

'Bachelorette' viewers aren't seeking reality, researcher says

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Reality television has been a big draw on television for years, but it appears viewers prefer some of these programs to be light in actual reality, says a Penn State researcher.

Dr. Beth Montemurro, assistant professor of sociology, says that on a recent installment of the reality show, "The Bachelorette," in particular, viewers had trouble accepting the fact that the female contestant, Jen Schefft, admitted she hadn't fallen in love and rejected all potential suitors.

"On the message boards I saw after the finale, many fans were upset that she did not want to pursue a relationship because that was their expectation," said Montemurro, who presented her research findings in a paper titled, "Fans, Fantasy, and Failed Romance: The Case of the Unhappy Ending on 'The Bachelorette'" Saturday (Aug. 12) at the American Sociological Association annual conference.

"Certainly, the fact that she went on the show and said that she didn't have chemistry with the suitors was more real than simply faking a happy ending for the show, but viewers felt contempt for her. Fans of the show rejected reality," says the Penn State researcher.

For her research, Montemurro studied several web sites and message boards after the finale to gauge prevailing sentiments. On one site's message board, there were nearly 100 messages that criticized Schefft, 20 that attacked the show and only 15 that supported the bachelorette's

right to reject her suitors. She found this surprising.

"I would have thought more viewers would support her decision, seeing how this was the third season of 'The Bachelorette,' and very few of the couples who 'found love' at the end of the program are still together," she said. "In a sense, people don't watch reality TV for reality, they watch it for the escape and fantasy, much as they watch other shows.

"Viewers of 'The Bachelor' and 'The Bachelorette,' most of whom are women, are encouraged to buy into the idea of romance, that there is one right person for everybody. The media presents images that make this concept seem plausible, and we're conditioned to believe in 'happily ever after,'" the Penn State researcher adds.

While it could be cause for concern in extreme cases, Montemurro thinks the overwhelming majority of viewers are able to make a distinction between what they see in the media and real life, despite the very real anger they derived from a "most unhappy ending" in this latest installment of "The Bachelorette."

Source: Penn State

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