

Prince Farming Takes a Wife: Exploring the Use of Agricultural Imagery and Stereotypes on ABC's *The Bachelor*

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Abstract

The 19th season of ABC's The Bachelor stars Chris Soules, an Iowa farmer who is pursuing a wife. Soules appears to exhibit all the qualities of a gentleman farmer desired by the contestants: good looks, kindness, strong family values, and courteous manners. However, research of previous reality television programs has concluded negative views of agricultural lifestyles typically are present. The Bachelor aired during prime-time television hours and exposed millions of viewers to agricultural imagery, which is why an analysis of this season is important to agricultural communicators. This qualitative discourse analysis examines the representation of agriculture and rural communities through selected videos and episodes of The Bachelor that show Soules and the bachelorettes in agriculture-related settings. Previous research indicates entertainment media have impacted audience's perceptions of agriculture and reality television programming is adept at perpetuating stereotypes. Repeated exposure to stereotypes through media representation causes viewers to absorb those images into their social reality and, in turn, impacts their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward the subject of those stereotypes. The Bachelor Season 19 contains both positive and negative agricultural stereotypes, including isolated small-town life, hard-working farmers, and "country" as a personality type. Farm-centric content is used to elicit laughs and to build romantic tension with the effect of minimizing the importance of agriculture. The researchers plan further investigation of the perceptual effects of the program's televised content and the related social-media conversation surrounding "Prince Farming."

Key Words

Reality television, stereotypes, social reality, *The Bachelor*, discourse analysis, and social semiotics

Introduction

In Season 10 of ABC's popular dating reality show *The Bachelorette*, television audiences met Iowa farmer Chris Soules, a 30-something agriculturalist whose "good looks and down-to-earth nice-guy demeanor" made him a favorite for the hand of Andi Dorfman (Yeo, 2015, para. 11). After Dorfman rejected his suit at the end of the season, Soules was approached to star in the nineteenth iteration of *The Bachelor* (Fleiss, Levenson, & Gale, 2002), the successful forerunner to *The Bachelorette*. In television previews, ABC dubbed Soules "Prince Farming" and revealed 30 women — instead of the show's usual 25 — would be vying for his affections through a series of challenges, group activities, and intimate dates (Barton, 2014; Rees, 2014).

The three-hour season premiere on January 5, 2015, garnered 7.7 million viewers, making ABC the most-watched network for adults 18-49 years of age that night (Futon Critic, 2015). The first

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episode was also the “most-social broadcast” of the night, generating nearly 250,000 tweets, according to the network (Futon Critic, 2015, para. 6).

Before the season filmed, ABC officials were concerned about finding applicants who were willing to move to Soules’s hometown of Arlington, Iowa, a farming community of less than 500 people. In an interview, *Bachelor* host Chris Harrison commented life with Soules would not “be all shucking corn. It isn’t like he doesn’t have a ton of money ... It isn’t like you are gonna move to the farm and never be heard from again” (Yeo, 2015, para. 17). Nonetheless, the fourth-generation farmer’s livelihood is dear to him: “I’ve never missed harvest ... for me to be gone for that was a big deal” (para. 19).

With Soules’s appearance on *The Bachelor* came hope the show would present an honest depiction of modern life in rural America. Des Moines Register reporter Donnelle Eller (2015) wrote, “Even playing a minor role, Iowa — and agriculture — could get exposure to millions of viewers ... watching as the corn and soybean grower whittles down his wannabe wives week by week” (para. 4). Soules expressed his desire to “change people’s perceptions about what life is like on a farm,” stating, “I think I’ve been able to bring to light that agriculture is not big, corporate farming. It’s families running operations that are very complex” (Eller, 2015, para. 9).

Agriculture’s previous forays into reality television (RTV) have been less than constructive. In 2003, Twentieth Century Fox released a reality program called *The Simple Life*. Starring socialites Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, the show was billed as a real-life reworking of Green Acres. Fox developed the premise as a way to “do comedies outside of the traditional sitcom format” (Ryan, 2003, para. 7). The first season follows Hilton and Richie’s exploits in rural Altus, Arkansas, as they work on a dairy farm, pen cattle at a livestock auction barn, and waitress at a Sonic fast-food restaurant. According to Nielsen Media Research, 13 million viewers watched the show’s first episode, dominating its 8:30-9:00 PM ET timeslot in a number of key demographics (Reality TV World staff, 2003).

In 2008, the CW released a “rural spin on *The Bachelor*” called *Farmer Wants a Wife* (Pennington, 2008, para. 4). The Minneapolis Star Tribune called the show “an interesting look through the pop culture prism at rural America, which has historically veered from the yokel Ma and Pa Kettle to the melodramatics of 1980s farm crisis movies” (“Goodbye,” 2008, para. 7). In a pre-show interview, Missouri native Matt Neustadt said, “The stereotype still pops up that farmers are uneducated hicks ... Tell someone you’re a farmer and they may think they know about you right away — plows, cows and sows. Not many people are aware of the business and science of farming today” (Pennington, 2008, para. 26). Despite its star’s pleas for accuracy, the show concocted much of its agricultural content, renting a farm and livestock for filming (Neustadt’s family raises only grain crops) and arranging trials like milking goats and gathering eggs. In a critical review, the Star Tribune (“Goodbye,” 2008) opined, “With farming at the center of energy, environmental and even foreign policy debates putting the back 40 on the front page, there’s room for a more nuanced portrayal of farmers than *Farmer Wants a Wife*, which may make some viewers yearn for the golden age of *Hee Haw*” (para. 9). This study was undertaken to determine if *The Bachelor* would offer audiences a more realistic portrayal of today’s agricultural industry compared to its reality-on-the-farm predecessors.

Literature Review

Social Construction of Reality

Media scholars have long argued film, television, and other communication channels play a major role in the social construction of reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Adoni and Mane (1984) describe three types of social reality:

objective, symbolic, and subjective. Objective social reality is that in which the individual exists, whereas *symbolic social reality* is the expression of objective reality (art and literature). In tandem, the two create *subjective social reality*, the individual's own perception of the world and the basis for his or her social actions. Symbolic social reality in the media age is complicated by what Gamson and colleagues (1992) call simulacra, substitutions "for a reality that has no foundation in experience" but that nonetheless have great power to influence values, ideologies, and beliefs (p. 374).

According to McQuail (1972), mass media shape the collective consciousness by "organizing and circulating the knowledge which people have of their own everyday life" (p. 13). Social learning theory posits repeated exposure to this mass-mediated "knowledge" helps individuals develop schemata, or cognitive structures used to organize knowledge about particular stimuli (Fiske & Taylor, 1991 ; Riddle, 2010; Wright, et al., 1995). These cultural stimuli include crime (Cavender & Bond-Maupin, 1993; Robbers, 2008); race (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000); gender and gender roles (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Kalof, 1993); and even occupations (Wright et al., 1995).

Reality Television (RTV)

Reality television offers researchers an especially intriguing opportunity to study fabricated realities and their influence on audiences' perceptions of the world around them. The genre itself is difficult to classify (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003): "The term 'reality television' is used to refer to a diverse array of programming that often mixes various types of television programs such as game shows, documentaries, and nonfiction dramas" (Egbert & Belcher, 2012, p. 409; Mittell, 2004). The online television repository TVTropes.org ("Reality TV," n.d.) identifies 13 subgenres of RTV programming, including documentary-style programs (*Duck Dynasty*, *The Real Housewives*), talent searches (*American Idol*, *Top Chef*), reality game shows (*Survivor*, *The Amazing Race*), and dating shows (*The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*). Some scholars even identify news programs like *America's Most Wanted* as RTV (Cavender & Bond-Maupin, 1993).

Kerrigan (2011) describes the problematic nature of reality programming: "All manifest a cross-fertilisation of genres, yet 'reality', this slippery term no social scientist is comfortable with, is still always portrayed as a legitimising social 'anchor'" (p. 17). As Kerrigan indicates, the "realities" contained in these programs are held to be authentic, but reality shows are cast by producers, edited for maximum entertainment value, and contain contrived scenarios that echo Gamson's simulacra more than objective reality (Bottinelli, 2005; Egbert & Belcher, 2012; Rose & Wood, 2005; Tyree, 2011). Viewers may be unaware of the behind-the-scenes manipulation of RTV content: "Because the programs are not scripted and do not employ directors, per se, viewers may draw conclusions about the competitions as if contestants were unaware that anyone was watching, let alone filming" (Denham & Jones, 2008, p. 80).

Research suggests the simulated reality presented in RTV programs has powerful effects on viewers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Several studies have been undertaken to investigate the impact of weight-loss competitions on body image and weight bias. Domoff and colleagues (2012) found young people exposed to as little as 40 minutes of *The Biggest Loser*, a popular program that emphasizes rapid and extreme weight loss, reported significantly more negative attitudes toward obese individuals than those who did not watch the show. Markey and Markey (2010) described a positive correlation between individuals' — typically young women — interest in cosmetic surgery and their impressions of reality programming focused on improving one's appearance (in this case, the program *Extreme Makeover*).

Reality Television and the Perpetuation of Stereotypes

Some media-effects researchers view the ubiquity and popularity of primetime reality television programs with trepidation. RTV content derives much of its audience appeal from broad sociocultural stereotypes. Show producers “sometimes cast certain contestants precisely because those contestants satisfy a stereotype” (Denham & Jones, 2008, p. 79). Rose and Wood (2005) found RTV viewers process show participants as both “characters” within the confines of their respective programs and as “people like them,” conflating the participants’ exaggerated personae with their real-world selves. This blurring of lines between objective reality and symbolic reality may lead to the extension of stereotypes beyond the TV screen.

Tyree (2005) studied the representation of African Americans in RTV. In a textual analysis of nine RTV programs, the author established the few black participants generally conformed to at least one emerging stereotype (e.g., “oreo,” “angry black woman”) or historical stereotype (“Uncle Tom,” “Sambo”). Tyree concluded RTV “accentuated situations that reinforced cultural codes and stereotypes” (p. 408), a precarious premise given the cultural clout ascribed to reality programming.

Stereotypes of other marginalized groups exist in RTV. Agricultural communications researchers have critiqued *The Simple Life* for its broad portrayals of rural communities and agricultural production. Ruth, Lundy, and Park (2005) examined *The Simple Life* using focus groups. The participants — college students — felt the show unrealistically portrayed agriculture as an easy occupation and found the stars’ inability to perform simple tasks unbelievable. Participants agreed the show supported negative stereotypes of rural Americans as “backwoods” and “lower class” (p. 28). Further discussion revealed participants themselves viewed agriculturalists as “farm people that live in a population of 800 ... they might not even get the reception to watch TV there” (p. 29).

In a visual analysis of the same program, Specht (2013) found imagery used in *The Simple Life* also supported stereotypical perceptions of agriculture as green fields, dirt roads, and backward people: “*The Simple Life* ... [conforms] to the basic tenets of the pastoral ideal but transform the agrarian landscape into an antediluvian and eccentric backwater” (Specht, 2013, p. 257). These broad portrayals of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and demographic groups reinforce many of the largely negative perceptions propagated by mass media outlets.

Purpose of the Study

In 2012, less than 2% of the United States population was directly tied to agricultural production; therefore, it is not likely a majority of Americans were aware of the reality of agricultural representations (EPA’s Ag Center, 2012). Mass media have become readily available for Americans to view, and according to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation:

American mass media have played a significant role in building and decorating these frames ... More recent pop culture products like television series *The Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie*, along with cinematic hits like *Places in the Heart* and *The River*, have presented warmer, more personal tales of rural Americans overcoming adversity and upholding values. Even fluff like *Petticoat Junction*, *Green Acres*, and the *Dukes of Hazzard* have played a role in our collective associations with rural America. (2002b, p. 1)

Representations of the agricultural industry and rural communities in mass media, no matter the format of the media, form an impression on the non-agricultural viewer. Although *The Bachelor* primarily focuses its content on the romantic exploits of Chris Soules and the 30 bachelorettes he

courted, an underlying theme connected this season of *The Bachelor* to Chris Soules's background as a farmer from Iowa.

The purpose of this study was to explore the symbolic social reality of agriculture in the public consciousness, represented by audiovisual content gleaned from *The Bachelor* (2015). The study was intended as a broad examination of agricultural images and themes in early Season 19 episodes, the results of which will serve as a baseline for future research into *The Bachelor*'s depiction of and attendant attitudes toward agriculture and rural agrarian life. Three research questions were developed to guide the researchers in their endeavors:

- RQ1: How does *The Bachelor* Season 19 depict agriculture and rural life through audiovisual content?
- RQ2: How are traditional stereotypes of agriculture and rural life represented in *The Bachelor*?
- RQ3: What overarching themes emerge in *The Bachelor*'s portrayal of agriculture and rural life?

Methodology

Text Selection

The researchers conducted a social-semiotic discourse analysis of episodes and video clips from *The Bachelor*. Five texts that contain agricultural references and images were chosen for examination: three full episodes and the season's promotional trailer (see Table 1). The content was accessed during both live broadcasts and on ABC's official website for the program.

Table 1

Details and Summaries of Selected Texts from The Bachelor

Title ¹	Length	Summary ¹	Purpose
"Week 3: Guest Host Jimmy Kimmel"	1:24:43	Jimmy Kimmel guest hosts and tries to help guide Chris' search for love.	Season 19 Episode 3
"Week 2: Tractor Race"	1:24:44	An eliminated bachelorette pleads for a second chance; six women join Chris for a pool party.	Season 19 Episode 2
"Season Premiere: Limo Arrivals"	2:05:44	Chris Soules, a wealthy businessman and farmer from Iowa, meets 30 bachelorettes.	Season 19 Episode 1
" <i>The Bachelor</i> 2015 Trailer"	4:58	Bachelor Chris Soules has a long journey ahead of him on <i>The Bachelor</i> 2015. Intense romance, lots of sweet moments, and buckets of drama await as he continues his quest to find the love of his life. Here's a look at what to expect from the rest of the season.	Promotional trailer for Season 19

^aOfficial titles and summaries for each episode or clip were taken from ABC.com/TheBachelor. ^bEpisode length is based on online runtimes without traditional television commercials.

Social Semiotics and Discourse Analysis

A subset of traditional semiotic — or sign-based — research, social semiotics allows the researcher

to situate textual artifacts within a specific sociocultural context while at the same time taking into account the researcher's own perspective as an element of the interpretive act (Chandler, 2007; Iedema, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2005). Social semiotic codes classify and frame relationships among meanings, their realizations, and their contexts as viewed through the lens of the researcher (Bernstein, 1981; Thibault, 1991).

Discourse analysis, a subset of qualitative research described by Krippendorff (2004), examines the reproduction of social phenomena within texts. For this study, the researchers investigated the visual and thematic representation of agriculture in *The Bachelor*. Together, the research team identified the specific clips for use in the study; separately, they examined each clip for specific instances of agriculture-related content using close-reading techniques (More, n.d.). Close reading is the critical consumption of a text that involves detailed note-taking and reflexive questioning of the reader's interpretation of key narrative, thematic, or stylistic features.

The researchers established *a priori* a typology of such elements to examine, including the appearance of livestock, crops, farm equipment, and the participants' wardrobes. Narrative elements, like dialogue and music, were transcribed. The researchers also noted any agricultural stereotypes identified in prior research (Kellogg Foundation, 2002b; Ruth, Lundy, & Park, 2005; Specht, 2013) that appeared in the content. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations, periodic crosschecks were conducted throughout the coding process to ensure study dependability. Following their initial individual analyses, the researchers discussed their findings and defined themes that emerged from the data. The researchers compared the themes found in the media and previous research to determine what were acceptable stereotypes for *The Bachelor*. Thick description and direct transcriptions are included in the findings to support the transferability of the study's outcomes and conclusions.

Contextualization

Social-semiotic discourse analysis relies on the disclosure of the researchers' experiences with and beliefs and attitudes toward the subject matter (McKee, 2001). The researchers used their personal experiences with agriculture to inform their analysis of agricultural imagery and themes. Both researchers were raised in rural areas on farms: one on a small dairy farm and the other on a large grain operation. Both earned Bachelor of Science degrees in agriculture from land-grant institutions, and each holds at least one advanced degree in a social-scientific agricultural field.

Findings

RQ1: Audiovisual Depictions of Agriculture and Rural Life *The Bachelor* Season 19

Agricultural imagery is abundant in *The Bachelor*, especially in Season 19's first episode: Roosters crowing at dawn, lush rolling fields of Iowa corn and soybeans (see Figure 1), and an idyllic rural hometown where people know their neighbors bring to mind *The Andy Griffith Show's* Mayberry. Cattle, tractors, and picturesque farmsteads adorn the countryside during abundant aerial views of Arlington, Iowa, Soules's hometown. Sunflowers and bales of straw frequently appear in the background of scenes to remind the audience the bachelor has rural roots and is not the suit-and-tie-wearing gentleman they view weekly, taking beautiful women on dates with private Gulfstream jets, helicopter tours of the Grand Canyon, or wedding-crashing in California vineyards.



Figure 1. Chris Soules, standing in a soybean field, looks off into the distance on his family's 6,000-acre farm in the first episode of *The Bachelor* Season 19.

Jimmy Kimmel, a late-night comedian for ABC, plans the dates for the third episode of *The Bachelor*, and he builds an image for the bachelorettes of their prospective husband. Kimmel states Soules has “cows to milk and pigs to slop and whatnot. He’s a real farmer.” Kimmel creates a farm-themed obstacle course (the “Hoedown Throwdown”), which gives the bachelorettes and viewers a taste of the rural lifestyle, complete with rusty farm equipment, a “Farmer Crossing” road sign, and the “cuteness and misery” of chasing pigs and milking goats by hand. Soules laughs off most of the challenges, saying, “Drinking goat milk right off the teat is not important to me, but if she can’t shuck some corn or get her hands a little dirty, she’s not for me.” Kimmel also asks Soules if there were “people on the farm, or just animals” when referencing Soules’s manners.

The notion of farm life does not deter one contestant, Kaitlyn, who previously dated a dairy farmer and seems to think Soules has a relatively easy life. “I have dated farmers,” she tells Soules and Kimmel. “They were legit, like, cow farmers ... They had to, like, get up at 6 every morning and milk cows.”

RQ2: Representations of Traditional Stereotypes of Agriculture and Rural Life

Both positive and negative stereotypes of agriculture and rural Americans are apparent in *The Bachelor*. Chris Soules is described by both the show’s host and the contestants as a charming, caring, kind, and genuine individual who would be the ideal man to take home to meet a prospective wife’s family. He comes from a self-proclaimed “heritage of high-quality farmers” and can perform laborious chores on the farm, such as shoveling corn in a grain bin with the assistance of a sweep auger (see Figure 2). In the first episode, Soules describes his hometown as “slow paced, yet awesome quality of life.”



Figure 2. Chris Soules is shown shoveling grain into a sweep auger in a grain bin on his family's farm in Arlington, Iowa, as shown in the first episode of *The Bachelor* Season 19.

The Bachelor employs less positive stereotypes of agriculture and rural life to increase the entertainment value of the program. Several contestants make references to “being country,” generally in competitive situations. When tasked with racing tractors down a Los Angeles street in Episode 2, *Bachelor* hopeful Tandra states, “I’m gonna floor that tractor, and we’ll see how country it’s gonna get.” The descriptor “country” in this context implies an aggressive, uncouth nature and a lack of civility toward other challengers. In other situations, the stereotype is softened. During the season premiere, Tara, a “sport-fishing enthusiast,” arrives on set wearing a pink plaid shirt, cutoff jean shorts, and cowboy boots to differentiate herself from her gown-wearing competitors (see Figure 3). “I wanted to show you that you can take the girl out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl,” she explains. “Chris got to see the real me — yeehaw!”



Figure 3. In Episode 1, Tara arrives in an outfit that suits her “country” personality.

RQ3: Overarching Themes in The Bachelor's Portrayal of Agriculture and Rural Life

Agricultural images and other narrative content are typically used for two purposes in *The Bachelor*: comedy and sex. Humor is educed by the awkward situations the city-dwelling bachelorettes endure: racing tractors in low gear through downtown Los Angeles; participating in the dubiously named “Hoedown Throwdown” obstacle course (complete with shucking corn, collecting and frying eggs, milking goats, shoveling composted manure, and catching piglets); and dressing up like “American Gothic” multiple times throughout the season. A soundtrack of twangy, banjo- and fiddle-driven country music heightens the comedic nature of these farm-related challenges and scenarios. The overall effect is cartoonish and silly, positioning both the contestants and rural life as the focus of audience ridicule.

The Bachelor also uses agriculture to enhance the romantic aspects of the show as well as the sexuality of the participants. In the Season 19 trailer, Soules and a contestant are shown walking hand-in-hand through a sunset-lit field; another moment captures the bachelor and a different woman taking a motorcycle ride through the Iowa countryside. Soules is also shown striding through a snow-covered field, staring broodily into the distance like an agrarian Mr. Darcy. Sexualization is reoccurring, ranging from suggestive farm-themed pick-up lines in Episode 1 — Kaitlyn memorably invites Soules to “plow ... [her] field” — to wardrobes of revealing bathing suits and cowboy boots for the bikini tractor race in Episode 2 (see Figure 4). Throughout the show, multiple bachelorettes wear bib overalls, flannel shirts, and Daisy Duke shorts that leave little to Soules’s imagination.



Figure 4. In Episode 2, the bathing-suit-clad bachelorettes compete for a date with Chris Soules by racing tractors down a Los Angeles street.

Discussion

Despite ABC’s enthusiasm for Chris Soules’s rural roots, *The Bachelor* handles its star’s background with an uneasy mix of respect and condescension. The positive aspects of rural and agrarian life — beautiful scenery, a small-town lifestyle, and values-driven, hardworking farmers — are celebrated by show participants. However, these desirable qualities are offset by the superficial manner in which production agriculture is portrayed.

The terms Soules uses to describe his family and hometown are congruent with the perception

Americans have with of rural, agrarian lifestyles according to previous research studies. Americans view family farms as the representation of idyllic American values by being “hard working and self sufficient” (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2002a, p. 5). The Kellogg study also found Americans believe rural communities are an ideal location to raise a family; however, residents of rural communities are “plagued by lack of opportunities, including access to cultural activities” (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2002a, p. 1). Soules helps fuel this perception by stating that it would take him 25 years to meet 30 bachelorettes in rural Iowa.

Americans also are trained by media outlets to relate agricultural or rural communities with terms such as “pastoral, peaceful, picturesque, quite, sleepy, quaint, Currier & Ives and Norman Rockwell” (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2002b, p. 21). The imagery of Grant Wood’s “American Gothic” was recreated to show Soules’s simplistic lifestyle in Arlington while representing the American perception of how agriculturalists live. The painting has been used before in entertainment media: In addition to its appearance in Episode 3 of *The Bachelor* and an episode of *The Bachelorette*, the iconic image was recreated in promotional materials for the film *Son In Law* (Basinger, 2005; Rash, 1993) (see Figure 5). As in *Son In Law*, *The Bachelor*’s Chris Soules attempts to transform a city slicker into a farmer’s spouse, and the show uses agriculture as a humorous prop to complicate the transition.



Figure 5. Clockwise from top left: “American Gothic” by Grant Woods; a promotional poster for *Son In Law*; Chris Soules and *Bachelor* contestant Carly; Soules and Jimmy Kimmel; and Soules with a fellow *Bachelorette* contestant.

Though the show makes some attempts to subvert the “backwoods” stereotypes of rural Americans found in previous reality shows — primarily through references to Soules’s good looks, fashion sense, and love for the trappings of city life — *The Bachelor* nonetheless conforms to the outdated interpretation of agriculture criticized in *The Simple Life* (Ruth, Lundy, & Park, 2005; Specht, 2013) and in *Farmer Wants a Wife* (“Goodbye,” 2008). In the third episode, Jimmy Kimmel tells the women,

“We’re going to put your farm skills to the test. If one of you were to wind up with Chris, you’re gonna have to work.” Instead of measuring the women’s suitability for farm life, important tasks, like milking dairy animals and cleaning pens, are lampooned for entertainment and are used as means of demoralizing the contestants.

This study demonstrates agricultural content on *The Bachelor* conforms to both the positive and negative stereotypes seen in previous entertainment-media portrayals. Continued propagation of these characteristics helps crystallize the public’s symbolic reality of food and fiber production and the individuals who undertake it, thus also potentially influencing their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward agriculture (Adoni & Mane, 1984). The researchers note other interpretations of the content of *The Bachelor* are possible; however, through their social semiotic lens, these were the findings determined to be the most accurate based on the content of the episodes and the knowledge the researchers have of the agriculture industry.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Future Research

Agriculture-centered popular media events like *The Bachelor* Season 19 offer agricultural communications practitioners an opportunity to open a dialogue between the industry they serve and the audiences who view these programs. Television programming is often consumed in social environments: “In fact, the worth of a particular television program is often gauged according to the amount of social interaction it generates,” whether direct (“movie nights”) or indirect (post-viewing “water cooler” conversations) (Ducheneaut, Moore, Oehlberg, Thornton, & Nickell, 2008, p. 136; White, 1986). Engaging in these interactions, whether by hosting viewing parties or by engaging audiences in interpersonal or online discussions during and after the show, may help agricultural communicators better inform audience members whose interest in agriculture has been piqued by their attention to the program.

Practitioners can learn from the findings of this study about the recent representations of agriculture in reality television programming. Reality television programming has become an increasingly popular entertainment medium for Americans, and the episodes of *The Bachelor* were viewed by millions of people. Practitioners should be aware of the representations of agriculture in entertainment because for some consumers the agricultural information in these episodes may be the only agricultural education they receive. Mass media is readily available on demand for anyone with an Internet connection, and therefore, agricultural communicators need to be cognizant of entertainment representations to communicate effectively with the American public that is educated on agriculture through the digital silver screen.

As this study constitutes an introductory examination of early *The Bachelor* Season 19 episodes, the researchers plan to continue studying how the show depicts the industry. Close attention will be paid to the customary “home visits,” during which finalists travel to the bachelor’s hometown in hope of impressing his friends and family. A follow-up content analysis of the program’s treatment of Arlington and Soules’s family farm will be conducted. Further research into the social aspects of *The Bachelor* — namely, the social media content generated by viewers — also should be conducted as a means of gauging, in real time, the impact the show may be having on perceptions of agriculture and rural life. Findings from this study will be triangulated with popular press and social media posts to determine the public’s perception of agriculture in *The Bachelor* Season 19 in future studies. Prince Charming met Cinderella at a glamorous ball; Prince Farming, on the other hand, pursues his bride-to-be through televised challenges rife with agrarian humor. In the early going, *The Bachelor* Season 19 has provided RTV viewers a brief glimpse at real farm life, but the show also has reinforced

stereotypes previously represented in media portrayals of rural America. While audiences wait to see if Prince Farming will valiantly defend an accurate depiction of agriculture and rural life in future episodes, the history of reality television suggests the show could become a disheartening lagoon for agricultural image accuracy.

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