

Chris Harrison Racism Controversy

INTRODUCTION

In 2021 infamous Bachelor host Chris Harrison was accused of racism following an interview with former bachelorette Rachel Lindsay. The interview was in regards to a picture of contestant Rachael Kirkconnell from Matt's season; it was taken in 2018 at an antebellum sorority party that took place on a plantation. Harrison's intentions for the interview was to speak out on behalf of the bachelor brand since Kirkconnell had failed to do so for weeks, which in the end backfired with Harrison himself making questionable remarks in the interview. In response to Lindsay stating the picture being posted in 2018 is not a good look, Harrison said "Well, Rachel is it a good look in 2018? Or, is it not a good look in 2021? Because there's a big difference," there indeed was much hate for that one comment. In his image repair attempt with an interview on *Good Morning America*, Harrison apologized for his actions in hopes of continuing with the brand, which he previously had stepped down from after 19 years. In this essay I will be discussing the actions taken by Chris Harrison following the interview and backlash, while also analyzing his use of mortification and correction action stated in his apology video and instagram post.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Benoit's Theory of Image Discourse offers his ideas on how image repair is done in many different ways, for example in this essay we are focusing on mortification and correction action. Mortification is "the accused may admit the wrongful act and ask for forgiveness..."(Benoit 26) and Correction Action is "the accused vows to fix the problem." (Benoit 26). In 2011 actor Rickey Gervais presented some jokes that lacked good taste while hosting the Golden Globes.

He used denial, minimization, bolstering, good intention, transcendence, and attacking the accuser as well as a lazy attempt to apologize for mortification; his efforts were ineffective.

Another attempt of image repair is Actor Hugh Grant when he was arrested for behavior with a prostitute. Grant appeared on several late night talk shows using mortification, bolstering, and attacking the accusers; his attempt was successful. Finally, Tonya Harding was an olympic figure skater who slashed the leg of her rival Nancy Kerrigan. Harding was unable to compete in the U.S championships but was allowed at Lillhammer. In an interview on *Eye to Eye with Connie Chung* you can see in her image repair attempt that she used bolstering, denial, and attacking accusers; the attempt was ineffective.

ANALYSIS

Chris Harrison's image repair efforts included several interviews and a post on instagram. We will be looking at the first interview with *Good Morning America* Harrison participated in after stepping down from the bachelor. Several controversies were covered and talked over briefly: "I am saddened and shocked at how insensitive I was in that interview with Rachel Lindsay. I can't believe I didn't speak against antebellum parties, what they stand for," said Harrison. "I didn't say it then and I want to say it now: those parties are not OK, past, present, future. And I didn't speak from my heart. And that is to say that I stand against all forms of racism, and I am deeply sorry to Rachel Lindsay and to the Black community." In order to gain respect back it is evident that Harrison needed to address all that was said in the initial interview with Rachel Lindsay, as initially he found little wrong with what he said until he had the realization piled with the backlash. In the *Good Morning America* interview we also hear his correction action, "I sought out leading scholars, teachers, faith leaders, people like Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, who I am so grateful for, and I've also been working closely with a race educator

and strategist. I thank them all," said Harrison. "But Dr. Dyson often talks to me about council. Not cancel, and that is full accountability, understanding what you didn't understand, owning that, learning from that, seeking counsel often in the community that you hurt, learning from them, listening, gaining experience, knowledge and moving forward." One thing that strikes me from this interview is how passionate he is about making this change, though he may just be a good actor, over the screen he portrayed himself as sincere and ready for what he is enduring from his actions.

Harrisons Instagram post:



chrisbharrison

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chrisbharrison

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Hello everyone,

I have spent the last few days listening to the pain my words have caused, and I am deeply remorseful. My ignorance did damage to my friends, colleagues and strangers alike. I have no one to blame but myself for what I said and the way I spoke. I set standards for myself, and have not met them. I feel that with every fiber of my being. Now, just as I taught my children to stand up, and to own their actions, I will do the same.

By excusing historical racism, I defended it. I invoked the term "woke police," which is unacceptable. I am ashamed over how uninformed I was. I was so wrong.

To the Black community, to the BIPOC community: I am so sorry. My words were harmful. I am listening, and I truly apologize for my ignorance and any pain it caused you. I want to give my heartfelt thanks to the people from these communities who I've had enlightening conversations with over the past few days, and I am so grateful to those who have reached out to help me on my path to anti-racism.

This historic season of The Bachelor should not be marred or overshadowed by my mistakes or diminished by my actions. To that end, I have consulted with Warner Bros. and ABC and will be stepping aside for a period of time and will not join for the After the Final Rose special. I am dedicated to getting educated on a more profound and productive level than ever before. I want to ensure our cast and crew members, to my friends, colleagues and our fans: this is not just a moment, but a commitment to much greater understanding that I will actively make every day.

From here I can only try to evolve and be a better man, and I humble myself before all of you. I hope I will again live up to the expectations you all rightfully have for me and the expectations I have for myself.

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EVALUATION

After studying and evaluating Chris Harrison's attempt at image repair I believe it was somewhat effective, but not enough to fully provide Harrison with what he wanted in the end. His mortification was done well, he stated many times how bad he felt and offered several apologies. Pairing the remorse with his corrective action efficiently played its role, having Harrison understand what he did wrong and attempt to learn and do better from his actions gave a sincere and overall meaningful apology. The only comment in regards to Harrison and where he is at today is that I don't believe it is where he wanted to be, after saying in the interview he wanted to continue with the Bachelor franchise and over a year later there is not a word about him and his return. Though maybe time may play a factor for him, overall Harrison's image repair was somewhat of a success.

CONCLUSION

Chris Harrison dug himself into a deep hole in early 2021 for his remarks during his interview with Rachel Lindsay. After stepping forward and apologizing with mortification and corrective action, Harrison has made a good attempt at image repair, though work is still to be done, his apology was sincere and taken well by many. As for the future of Harrison, time may be beneficial for him as it is for many when it comes to events like these but he still has maintained his public image, though his work with the Bachelor franchise has come to an end for him.

Citations

Benoit, W. L. (2014). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies : image repair theory and research*

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