willing to watch the classy dancing competition as they are the underhanded activities seen on *The Bachelor*. This begs the question of why, when a classier and less invasive program attracts similar audiences and experiences comparable success to that of *The Bachelor*, would producers choose to resort to the base content seen in *The Bachelor*?

In a similar vein, editors and producers also no longer have to rely on ratings to determine audience reactions to content: Social media allows audiences to give constructive, critical feedback to producers, stars, and contestants.

Further Research Suggestions

In researching for this paper and analyzing *The Bachelor*, several other topics for helpful further research came to light.

"I never thought that I would get a second chance at finding love," Kaitlyn declares at the beginning of the season, speaking as if becoming *The Bachelorette* is the only way to "find love". The program creates a "cult of love", complete with its own

language, code words, groupthink where contestants are not permitted to vary in opinion from the star. Further research could correlate this theme to other similar cult situations.

Other topics could include a critical examination of gender empowerment and denigration in reality television, and the incidence of suicide and accidental death among reality television stars. Some articles (Schuster, 2016) cite as many as 21 suicides by RTV stars in the past decade, begging the question of whether the pressures RTV stars face contribute to this statistic.

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