



Lessons from The Bachelor

What this “reality” show should teach us if we’re paying attention

First of all, I have to admit I’ve actually watched the show

With the hatchet job I’m about to do on television’s “The Bachelor” (as well as Online Dating websites!), let me do the housekeeping right off. The first thing anybody’s going to want to know is whether I’ve ever actually WATCHED the show. Yes, I watched two entire seasons, and parts of others. I’m embarrassed to admit this. It’s like roadkill. You TELL yourself not to look and then you sneak a peek just as you drive by! Actually, another analogy might fit better. To watch a season of The Bachelor is like watching a slow train-wreck happen. But there are some good lessons for us, like...

... It’s not real

Okay, let’s keep the facts straight. The producer’s job is to make a marketable television show that can be sold to a network. The network’s job is to buy tv shows that will draw good ratings, so they can sell advertisement. Therefore, the “talent’s” job is to play the parts that will make compelling tv that will sell. You get it? It’s not real. Trouble is, people are watching in droves! And those people who are drawn to a “reality” show like The Bachelor get sucked in by their hopeful, romantic side. (knock, knock, knock) Let me remind us: a REAL, mature and healthy relationship won’t likely be fostered in a Petri-dish like a tv show where the stated objective is for some poor schmoo to be handed a field of contestants...and a few weeks later he’s going to pick out the love of his life. Real relationships can’t be manufactured on the clock, with an audience of cameras and producers. There’s nothing remotely real about this tv show. I’m sorry.

Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you

Fairy tales can come true. If you have a script-writer and a big budget production team writing your life’s script for you. I’ve said this before. Trouble is, even these contestants lose all that as soon as they hear “That’s a wrap!” for the last time. Summer romances rarely pan out. Long-distance relationships often struggle once the two lovers are confronted with living together finally. The romantic in me likes a good happy ending as much as anyone. But we have to know the difference between something that is real and something that is not. Viewership this year was up more than 3 million over the previous season. For a show that is several years old. We DO like a fairy tale, don’t we! Or, maybe we like a good train-wreck? It’s actually sad either way.

The “looking” mode forces relationships to get out-of-whack

My Divorce Recovery participants don’t like my position with regard to Online Dating. So let me add tv shows like this—as well as bar-hopping—and offend some more people. Here’s my beef with these contrived attempts to “find love.” That’s just the problem—rarely can we set out to “find” love. The fact that one is “looking” sets them off in a mode that can skew reality. If one is looking, then one is probably willing to over-look. Overlook a bad personality mismatch, overlook a set of values that is destined to clash. Overlook life goals that can’t possibly mesh. All because they’re looking. Do I differentiate being “open” to love from “looking” for love? You betcha!

They look like adults—but they’re playing a kid’s game

The Bachelor is like an expensive version of the old party game “Spin the Bottle.” You know, that thing 14 year-olds used to do. They’d spin a Coke bottle and whoever it ended up pointing toward, they’d go make out with them for a few minutes. But nobody much expected to find true love that way. Yet, this supposed reality show reinforces that one can go looking for love and expect to find it. America...let’s come to our adult senses. The show actually ends with the Bachelor proposing to someone. Marriage. A real life commitment goes to the “winning” contestant. *God, save us from our shallowness.* No wonder divorce rates have been so high for so long. We think love and marriage can be a game. But ask my Divorce Recovery participants if they think this is a game...

You’re not the exception you think you are!

I have to address this one from time to time. That’s because when it comes to matters of the heart, most people genuinely believe they’re the exception to norms. Guess what? Most of us aren’t. You may be a smart, fully grown adult. But when it comes to love, I watch middle-age (and older!) adults act like silly teenagers at times. On an even more serious note, I watch divorcees jump from one painful ending right into a new fairy tale beginning. From the safety of distance, many of us can see that they’re simply repeating their same relational patterns. Only this time with contestants who are virtually identical to their former spouses. But everyone thinks they can beat the odds in love. Thinking that I can pull off what most others obviously can’t? That’s a dangerous game to play.

How can you say this? They’ve got millions watching!

Ahh... yes. The American way. Majority rule! A dumpy middle-aged minister says the Bachelor is teaching us some lessons through self-conviction. Yet they have millions of viewers watching the show. Online Dating services also have millions of clients, and folks are getting married from them. So, one man’s voice is obviously wrong. After all, that many people have to be right! We’ve been wrong collectively about a lot of things: Presidents. Economic and social policies. Christ himself recommended for us to “*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*” (Matthew 7:13-14) That was sometime before the crowd voted to kill Him. Just because a bunch of folks do something doesn’t make it smart.

The Bachelor said it himself!

“We got along, and I thought we knew each other. But when the show ended, and we actually started to spend time together alone, I realized we weren’t right for each other.” That’s what Jason, the 2009 Bachelor, said in an interview. As he explained why he dumped the girl he proposed to on the show. And picked another contestant to date instead. So here we go again! Oh, that’s some painful roadkill to look at!

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