

The Bachelor – **Why highly educated young women in particular love the “casting show for the dream bride of the year”**

On Wednesday 14.01.2015 the new season of the match-making show *The Bachelor* begins. For the fifth time 22 women will court the favour of a man, hoping to find the love of their lives. The format is remarkably successful among young target groups in particular. The IZI asked 174 young women and men between 12 and 26 what makes the format so fascinating for them. The surprising result: an unusually high number of highly educated women love the format. They use it as a chance to analyse the clichéd behaviour of the protagonists, to distance themselves and make fun of the candidates. At the same time, they deeply enjoy the romantic moments as the appreciation of intimate togetherness, and they absorb images of staged, clichéd dates.

Munich, 12th January 2015 – Around 4 million people will watch the programme *The Bachelor* on RTL over the next few weeks again. A format that in its composition seems to go against all the emancipatory achievements of the last few decades: 22 highly styled women fight for the favour of a man. A casting show for the dream bride of the year, a bridal show played out against a picture-postcard backdrop in a setting resembling a harem.

For three years now the format has been in the top 20 most popular programmes among young women. Why are young women so enthusiastic about this anachronistic concept? The IZI put this question to 174 fans – 89% of these women – between 12 and 26 years-old.

The Bachelor fans are usually highly educated and they have followed the format for several seasons

The first surprise: a large proportion of the fans are students or they attend the *Gymnasium* (similar to a British grammar school). Most of them watch every episode of the season, and over half of them have been following the format for several years. For the 8 weeks that the programme is on air the format becomes a fixed part of their daily lives. They sometimes watch the programme together with friends, they comment on it intently on Twitter and Facebook, and the next day it is a topic of conversation at uni or in the school playground.

Motives for watching The Bachelor: taking part in the guessing, scrutinising and belittling women

The motive the fans most frequently give for watching the programme is taking part in guessing which candidates will be chosen and seeing whether their guess was right. Above all, fans enjoy the dates and the question of “how far” the women take these. At the same time, the fans have a lot of fun “bitching” about the candidates and the bachelor.

By contrast, watching and learning how to find a partner for life, how to flirt properly or prevail against the competition has very little role to play. In comparison with corresponding format studies on *Germany’s Next Top Model* and *Germany Seeks a Superstar* it is noticeable that *Bachelor* fans can barely imagine how they would have acted in the situation in question, and only a few establish a parasocial relationship with the candidates. Only a minority would like to take part themselves.

	Motives for watching <i>The Bachelor</i> I watch the programme because...
1.	... it's exciting to see which woman the bachelor chooses.
2.	... it's exciting to see “how far” the women take the dates.
3.	... I want to see whether I was right about which woman will go out.
4.	... it's fun bitching about the programme, the candidates and the bachelor.
5.	... I follow my favourite candidate avidly, and I'm upset when she has to go.

The Bachelor fans are usually not naive

By far the majority enjoy the programme from a critical distance with regard to the media. The *Bachelor* fans assume neither that the bachelor is really looking for a woman to spend his life with nor that he will choose the one he really loves. The fans frequently show they are media-literate, and they realistically assume that the candidates use “*the format to launch their careers [...] to get on television and become a C-list celebrity*” (woman, 26). At the same time, there is no fundamental challenge to the programme’s “harem” setting. If any criticism is made, it is that the bachelor goes “too far” with various women. The criticism is made, therefore, at the individual level of the protagonists, but not at format level.

The fascination of The Bachelor: analysing, evaluating and elevating oneself

The fans mainly get pleasure from analysing what happens in detail: thus, the different kinds of women are identified, the way they play the game and behave is studied. The figure of the bachelor is closely scrutinised, and the recurrent paradigm of initiating the relationship and of self-portrayal is identified and evaluated. The fans are very disparaging about the “cat fight” between the candidates. To a certain extent the fans’ condemnation turns out to be, to all intents and purposes, aggressive: “*Predominantly naive girls and apparently mature women who should actually be above this kind of thing*” (woman, 18). There are ways in which the fans distance themselves from female role models. This makes them feel good, elevates them in their analytical competence, and creates certainty in their identity construction and as regards what kind of woman they would not like to be. In this sense the *Bachelor* fans themselves wander into an identity trap. They reject “cat fights”, but they act in a very similar way when they put the candidates down.

Parallel to any analysis and intellectual pleasure in comprehending and putting people down, the fans become intensely and emotionally involved in the dates: “*After all, every woman wants this kind of thing*” (woman, 25). Here, the fans enjoy the appreciation of togetherness and the staging of the first erotic encounter: “Just amazing, and so romantic” (woman, 22). In doing so, they overlook the clichéd staging, which is aesthetically more like a kitschy penny dreadful, adopting it as the ideal for future dates of their own.

The enthusiasm for the format *The Bachelor* is complex and, in most areas, anything but naive. At the same time, images of how a woman should present herself and kitschy clichés of the romantic initiation of relationships are taken for granted and are at no point seriously challenged.

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