

## From Slut Shaming to Cultural Commentary: What Live Tweeting Practices of Viewers of ABC's *The Bachelorette* Reveal about Gender Policing and Digital Activism on Twitter

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This article analyzes live tweets posted by viewers of ABC's *The Bachelorette* during a network-promoted scandal concerning the star's sexual activity on the reality TV program. This study notes how problematic gender norms were reinforced within the conversation unfolding on Twitter and how a subset of tweets served to critique the sexism found within the program, the Twitter feed, and in society more generally. As these tweets attempting to combat gender norms can be considered a form of digital activism, this study also analyzes the ways in which Twitter's particular communication format might complicate and/or interfere with their desired societal critiques.

On June 22, 2015, the Twittersverse erupted when the star of ABC's *The Bachelorette* had sex with one of her male suitors prior to the show's pre-approved, pre-scripted timeline. Far from being a PG-rated reality TV franchise, the long-running show is well known for broadcasting a slew of make out sessions and an entire episode devoted to speculating on whether the bachelor or bachelorette will sleep with any or all of his or her final three contestants in the fantasy suite. Yet when an episode aired revealing that Kaitlyn Bristowe, the season's bachelorette, and repeat contestant, Nick Viall, had slept together at the close of their one-on-one date, Kaitlyn faced a wave of criticism from viewers through social media. Over 80,000 tweets with the hashtag #TheBachelorette appeared in the 24 hours surrounding this episode, and a vast majority of them were negative posts consisting of judgmental quips and derogatory slurs focusing on Kaitlyn's sexual activity. These tweeters, the majority of whom were female, were quick to affix all the normal labels used to discuss so-called female promiscuity. Among the tamer tweets were chastising posts, such as "Kaitlyn needs to learn how to keep it classy & not so trashy" (@otrat\_rowyso).

Amid the caustic remarks were also hundreds of tweets defending the star. For example, comedian Amy Schumer (@amyschumer) posted: "Oh no someone slept with a guy they're dating and considering marrying! Showing love for @kaitlynbristowe." Tweets that challenged slut shaming began to enter the feed, as did posts that specifically criticized ABC's producers for the ways in which the show participated in and encouraged such shaming. While some important conversations resulted from this sensationalized reality television episode (Gray, 2015; Uffalussy, 2015; Yahr, 2015), the initial social media response it provoked reveals how expectations for single women on the dating market today are entrenched in problematic sexual double standards that have remained unaltered for decades. Consider, for example, this tweet posted during the episode: "you can turn a housewife into a hoe. But you can't turn a hoe into a housewife" (@HeatherGossman). As the negative twitter posts prove, many still believe that certain behaviors determine whether a woman is good girlfriend or wife material, and at the top of the list remains her sexual history. This study notes the pervasiveness of these problematic gender norms within the collected tweets and analyzes a subset of posts that serve to critique these norms and provide broader cultural commentary. It could be argued that these latter tweets combatting gender norms are a form of digital activism. As such, this study analyzes the ways in which Twitter's particular communication format might complicate or interfere with their societal critiques.

Twitter data was collected weekly from May 18, 2015 through July 27, 2015, spanning the entire eleven week season. Live tweets (posted between 8:00 p.m. EST and 10:00 p.m. EST) associated with the hashtag #TheBachelorette were scraped weekly using NodeXL. Focus was then narrowed to a three-week period that involved the public slut shaming of the bachelorette contestant (tweets pertaining to the episodes that aired on July 15, July 22, and July 29). During the July 15 episode, contestant Ian Thomson criticized Kaitlin for making out with too many male contestants, prompting the first discussion of slut shaming for the season; during the July 22 episode, as discussed earlier, Kaitlin was recorded having sex with one contestant; and the July 29 episode focused on Kaitlin confessing to her remaining suitors that

she had had this early sexual encounter. The publicity for these episodes continually stressed Kaitlyn's sexual behavior (or anticipated people's reactions to it). The resulting data pool from these three episodes consisted of 56,764 total tweets.

The dataset was then coded to highlight critiquing tweets. These tweets would fall under what Yvette Wohn and Eun-Kyung Na (2011) called *opinion posts* in their analytical model for mapping the type and flow of content found in social media threads. In studying the live tweeting practices of television viewers watching two non-scripted television programs, Wohn and Na determined four main purposes for viewers' posts: to give opinions (59%), to provide information, to express emotion, or to gain attention. Another study, conducted by Fabio Giglietto and Donatella Selva (2014), determined that opinion-based tweets are the most prevalent. When analyzing viewer tweets about *The Bachelorette*, critiquing tweets were further organized into two categories: (1) small-scale critiques directed at the contestants (including subcategories such as personal opinions, name calling, and jokes) and (2) large-scale cultural critiques directed at the producers or other Twitter users (including subcategories focused on media criticism—e.g. posts about editing or marketing choices—and cultural commentary).

Although there has been debate about whether Twitter is an accurate indicator of cultural values, this dataset does document prevalent sexism. The most common sexist tweets involved slut shaming (see Table 1), reinforcing double standards concerning sexual behavior, and accepting (or at least not criticizing) vulgar or violent language directed at women. Studies continue to find evidence of a cultural double standard pertaining acceptance towards male versus female sexual activity (Kreager & Staff, 2009; Vrangalova, 2014).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
niiicy_babii	6/22/2015, 9:09 p.m.	I feel so bad for the original men in the house. Kaitlyn really is doing them dirty, she has no respect . #TheBachelorette
Scarlettmerk	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	You're having sex on national television #classy #TheBachelorette
HollyDurst	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	I bet her parents like this episode. #TheBachelorette
CocoNutsNYC	6/22/2015, 9:16 p.m.	They deserve each other. She's as deep as bucket of water in the desert and he's just gross. NOT A GENTLEMAN! NOT A LADY! #TheBachelorette
AbsolutelyAnna	6/22/2015, 9:16 p.m.	COMMENCE WALK OF SHAME. #thebachelorette
RoxieKat	6/22/2015, 9:20 p.m.	Fix it...? How about keeping your v-jayjay in your pants?
Melanie_G123	6/22/2015, 9:22 p.m.	"I wouldn't want my son dating her"-mom #TheBachelorette @PrincessProz

Table 1: Posts slut shaming contestant(s).

The pure quantity of tweets produced reinforces research that indicates that commenting on a woman's sexual behavior is a common, if not acceptable, cultural practice. (The July 22 episode nearly doubled the average weekly tweet total for this hashtag.) The controversial scene between Kaitlyn and Nick aired over eight minutes, between 9:08 p.m.–9:16 p.m. This scene began with a series of make-out sessions (juxtaposed between clips of the other men expressing their feelings for her). Next came six minutes of footage recording their sexual encounter. While the actual interaction occurred behind closed doors, it was captured on audio, and the producers decided to air it with subtitles added. (And to edit in shots of birds and bees and erupting water fountains as a form of crass symbolism.) The scene ended with Nick leaving her hotel room in the morning, providing further clarity of what had occurred. Throughout this eight-minute scene, 7,312 total tweets (original tweets plus replies and retweets) were posted under #TheBachelorette hashtag (at a rate of 914 tweets per minute).

Unsurprisingly, the authors of these posts were predominantly female (assuming that the profile pictures and names used are an accurate representation of users' gender). This aligns with previous research concerning how women are as likely, if not more, as men to critique another woman's sexual activity on Twitter (Gibson, 2014). A recent study has found that even women who identify as sexually permissive are likely to criticize another woman's sexual activity (Vrangalova, Bukberg, & Rieger, 2013).

The fact that more women than men participated in this slut shaming is also likely due to the fact that viewership of the program is largely comprised of women. Beyond the general criticism directed at Kaitlyn, the casual use of derogatory terms is also noteworthy (Table 2). A secondary dataset obtained by using keyword searches on Topsy, an online social media search engine, determined that in the days surrounding the July 22 episode, 293 tweets under the hashtag #TheBachelorette included the word *slut* (although this number is slightly misleading since a portion of these included critiques of slut shaming); 151 tweets included the adjective *dirty*; 112 tweets included the word *classy* (used in a sarcastic fashion); 102 included the term *hoe*; 85 included the slur *whore*; 43 tweets included the insult *trashy*; 38 included the term *skank*; 32 included the term *tramp*; and 25 included the term *tacky*. Context, of course, cannot always be gleaned from simple word count analyses, and what the data suggests is that these numbers actually underrepresent the amount of times vulgar terms were directed at the star, since oftentimes such insults are purposely misspelled to add emphasis or humor. Take for example the poster (@courtyvonne), who integrated hoe into the spelling of Bristowe's name (Table 2).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
afterfivenow	6/22/2015, 9:10 p.m.	Ho dee Ho Ho Ho #TheBachelorette
kellieewalton	6/22/2015 9:10 p.m.	My mom said "she's a scuz-bucket" #nuffsaid #TheBachelorette
sabymarie7	6/22/2015, 9:10 p.m.	TRAMP #TheBachelorette
californiaashes	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	All aboard the slut train. ALL ABOARD!!!! #TheBachelorette
aiken4jr	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	Uh oh this is turning into 50 shades of slutty!!! #TheBachelorette
liv_cappucci	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	kaitlin is a whoreeeee #TheBachelorette
courtyvonne	6/22/2015, 9:16 p.m.	So, Kaitlyn BristHOE? #TheBachelorette
miranda0678	6/22/2015, 9:17 p.m.	If you didn't want it to be an issue, you should have kept your legs closed! Bloody whore! #TheBachelorette
marlin_hargrove	6/22/2015, 9:23pm	#TheBachelorette. Kaitlyn is trashy.

Table 2: Derogatory name-calling tweets.

While ample research has suggested that Twitter may be used to track cultural sentiment (Diakopoulos & Shamma, 2010), the type of writing Twitter promotes contributes to its performative nature (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010; Booth, 2012; Qui, Lin, Ramsay, & Yang, 2012) and, therefore, problematizes the notion that tweets can act as a societal mirror reflecting cultural values. For example, humorous and inflammatory posts tend to receive more attention in the form of retweeting and replying practices (Holton & Lewis, 2011, p. 6). On the one hand, the performative nature of Twitter could result in social media users who perform in ways that do not necessarily reflect their own beliefs in order to obtain visibility and popularity. On the other, the data analyzed collectively does reveal some striking things about cultural practices, and, by extension, the cultural beliefs they stem from. The prevalence of negative tweets also align with larger trends in Internet communication, for example the common practice of flaming or trolling, especially in settings that allow for anonymity (van der Nagel & Frith, 2015). Since negative commentary online is often explicitly or implicitly focused on identity factors, such as gender or race (Tillman, 2014), the abundance of gender-based slurs found in this dataset is not surprising.

Aligning with the research, negative or comedic tweets from this dataset were more likely to be retweeted. And while the content of these tweets may not necessarily perfectly reflect societal beliefs, they do at least reveal common practices for live tweeting televised content. The comedic tweets indicated an expectation for synchronous communication—posts intended for an imagined audience of fellow viewers watching the program during the live broadcast. The idea that Twitter provides users with an imagined community is well documented in scholarship (Chen, 2011; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Huimin and Ruoh-Nan, 2011; Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns, 2012). Unsurprisingly, the sexual encounter prompted a slew of jokes referencing the sounds and actions editors allowed viewers access to during the eight minute scene (Table 3). The specificity of these tweets highlights the ephemeral nature of

tweets, in general, but also how their humor often depends on when the tweet is received. Consider, for example, this joke that referenced a commercial campaign running concurrently with the season: “I think we ALL know what never-before-seen #BleachableMoment we want Clorox to unlock tonight” (@KristenGBaldwin).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
Jenniferweiner	6/22/2015, 9:03 p.m.	"The chemistry's there. The emotions are there. Everything I'm looking for is there." Hoping the birth control is there...
Eonline	6/22/2015, 9:11 p.m.	Something tells us they aren't just playing Scrabble in there... #TheBachelorette
chamie713	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	Can you imagine the looks the camera guys are giving each other during this scene #TheBachelorette
Jasonpinter	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	I think I'd rather fill my ears with pregnant scorpions than listen to more of Nick's bedroom talk. #TheBachelorette
jenniferweiner	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	Sighs. Coos. Kisses. Soprano groans. Either they're having sex or eating a really delicious sundae. Mmm. Sundae. #thebachelorette
LaurenDenhamXo	6/22/2015, 9:13 p.m.	And suddenly, watching #TheBachelorette with my mom seems like a not so good idea
Jamienotis	6/22/2015, 9:18 p.m.	Watching #TheBachelorette is like listening to the audio book of a harlequin romance novel. #Bachelornation
butterflyblob	6/22/2015, 9:18 p.m.	"Off-camera time" is my new favorite euphemism for sex. #TheBachelorette
AnonBachelorFan	6/22/2015, 9:22 p.m.	Which producer drew the short stick and had to film the door while they did it? #TheBachelorette

Table 3: Joking tweets.

Another example would be the increased number STD jokes posted during a bizarre group date that followed Kaitlyn and Nick’s sex scene. This date—held at a funeral parlor—found Kaitlyn posing as a corpse in a coffin while her suitors recited eulogies. Quite often these comedic tweets only make sense to someone watching the show live (Table 4).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
bachelorburnbk	6/22/2015, 9:02 p.m.	Oh, dear. This is going to bad places. Don't do it, Kaitlyn! You will get chlamydia. And die. #TheBachelorette
Bachbros	6/22/2015, 9:11 p.m.	Nick's coming back with something alright, and it rhymes with with "schmerpes". #TheBachelorette
KristenGBaldwin	6/22/2015, 9:25 p.m.	"Kaitlyn is dead. Nick gave her a toxic case of the clap." #TheBachelorette
FakeHarrison	6/22/2015, 9:28 p.m.	I figured @viallnicholas28 had megaherpes, I just didn't think it would kill @kaitlynbristowe this fast. #TheBachelorette

Table 4: STD-themed jokes in tweets.

Some program-specific complications arose when trying to determine whether larger cultural sentiments could be gleaned from this dataset. Some of the critical posts directed at Kaitlyn’s sexual activity were influenced by viewers’ pre-existing feelings for Nick—a contest on the previous season. For example, one viewer tweeted: “Not shaming her for what she is doing... My issue is who she is doing it with. Huge difference” (@ellabella1792). Such critiques are further complicated by the reason why many viewers disliked Nick. Ironically, he, himself, had engaged in a form of televised slut-shaming. During an “After the Final Rose” episode, he criticized Andi Dorkman, the previous bachelorette, for sleeping with him if she had not intended to marry him. So, oddly enough, Kaitlyn was shamed more for *her* sexual acts

because she was with a partner who had previously (inadvertently or not) shamed another woman for hers. This aligns with the long history of women being judged based on the behavior of their male romantic partners. Consider for example the ways in which Bill Clinton’s infidelity was used to criticize Hillary Clinton during the 2016 Presidential campaign (Ames, 2016). Viewers’ history with the program influenced other critiques as well. For example, many saw the interaction between Kaitlyn and Nick as deviating from the normal program arc, and her sexual activity was interpreted as violating the so-called rules of the show (e.g. the expectation that the star will wait until the fantasy suite to have sex).

While the majority of the critiquing posts focused on the specific behavior of the contestants rather than on societal critique, there was a subset that countered the normative messages found in the larger thread. Studies have found that Twitter, like most online platforms, reinforce cultural norms concerning identity construction (Risam, 2015). Many viewers used Twitter to combat the sexist commentary present within the program or the fan tweets. Some users pointed out the misogyny of fellow viewers, some called for more positive discussions of sex, and some simply celebrated Kaitlyn’s choice without qualification (Table 5). This type of feminist digital activism appears to be one of the more common within program-specific Twitter threads. A recent example would be the ways in which female fans of *Doctor Who* pointed out the sexism within complaints by male fans after the announcement of the first female Doctor was announced (Gettell, 2017). The practice of specifically labeling sexism and misogyny present within the feed aligns with one of the more common feminist activist practices online: educating about feminism and feminist issues (Keller, 2016, p. 266).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
Jenniferweiner	6/22/2015, 8:23 p.m.	Kaitlyn will not apologizing for kissing guys. Because intimacy is important. Also, she's thirty years old and not Amish. #thebachelorette
UnSlutProject	6/22/2015, 9:07 p.m.	Everyone "slut"-shaming #TheBachelorette needs to knock it the hell off. @kaitlynbristowe we've got your back! #unslut
AshleySpivey	6/22/2015, 9:08 p.m.	All these girls on Twitter acting like they haven't hooked up with a dude on the first date. Come on. #TheBachelorette
KarisaHolden	6/22/2015, 9:09 p.m.	OMG! A woman in 2015 wants to have sex with a guy she's attracted to! It's like Sodom & Gomorrah up in there. #TheBachelorette
Shilohbarkley	6/22/2015, 9:10 p.m.	Get your orgasm on, girlfriend! #TheBachelorette
EmilyLFoley	6/22/2015, 9:11 p.m.	The only things Kaitlyn should be embarrassed about it not turning off her mic pack. #TheBachelorette
BluntAssJenny	6/22/2015, 9:16 p.m.	Here comes sexism/misgynoticism in 3...2...1... #TheBachelorette
Jcapejcape	6/22/2015, 9:17 p.m.	GIRL CAN HAVE SEX IF SHE WANTS EVERYONE props to @kaitlynbristowe for bein real about her desires everyone else shhhh #TheBachelorette
CelebrityFind	6/22/2015, 9:17 p.m.	Hey! Don't say that! #Nymphomaniacs have rights, too! #DontJudge #Each2HisOwn #havingfun #TheBachelorette #NiceGirl ;D
guyisonahorse	6/22/2015, 9:17 p.m.	So much embarrassing slut shaming happening on #TheBachelorette tags. Yall are at best, hypocrites. At worst, pooppy faced scum bags.
bachrants	6/22/2015, 9:17 p.m.	And so begins the "Slutshaming Special" episode of #TheBachelorette
HegartyKatie	6/22/2015, 9:18 p.m.	Kaitlyn says she doesn't feel guilt for "the act." Very glad to hear that because the show will FIGHT to take that from her #TheBachelorette
AshleySpivey	6/22/2015, 9:23 p.m.	I think we all need to have a big discussion about how sex can actually make you feel powerful, ladies. #TheBachelorette

Table 5: Anti-sex shaming and contestant support tweets.

Still others used Twitter to criticize the network, arguing that ABC had finally crossed a line with their treatment of Kaitlyn (Table 6).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
Eonline	6/22/2015, 9:10 p.m.	The heavy breathing? The sound effects? STOP. THIS. #TheBachelorette
TayMartin13	6/22/2015, 9:11 p.m.	You've went too far, ABC. Too far. #TheBachelorette
Possessionista	6/22/2015, 9:11 p.m.	Hey ABC we all know what's happening. We could do without the sound effects. #TheBachelorette
NMariRogers	6/22/2015, 9:11 p.m.	Ew. Slurping and subtitles?! Too much. It's too much. #TheBachelorette
Possessionista	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	Oh sure, the bleep out the word "erection," but Kaitlyn moaning is a-ok? #TheBachelorette
GitrDUNNashton	6/22/2015, 9:13 p.m.	I'm really disappointed in the way @ABCNetwork @BacheloretteABC is showing this. Very poor taste. #TheBachelorette
Colindonnell	6/22/2015, 9:13 p.m.	Gotta hand it to #TheBachelorette editors. The fountain at the end of that whole thing was genius
Leonicka	6/22/2015, 9:16 p.m.	LOL at the birds and bees footage. I SEE WHAT YOU DID THERE @BacheloretteABC #TheBachelorette

Table 6: Criticism directed at producers.

Expanding the Twitter collection beyond the live tweeting window reveals that tweets of this nature were more likely to occur outside the live broadcast window. Those criticizing the practice of slut shaming under this hashtag were often joining the conversation after the fact, indicating that this sort of digital activism—although engaging with viewers of *The Bachelorette*—may not be coming from those who watch the show live (if at all). Interestingly, unlike the comedic tweets, these often seem crafted for asynchronous communication (Table 7).

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
brosandprose	6/22/2015, 1:37 p.m.	fuck it, I'm spending this weekend writing about #TheBachelorette, social media harassment and slut-shaming. A Bachelorella manifesto.
BachBlackBox	6/22/2015, 2:12 p.m.	Let's all make a promise that tonight we will not slut-shame @kaitlynbristowe Support women's decisions, dont be degrading #TheBachelorette
jennyrocks	6/22/2015, 5:31 p.m.	also, we've got what will surely be the most slut-shamingest #thebachelorette of the season tonight, so yay feminism
Fortitude1913	6/22/2015, 6:36 p.m.	Watching #TheBachelorette tonight just to see if @ABCNetwork will remain true to form & let Caitlyn get slut-shamed on national TV...
Cckessler	6/23/2015, 8:05 a.m.	All these people slut-shaming Kaitlyn and yet very little about Nick who has now slept two Bachelorettes on national TV. #TheBachelorette
LindsWilliams_	6/23/2015, 8:43 p.m.	Catching up on last nights episode of #theBachelorette &BOY OH BOY. I'd never slut-shame you, @kaitlynbristowe -but who edited it did girl.
CalgarySarah	6/24/2015, 5:51 p.m.	To #TheBachelorette viewers: Slut-shaming is never okay. Never slut-shame yourself or others.
YahooStyle	6/25/2015, 5:19 p.m.	Feminism in retrograde: Why we NEED to stop slut-shaming #theBachelorette @kaitlynbristowe. <a href="http://yhoo.it/1HjHhWQ">http://yhoo.it/1HjHhWQ</a>
LaDiavolina	6/25/2015, 11:42 p.m.	It makes me irrationally angry that the majority of those slut-shaming Kaitlyn Bristowe are women. Judgmental prudes.

		#TheBachelorette
bachelorbenhair	6/30/2015, 8:54 p.m.	UGH, Kaitlyn take your power back. You're #TheBachelorette and you apologize for nothing!

Table 7: Anti-slut shaming tweets from July 22 to July 29 (during and in-between episodes).

However, there were a number of live tweets that engaged in cultural commentary while the episode aired. Unfortunately, they suggest some challenges of using Twitter to provide such critiques—or at least such critiques inspired by a longstanding reality television program. Although some have argued that Twitter’s minimalism can be viewed as an affordance (Brock, 2012, p. 535), arguably, persuasive social commentary is difficult to achieve in 140 (now 280) characters. As previous studies have found, the length restrictions, coupled with the text-based messaging, often led to ambiguous posts (Purohit et al., 2016). For example, consider the first four posts in Table 8. The first tweet, “I guess self-slut-shaming is possible” (@VaughnFry), could be interpreted as criticizing slut-shaming or as saying that finally a contestant has crossed a line and is warranted in being the target of such shaming. The words within the second tweet, “this girl is dirty” (@\_MissNessaJ), seems like a criticism, but then the post includes two contradictory emoticons which could be viewed as criticizing or celebrating her actions. The third tweet, “let the slut shaming commence” (@devongross), could be read as predicting, criticizing, or encouraging the series of slut-shaming tweets that would follow. And the fourth tweet, “I’m embarrassed for this girl” (@msemilymosley), could viewed as empathetic or judgmental.

Twitter User	Timestamp	Tweet
VaughnFry	6/22/2015, 9:09 p.m.	TheBachelorette So I guess self-slut-shaming is possible.
_MissNessaJ	6/22/2015, 9:10 p.m.	this girl is dirty #TheBachelorette
devongross	6/22/2015, 9:10 p.m.	#Let the slut shaming commence #TheBachelorette
msemilymosley	6/22/2015, 9:12 p.m.	I'm embarrassed for this girl! #TheBachelorette
youngmathgeniu	6/22/2015, 9:13 p.m.	I won't condemn Kaitlyn for what she did even though it's inappropriate, but why Nick? #TheBachelorette
AbbeWright	6/22/2015, 9:14 p.m.	I would DIE if my moans were on national TV. #ReasonsWhyICouldntBeTheBachelorette But go on and get it girl! #TheBachelorette
ellabella1792	6/22/2015, 9:14 p.m.	Not shaming her for what she is doing.... My issue is who she is doing it with. Huge difference #TheBachelorette
click4Amanda	6/22/2015, 9:14 p.m.	#TheBachelorette Kaitlyn's not gross for boning a guy; she's gross for boning a guy 3 feet from an entire production crew
charleen383	6/22/2015, 9:15 p.m.	Dumbbell! Everyone gets one dumbbell moment, don't they? #TheBachelorette
bluntassjenney	6/22/2015, 9:16 p.m.	Should have just held out until the fantasy suites where it's perfectly acceptable to bone on national TV #TheBachelorette

Table 8: Mixed messages and ambiguous posts.

Ultimately this study suggests that live tweeting reality television programs—or at least this particular reality television program—may not be an effective form of digital activism. Overall the social activist posts were greatly outnumbered by misogynistic posts, decreasing their visibility within the feed. The posts containing social commentary were also less likely to be retweeted than those that provided gendered insults, slurs, or jokes. Further, even the tweets critiquing the sexist, heteronormative, and patriarchal tropes of the show were influenced by viewers’ expectations for the television genre, the program’s particular structure, and the communication platform with which they were engaging.

Successful feminist digital activism engages like-minded individuals online, voicing concerns and sharing information with the intent to raise awareness within the general public about feminist issues (Carstensen, 2012, p. 223). Hashtag feminists—those employing hashtags to draw attention to specific feminist issues—have successfully intervened in “oppressive discourse produced by commercial, news, and entertainment media” (Clark, 2016, p. 2). The live tweeted critiques of *The Bachelorette* can be

viewed as attempts at hashtag feminism, but they falter largely because the tweets were made under the wide reaching #TheBachelorette hashtag. Very few posts included targeted feminist hashtags that could link their critiques to that of others, allow for a visible counter message related to the show, or enter into broader conversations about feminist issues beyond the context of the program. If done effectively, appending a social justice orientated hashtag to that of a major broadcast can allow users to co-opt the conversation concerning television programming. Consider, for example, the Representation Project's launch of the #NotBuyingIt hashtag and iPhone app six days before the 2014 Super Bowl. The campaign encouraged users to combat gender misrepresentation, prompting over fifteen thousand tweets—reaching more than 2.4 million people—during the nationally televised game (Clark, 2014, p. 2). Hashtag activism works best when individual posts—often those involving personal stories (Cochrane, 2014)—coalesce into a unified protest and this did not occur within this particular data set. This study suggests that live tweeting television shows as a form of cultural commentary will only be effective if the individual tweets pointing out social injustice reach a high level of visibility and interconnectivity.

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