

# MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS OF ROMANCE IN POPULAR CULTURE

An exploration of romance & relationships on reality TV

## INTRODUCTION

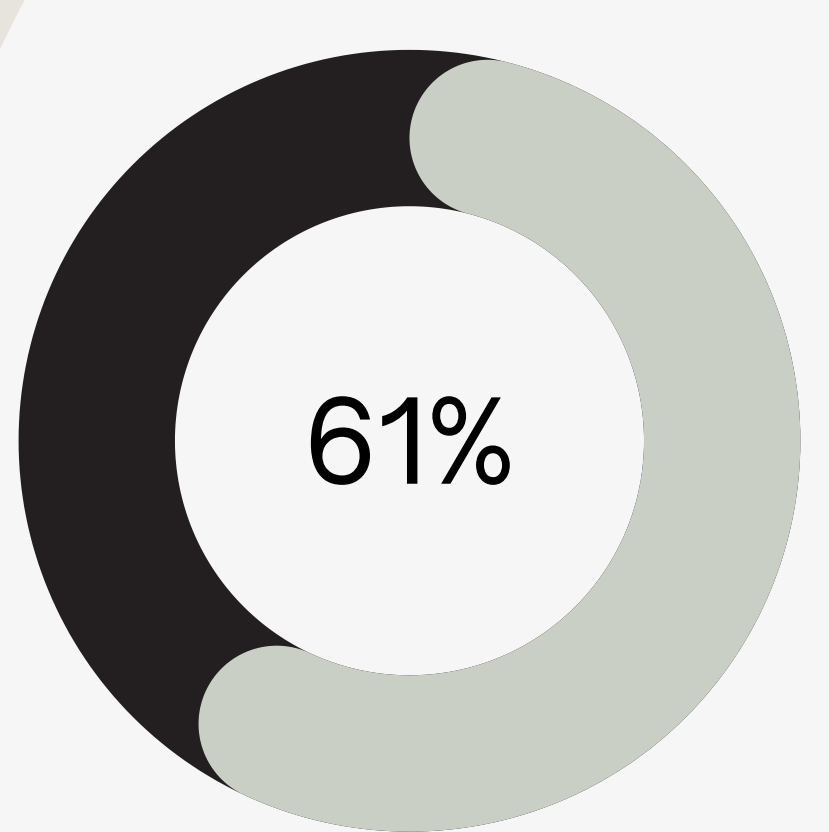
Television audiences consume mediated representations of courtships and relationships in fictional, and often unrealistic, tales of true love. Over the past 25 years, reality dating shows have blurred the line between fact & fiction, creating a new platform for delivering the messages that shape the hearts and minds of viewers across the country.

This study examines portrayals of romance on the longest-running reality dating show in the United States, *The Bachelor*, and its sister program, *The Bachelorette*.

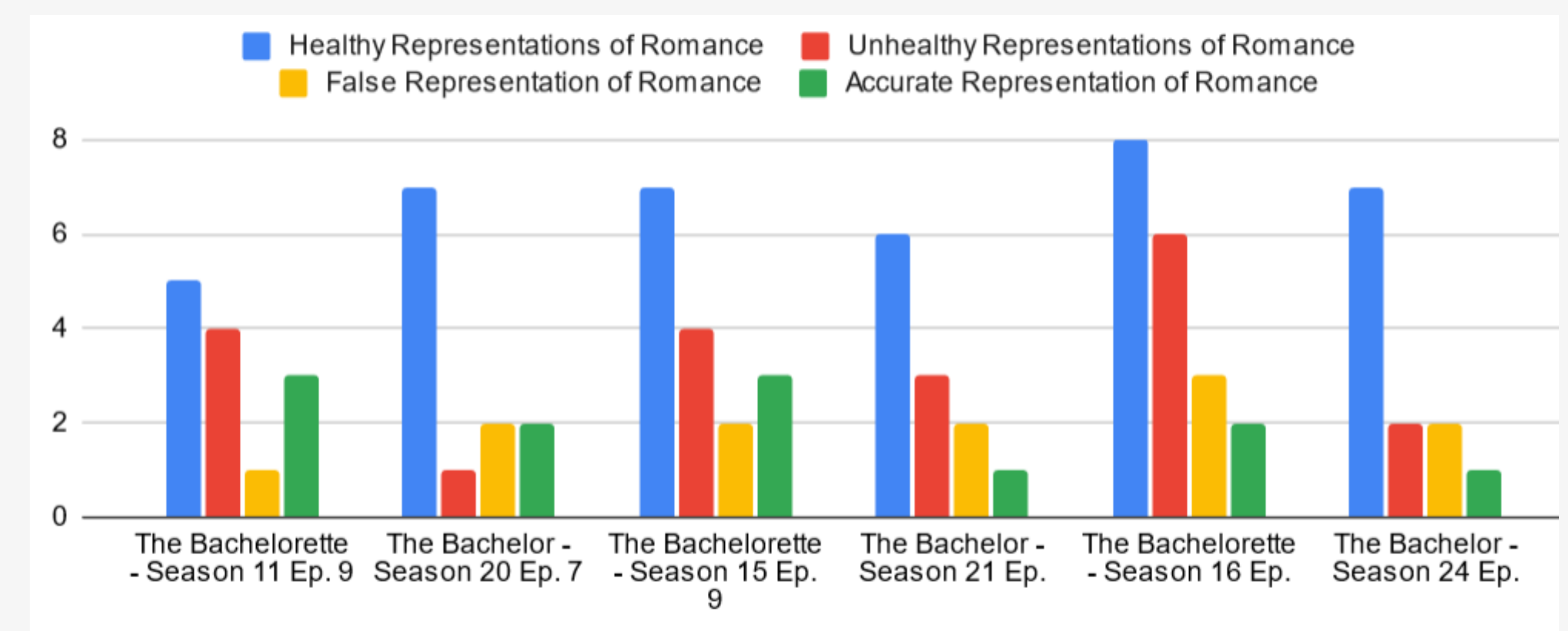
## OBJECTIVE

Media consumption influences beliefs, values, and perceptions of reality, as cultivation theory suggests, so it is important to understand *how* the concept of romance is constructed and received. Our research seeks to determine if representations of romance on reality TV are accurately portrayed to the masses & the effect that these representations may have on viewers.

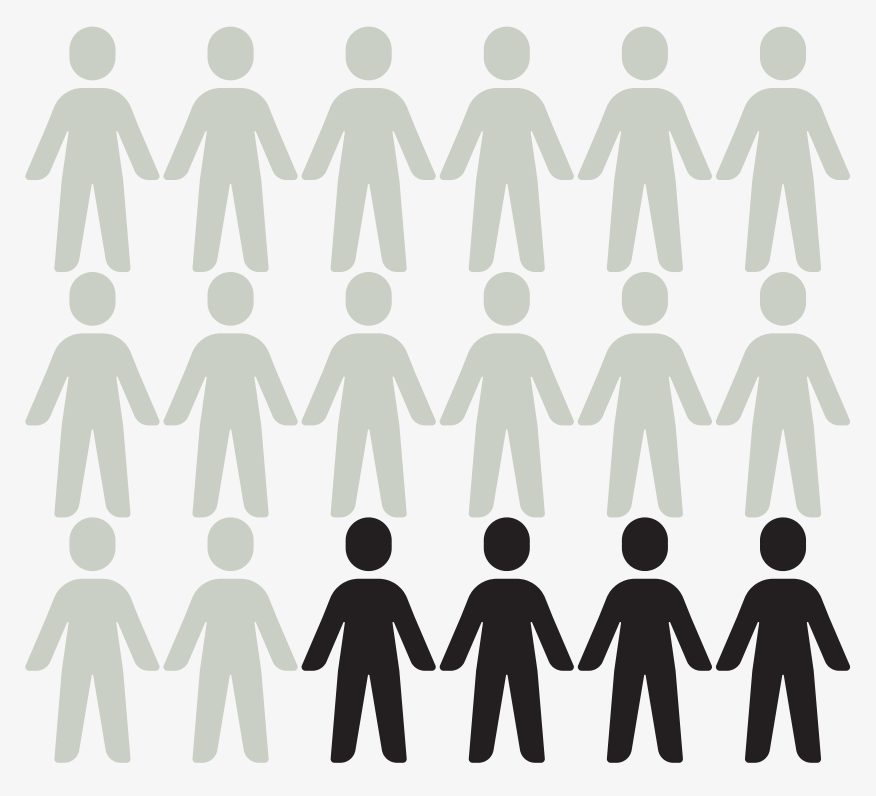
## HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS



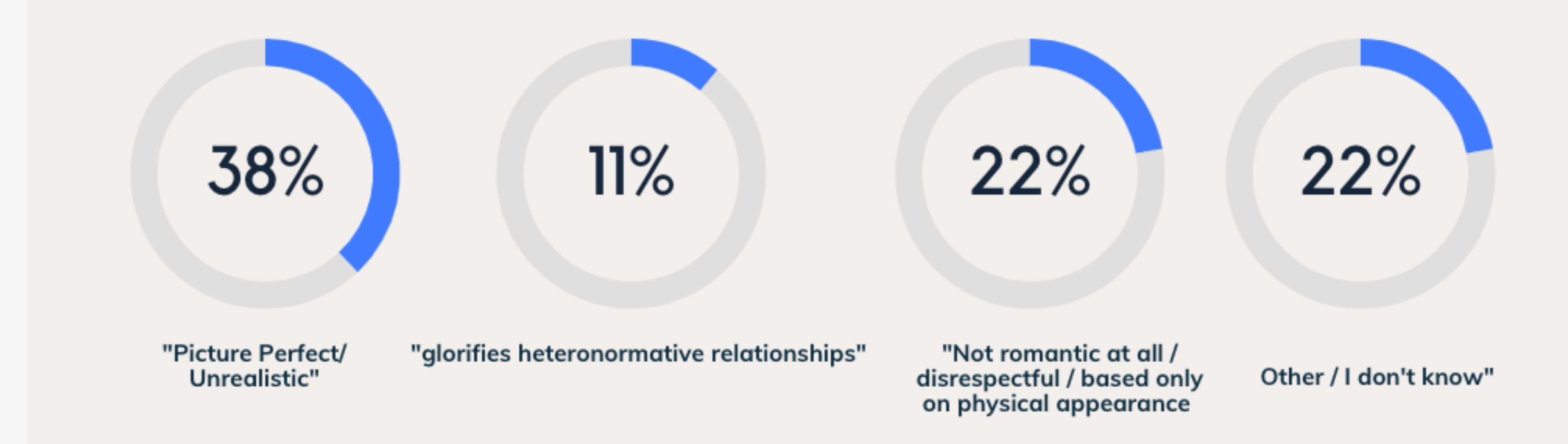
61% of respondents believe *The Bachelor* represents more unhealthy relationship behavior than healthy. 61% also define *healthy relationships* as having "good communication and loyalty."



78% of respondents watch *The Bachelor/Bachelorette*



How does *The Bachelor* represent romance?\*



\*open-ended question

## METHODOLOGY

**Audience Survey:** Open- and closed-ended questions focused on respondents' opinions about reality television and dating shows, whether they deem mediated representations of relationships and romance to be healthy, realistic, etc., and potential effects of media consumption on their own lives and worldview. 18 respondents participated in the survey.

**Content Analysis:** A coding sheet was applied to 6 episodes of *The Bachelor* & *The Bachelorette* to gather quantitative data about the show's portrayals of romance & relationships. Behaviors were ranked and organized into 4 categories: Healthy, Unhealthy, False, Accurate.

## RESULTS

While 61% percent of viewers believe *The Bachelor* to represent unhealthy or unrealistic ideas of romance, most continued watching because they enjoy the drama. 38% said *The Bachelor* perpetuates false representations by illustrating unrealistic versions of picture-perfect romance. 22% said the show puts too much emphasis on physical appearances. Approximately 50% of respondents acknowledge that they might be influenced by what they see on the show.

## CONCLUSION

While a surprising number of viewers seem to believe that reality dating shows do illustrate accurate portrayals of romance, most had a negative view of the mediated representations of relationships on *The Bachelor*. The majority of respondents do not think that their personal consumption of media has a direct effect on their own relationships or their view of romantic ideals. The data collected from the content analysis confirms that negative representations are indeed more prevalent than positives ones.

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