Book Review

Dubrofsky, Rachel E. 2011. *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television: Watching The Bachelor and The Bachelorette*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.

151pp. Hardback, \$58.68 (US), ISBN 978-0-7391-6498-3

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At the time of writing, the 8th season of *The Bachelorette* is winding up, the producers have begun casting for the 17th season of *The Bachelor*, and another spin off, *The Bachelor Pad*, is set to begin broadcasting its 3rd season in a few weeks. The franchise has been on the air since 2002, is the longest running and most successful reality romance show on a major US network (pg. 12), and is showing no evidence of slowing down; yet Dubrofsky's work is the first comprehensive academic critique of this incredibly popular and problematic franchise. Additionally, the author's analysis of racialization in *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television* makes the book even timelier, given the recent racial discrimination lawsuit launched against *The Bachelor* by two African American men (Burke 2012).

Dubrofsky establishes the important connection between reality TV and surveillance from the outset as she states simply that "surveillance technologies are used to gather footage required to create the shows" (pg. 17). In particular, her analysis is framed by the question, "how are racialized and gendered bodies produced by surveillance in the space of reality TV?" (pg. 1). However, *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television* is not an exploration of surveillance *per se*; rather surveillance is considered as the mechanism which enables other things to happen. Surveillance is not addressed in a systematic way; instead it is taken as *a priori* inasmuch as it is seen to simply exist fully formed in *The Bachelor/ette* universe. That said, Dubrofsky does address the role that surveillance plays in establishing authenticity, the privileging of whiteness, and the construction of the narrative about women who take risks for a chance at marriage and family, but who mostly "fail at love" (pg. 3).

One of the main points Dubrofsky makes about surveillance is that it is essential to constructing and ensuring authenticity. She argues that the emotion displayed by the participants can be judged authentic because it is "so strong" and "so real" that it is admitted and performed despite the knowledge that one is being surveilled. On this point, Dubrofsky writes, "What is particular to reality TV is the suggestion that surveillance of the self is not only acceptable but desirable, inasmuch as it can be used to prove authenticity of the self. Paradoxically, this translates into an ability to appear under surveillance as if one is not under surveillance" (pg. 19). Conversely the lack of emotional display while under surveillance is evidence of a lack of genuine feelings (as opposed to a desire not to disclose intimate sentiments on national television).

The author begins her analysis with an examination of race and racialization in the Bachelor Industry (BI), which is the term that the author uses to refer to all shows related to *The Bachelor* (pgs. 7-9). In the first two chapters, Dubrofsky makes the point that whiteness and white bodies are privileged and therefore racialized women are ineligible to be part of the love story (pg. 21). She expands this analysis by

Superle, Tamy. 2012. Review of Dubrofsky's *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television: Watching The Bachelor and The Bachelorette*. *Surveillance & Society* Vol 10(2): 199-201.

<http://www.surveillance-and-society.org> | ISSN: 1477-7487

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suggesting that, while racialized women are not ever conceived of as possible romantic partners for the Bachelor, they are used in ways to “facilitate the process of two white people finding love” (pg. 29). Racialized women are left because whiteness is required for the successful performance of authenticity and naturalness which are necessary to be successful in finding love on *The Bachelor*. However, for women who are not racialized, despite displaying physical markers of non-white ethnicity, love is still possible because they are able to perform whiteness correctly. Dubrofsky’s analysis of the privileging of whiteness and the neo-colonial project undertaken by the BI to reify the naturalness and desirability of whiteness is one of the strengths of this book. Her thorough and nuanced analysis exposes the racist ideology that is embedded within the narrative of the “fairytale” of falling in love in the BI universe.

Dubrofsky continues her study with an in-depth discussion of the “economy of emotion” (pg. 53). She contends that in the BI women must display an appropriate amount of emotion in order to prove that they are vulnerable and open enough to risk finding love. Either of the two extremes of emotional expression, too little or too much, will end a woman’s journey to finding true love. In Chapter Four she discusses the fatal flaw of expressing excessive emotion by utilizing the concept of the “money shot” in order to explore the “implications of the display of women’s emotions as the climactic moment in the BI shows” (pg. 68). Dubrofsky argues that women who show excessive emotion reveal their “true” selves to be inconsistent with the way they portrayed themselves at the beginning of the show. It is essential to remain consistent (and therefore authentic) throughout the process, as Dubrofsky writes, “Nothing new should be revealed by a woman; rather, something already known should be confirmed” (pg. 67). By being inconsistent a woman makes herself ineligible for the Bachelor’s affections. The “money shot” performs a deeper function as it also serves to discipline other women. When the images of the “money shot” are broadcast, the “women provide the ‘bad’ example (and suffer the consequences) to offer lessons for female viewers on how to properly govern the self” (pg. 89).

The most focused discussion of surveillance comes with the investigation of the confessional and “therapeutics of the self,” for which Dubrofsky draws on and extends Foucault’s ideas of confession and the panopticon. She writes, “The process of surveillance, production, and editing in the BI are part of a mechanism that makes people knowable to themselves and to others and subsequently has the potential to carry out a therapeutic good” (pg. 99). What is particular about the BI “therapeutics of the self” is that participants have been “therapeutically transformed by not changing” (pg. 105). In other words, the knowledge that one can and did remain authentic and genuine despite being under surveillance inspires confidence in one’s consistency and therefore serves a therapeutic good (pg. 101).

Dubrofsky concludes with an insightful discussion about “postfeminist nirvana” which adds another dimension to the postfeminist discourse of empowerment in choice. Postfeminism constructs women’s desire to opt out of a career in favour of marriage and a family as an individual choice. However, choice is seemingly erased on *The Bachelor*. Careers (or the potential to have one) are a necessity for the participants and since they have their career goals met they are all ready to engage in the more important job of finding a husband. Dubrofsky sums this up nicely when she writes, “Empowerment and career are pastimes that women engage in until they find love, their final goal” (pg. 121).

The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television has many strong and insightful aspects, but there are two matters worth noting. First, Dubrofsky’s background in media and communication studies is evident throughout her analysis. She provides much detail about the technical aspect of the production (for example, music selection and the framing of the shots), but without always explaining their significance. The importance of some of the examples may therefore be lost for those without a background in the area. Second, there is very little discussion of methodological considerations, which, given the nature of the claims (that examples are used as representative of larger patterns), would have strengthened the analysis. In many cases Dubrofsky uses one or two participants as illustrative of the theme she is addressing, but

without the details of the sample it is difficult to establish the pattern. This absence of a discussion of the data and analysis may open up some of her claims to challenge.

Overall, *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television* is a welcome and necessary addition to the literature on reality TV. The strength of this book is that it takes a detailed approach to questions of gender and race as they are represented and constructed on *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette*. There are many who will find this book a useful scholarly and teaching resource, as well as an illuminating analysis of a show that will likely be on our televisions of a long time to come. But I worry that those looking for the surveillance in *The Surveillance of Women on Reality Television* may ultimately feel slightly unsatisfied.

References

Burke, Shelia. 2012. "Lawsuit claims 'Bachelor' show discriminates" *Yahoo News*, Apr. 19, 2012. Retrieved from <http://news.yahoo.com/lawsuit-claims-bachelor-show-discriminates-183445035.html>