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Performing the Self: Character Agency and Impression Management within the Narrative of Survivor: Samoa

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Abstract

This study used an in-depth textual analysis of the television show *Survivor: Samoa* to demonstrate that the unscripted characters of the program and shows like it have agency within the narrative. In addition to the 19th season of the *Survivor* series, the sample also included Jeff Probst's (host and executive producer of the series) weekly blog for *EntertainmentWeekly.com*. Unlike most popular television narratives, the unscripted characters of *Survivor: Samoa* have the opportunity to tell their own story. This doctoral project was an in-depth analysis at how that authorial power was shared between the Producers of the show and the individual characters. The results of indicate there are three types of narrative agents that contributed to the storytelling process: the producers, the characters, and then a unique mix of the two. The result is a new perspective within the academic literature on *Survivor* and reality television shows like it. The *self*-performing characters are the product of our societal fascination with fame, self-promotion and hyperbolic impression management.

PERFORMING THE SELF:
CHARACTER AGENCY AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE
NARRATIVE OF *SURVIVOR: SAMOA*

By

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DISSERTATION

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communications
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In the last 15 years reality television has dominated prime-time schedules and there is no evidence to suggest the genre is losing any momentum. According to Barnhart (2010), 40% of all current television programs are reality TV. Many of the most successful of these – *Survivor*, *The Bachelor, and The Apprentice* –involve participants who perform their roles within the show's narrative without scripts. This brings something new to the history of narrative on prime time television. In these kinds of reality shows, which can be traced back to 1992's *The Real World*, the participants have a significant amount of input into their portrayal. These participants are not able to control their narrative destinies, but they do make important authorial contributions. While many alumni of *The Real World* complained that editing and other aspects of production were to blame for their less than complimentary portrayals, they still enjoyed a significantly greater degree of dramaturgical agency than characters in a sitcom or scripted drama. Although they give up some control by not providing a script, producers and editors still have the final say in what we will eventually see on television. They must cleverly sculpt stories from a massive amount of predominantly monotonous raw footage of the characters enacting their roles.

Documentary films also allow for their subjects to determine the nature of the story. Despite this similarity, the processes and results are drastically different. The documentary filmmaker chooses its subject and reveals him/her/them, as he/she/they exist in his/her/their natural world. Whereas the reality television producer places a carefully selected, but otherwise unconnected, group into a contrived situation where the participants must meaningfully engage with each other. Subjects of documentary film are

typically maintained as artifacts of their natural surroundings. Therefore, the subject (or participant) in this type of reality television, while very much a living, breathing, agent of choice, is now being placed within a narrative structure that itself has been constructed much like fiction.

Reality television can present a fictive world populated by actual people who have the opportunity to perform and develop their own idea of their "character." The purpose of this study is to understand how a "character's" authorial power unfolds in the unique context of a reality television narrative, namely, *Survivor: Samoa*.

Reality television

Often, it is unclear what is meant by the seemingly catchall term reality television. The definition in its vernacular usage includes everything from old-fashioned game shows, to talent competitions, to documentaries featuring celebrities. Journalists and executives have attempted a definition of reality television for decades, all of which typically include the previously mentioned wide-ranging generic formats. Scholars have been struggling to define the mega-genre (Marc & Thompson, 2005) since at least as far back as 1994 (Kilborn, 1994). However, the vague elements we come to know as reality television have been employed in so many different combinations that any attempt at an all-inclusive definition hardly seems necessary.

For the purpose of this study, I'm interested not in the entirety of the reality television mega-genre, but a certain type of reality television that places non-scripted individuals in a fictive situation for the purposes of storytelling. Some notable examples of this type of reality television show are *The Real World*, *Big Brother*, *The Bachelor*, and *The Apprentice*. Perhaps the most relevant of all these is *Survivor*. Therefore, I will

use season 19 of the franchise, *Survivor: Samoa,* to investigate how these participants perform within this fictive world; specifically how their authorial power is manifest within the context of this type of reality television show.

I chose *Survivor* not only for of its longevity and success, but also because I have been a regular and enthusiastic viewer since season 8 (2003). Prior to its debut in 2000 there was nothing like *Survivor* on network television. So, for most Americans this was their first taste of a genre that would dominate the prime time schedules for years to come.

As of this writing, *Survivor* completed its 22nd season, is contracted for seasons 23 and 24, and is in its 11th year on the air in the United States. It is also currently produced in 9 other countries: Belgium/Netherlands, Brazil, Denmark, Israel, Norway, Philippines, Serbia, South Africa, and Sweden – and while no longer in production, *Survivor* shows also once played in: Australia, Bulgaria, Colombia, Czech Republic, Estonia/Latvia/Lithuania, Georgia, Japan, Russia and United Kingdom. *Survivor*'s translation into other cultures and long run in the US marks its importance not just as a profitable enterprise, but a cultural phenomenon. While earlier installments of the series garnered higher Nielsen ratings, every single season of *Survivor* has landed in the Nielsen top 15 (Nielsen TV Ratings, 2011). The remarkably large number of fan sites, blogs, and twitter feeds reveals that the show has adapted well to the new media environment as well.

Survivor is an hour-long show that airs on CBS and averages 13-15 episodes[1] per season. Depending on the season, the cast consists of 16-20 Americans (Denhart, 2011) who compete in the 39-days-long game to win $1 million. Placed into two teams, referred to on the show as tribes, they battle each other through a series of reward and immunity challenges. Participants must survive the extreme living conditions and each other in order to not be voted out by their tribemates. Each episode spans three days and includes competitive challenges[2], interactions between tribe members at their respective camps, and always ends with a ritual known as "tribal council." At Tribal Council the losing tribe from the challenge must vote one member of their tribe out of the game. This basic format has remained relatively constant since the series began. The other constant is the host, Jeff Probst, who moderates the tribal council and officiates the challenges. His presence in the game is felt through his colorful commentary and apt observations. With the exception of Probst's role as host, all the other participants in this fabricated situation do not have a script. Therefore, the show allows for them to influence the narrative and their own portrayals each week by the mere act of being present.

The cast

The dominant narrative thread of every season is the one-by-one elimination of cast members that inevitably leads to the final tribal council in which only one person can win. In order for the viewer to care about who is voted out, the cast must be portrayed in

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[1] The number of episodes depends on the number of cast members. More recently, due to participants either quitting the show or being medically evacuated, the producers decided to pad the cast with up to 2 extra people.

[2] Typically there are two challenges, both with prizes to be won: the reward challenges result in some kind of luxury good or food to make life at camp more tolerable; the immunity challenges grant the winning tribe, or participant, safety at tribal council.

a way to maximize drama and audience interest. However, some casts achieve this better than others. Dalton Ross (2009), a television critic for *Entertainment Weekly*, a magazine that regularly reports on *Survivor,* recently ranked 19 seasons of the series from best to worst. In his justifications for each season's ranking, Ross mentioned the cast in 14 of them.[3]

The audience's interest in a cast is rooted in the power of the producer to make good choices in both participant selection and tribe assignment. The risks of an ill-fit cast include unexpected violence and indecent drama, or dullness and apathy. To avoid these opposing pitfalls, the casting process is a type of science marked by employing both psychologists and background checks to produce the best cast possible (Carr, 2004). The precision of selecting individuals is well understood by audiences and cast members alike. As such, participants on reality television shows understand that they were cast to fit within a certain type. Therefore, in addition to trying to win the $1 million prize, the character must negotiate their role and make it their own.

Sometimes, as *New York Times* writer, Edward Wyatt (2009) pointed out, producers instigate and interfere in the emotional states of reality television casts by imposing strict rules and aggressive production schedules. Mark Andrejevic, a reality television expert, is quoted in Wyatt's article: "The bread and butter of reality television is to get people into a state where they are tired, stressed and emotionally vulnerable"

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[3] However, after I compared his favorite seasons with their corresponding Nielsen ratings (Nielsen TV Ratings, 2011), Ross's favorites were not the highest rated and vice versa, in fact there appeared to be no pattern to suggest any relationship. Regardless of critical rankings, Nielsen ratings and other quantitative assessments, the casting process for *Survivor* is important.

(Wyatt, 2009). The main assumption here is that vulnerability translates into audience engagement with the cast member and therefore increased viewership, which means higher ratings. In *Survivor* the combination of the strategic game play and the severe living conditions can affect mental competency. As a result, conflicts are inevitable.

Individualism and performing characters

The unique aspect of a *Survivor* cast member (and most others on reality television shows of this ilk) is that he or she transforms into a character in a complex narrative. Artificial setting, purposeful casting and pre-determined rules for the game of *Survivor* place these willing participants into a world more likened to fiction; all aspects of the show are contrived with the exception of what the cast says and does[4]. Therefore, it is more apt to use the term character than participant; these individuals exist in a quasi-fictive world where they exercise authorial power due to their agency within the narrative. Unlike the "subject" of a documentary film, who operates in an indigenous environment, a character on *Survivor* is the only element of the fictive world the producers have not created. A participant brings to *Survivor* an idea of the role that he or she perceives to be the one they were cast to fulfill. In most cases this compliments the sense they have of their identity. In essence the cast, as a deliberate but heretofore unrelated selection of individuals, is constantly in a state of defining and emphasizing the self. So, in order to understand reality television shows like *Survivor* we have to recognize how participants have authorial power. In order to do that we have to explore

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[4] There is a certain amount of restraint on what the cast members can do while on *Survivor*. However, similar restraints exist in their everyday lives that can impose a pre-determined set of choices. Therefore, the choices they make within the show are part of the roles they perform.

how people perceive and manage their own identities to ones self and the group.

According to social identity theory, we define ourselves based on group membership and our role(s) within that group (Hogg, 2006). The unique ways we present our identity for consumption of others is at the heart of impression management. Impression management, as Goffman defines it, is the result of being other-directed (Riesman, 2001); we look to others to understand our self-worth. In order to account for diverse audiences we are constantly changing our performances and sometimes even taking on new identities, both of which lead to realizing the types of social roles we play (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, depending on our perceived audience we present a range of identities for the best possible outcome (Goffman, 1959). Performing an identity is a complex process of self-comparison, role-playing, and fulfilling desires. Identity, for the purpose of this project, is our aggregate membership of our perceived social roles. Based on our identity we have notions of correct and proper behaviors; we have rough estimates of how others will regard us and we act accordingly. We are all members a society set out on a quest to understand and define our unique, individual selves and to discover our identity.

Like the process that occurs in our everyday lives, reality television editors and producers are managing identities to audiences, but also have the luxury of using filmic tropes. Characters on reality shows materialize from raw footage; the use of clever montage editing, creative casting and drama-inducing situations are compiled to create a succinct and compelling story. The editors have many different ways they can manipulate the material, but in the end all they have to work with is what each character actually said and did.

However, since these acts and words are unscripted, the editors must rely heavily on who is cast in order to get the desired effect – a narrative filled with conflict, drama and suspense. Although the producers may be assembling a cast in terms of recognizable types of the kind Propp (1968) identifies. The characters as actual human beings are not necessarily going to behave according to this schema. As Kavka (2008) argues the representation of reality television characters does not place them neatly into one of Propp's[5] (1968) characterizations, instead it treats each as an individual.

> [Reality television] works by representing the particularity of individuals for its own sake; on reality television, the public is represented by accretion, individual by individual, in a paratactic series that offers to answer the question (if only we had world enough and time), who are the people in your neighbourhood? The participants on reality TV thus become subjects of publicity *without* losing the particularities that mark them as individuals; the viewers in turn become subjects of publicity when they engage, via their intimacy with such particularities, with these private people in the public gaze (Kavka, 2008, p. 61-62).

Kavka's claim supports the concept of authorial characters in a non-scripted drama as it occurs within *Survivor* and other reality shows like it. Therefore, characters exercise agency within the narrative and create their on-air identities through their actions, behaviors and words.

According to Barker and Galisinski (2003), "agency is the socially constructed capacity to act" (p. 46). They explain that agency cannot exist free from social determinants, but the fact that we still have choice, is the essence of agency; we can decide to do one thing instead of another. The choices, decisions and language we use are based on cultural and biological forces, but yet, "agency is a culturally intelligible way of understanding ourselves and we clearly have the existential experience of facing and

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[5] Vladimir Propp's (1968) characterizations are a staple in narrative scholarship. His typology of characters was based on Russian folk tales. They are an excellent point of origin for any endeavor in character analysis.

making choices" (Barker & Galisinski, 2003, p. 46). Agency is therefore something contingent upon an individual's ability to act within the social and cultural constructs of their situation; it is not pre-determined because we are typically not aware of a conscious imposition from these outside forces. Agency is the ability to make decisions and wield a semblance of power within the scope of the actor's existence.

The question of agency and the character's ability to take control of a narrative is reflective of contemporary culture in which the *self* is primary. Our emphasis on the individual over the community is something reflected in the motto of the *Survivor* series: "Outwit, outplay, outlast." Contestants *outwit* their tribemates by manipulative, cunning and preferably unnoticeable deceptions. Those that *outplay* are ruthless and break trusts while maintaining strategies that allow for them to *outlast* the rest of their tribemates. This agenda is deemed a natural philosophical outlook on the game of *Survivor*. The motto offers the secret to winning the game and demonstrates the objective each contestant must adopt on *Survivor*; if they don't, they will be voted out of their tribe. While not specifically in reaction to reality television, American cultural critics like Lippmann (2003) claim that Americans no longer have a common collective goal as a society, but instead we are interested in individual pursuits.

Turner (2006) reminds us of this agenda in that "much of the participation in reality TV is aimed at a certain kind of recognition of the self" (p. 154). Hence, the mediated self for many is one of constant pursuit. As a products of our individualist culture we long to see ourselves as part of history in some way, whether it be through publishing written work, being interviewed for the local news, spearheading a humanitarian effort or to be part of the "biggest blindside in *Survivor* history" (Burnett,

2009). Regardless of the medium, American culture has become preoccupied with

branding the self and being unique.

Overview

       This study is about understanding the authorial power of the character. Rooted in

the act of character performance and the authorial power that affords the individual, the

present study aims to dissect and actualize this unique narrative contribution as it pertains

to *Survivor: Samoa*. Due to the multi-faceted nature of *Survivo*r's location within the

greater cultural landscape as both a television show and a reflection of our individual-

centric culture, a review of extant literature will be divided into two parts. In chapter 2, I

position reality television and *Survivor: Samoa* in their historical contexts. Chapter 3 then

addresses the development of our *self*-consumed society and how this "culture of

narcissism" (Lasch, 1979) begat our current obsession with the *sincere* and the *authentic*

(Trilling, 1971). In this chapter I demonstrate how these concepts and their evolution in

the 20th century are reflected in reality programming. For example, it is important to

define sincerity and authenticity within the context of mass culture in order to understand

Survivor's popularity.

       Then, chapter 4 explores narrative and identification and how these two

theoretical constructs contribute to my research questions. Chapter 5 details my

empirical approach to textual analysis, specifically outlining the sample, the procedure

and my role as a researcher in studying *Survivor: Samoa* as a text. Chapters 6, 7, and 8

explore the themes that emerged as the result of my textual analysis and offer evidence

for a multi-authorial narrative paradigm present in *Survivor: Samoa*. Finally, chapter 10

summarizes the project using a new model of narrative agency found within *Survivor:*

Samoa, and I offer some concluding thoughts pertaining to my findings and the

contributions it makes to the extant literature on reality television.

CHAPTER 2: Reality Television: History, Research and Theories

Reality television is hard to define. Principally, this catchall term cannot possibly encompass the diverse offerings on television that make claims to being reality television. For example, talent competitions (*American Idol*, *So You Think You Can Dance?*, *America's Next Top Model*), celebrity series (i.e., *Keeping up with the Kardashians*, *Celebrity Rehab*, *The Simple Life*), makeover shows (*Extreme Home Makeover*, *The Biggest Loser*, *What Not to Wear*), and elimination/game shows (i.e. *The Apprentice*, *Survivor*, *The Amazing Race*) all are defined as reality television. The list could go on and on because there is a plethora of sub-types, yet no definitive definition. In what follows, I explore how scholars define reality television and why doing so has been problematic. Additionally, I excavate the history of reality television as it emerged from several forms including documentary film, televised documentary and game shows. This historical perspective serves as an introduction to the academic literature in the area of reality television.

Defining reality television

> The category of 'reality TV' has been stretched that far as to restrain its own analytic usefulness and any author critically writing about the changing factual television landscape has to cope with the difficult task of somehow defining or delineating the subject under study (Mast, 2008, p. 2).

As Mast states, the definition of reality television is difficult to summarize in a few pithy phrases. Most relevant to this conundrum is the term itself; *reality* television is a misnomer and an oxymoron. Stating that anything on television is real is burdened with demonstrating a pure objective truth, of which there is none. The burden of the *reality* of reality television lures many to focus on negating and questioning the *real* of reality television; few can get beyond these nuisances to understand what this phenomenon is

and how it can be defined. Legendary reality television producer (and executive producer of *Survivor*), Mark Burnett, stated years ago that what he does is "dramality." More recently he termed his particular type of programming "unscripted drama," not *reality* television (Young, 2009). Therefore, any attempt to define reality television must deal with the difficult task of mitigating the term *reality*.

As Marc and Thompson (2005) state, despite the desire to qualify reality television as a *genre* it might be more appropriate to consider it as "a mere program type. Reality TV is perhaps better understood as a media-age equal partner to those two long-running Aristotelian mega-genres, comedy and tragedy" (p.41). Therefore, this project will treat reality television not as a genre, but as *mega-genre*, one that requires clarification, qualification and subgenres to understand its import and scope. I, like the many other reality television researchers before me, (Kilborn, 1994; 1996; 2003, Hall, 2006; and others) begin the discussion of reality television lamenting the lack of succinct defining elements. Each author ultimately claims there are elements that define this mega-genre, even if they cannot agree on the specifics. In 1994, only two years after the premiere of *The Real World* and six years before *Survivor*'s debut, Kilborn (1994) offers us the most succinct definition of reality programming. His explanation is one that we can build on to account for reality television's more modern nuances and iterations. According to Kilborn (1994) reality television is a "catch-all phrase" (p. 423) with three fundamental elements that he describes as:

> …[A] the recording 'on the wing,' and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals or groups, (b) the attempt to simulate real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction and (c) the incorporation of this material, in suitably edited form, into an attractively packaged television programme which can be promoted on the strength of its 'reality' credentials. (Kilborn, 1994, p. 423)

Of primary interest in this definition is both the similarity to documentary film attributes and the fact that it holds up despite how much reality television has changed in the last 17 years. For example, most of the programs that Kilborn was referring to were reenactment programs such as *Unsolved Mysteries* and crime dramas such as *Cops*. Yet, despite how different these programs are from what is deemed popular reality programming in 2011, his outline of definitive qualities remain constant.

The first element of his definition – equipment – is essential to reality programming. The use of lightweight equipment is necessary to capturing the "fly on the wall" observation aesthetic of cinema verité. Using latest advances in video equipment has become increasingly important for many reality television programs mostly in an effort to keep up with other types of entertainment programming[6]. Also, the perspective places the audience within the narrative as though they too are experiencing the action as it happens.

I expand Kilborn's use of the term equipment to include technology in general. Interactivity and online communities supplement a plethora of television programming, yet reality television uses these features very effectively. For example, *Big Brother* (BB) viewers can watch 24/7 feeds of the houseguests, with the promise of not missing a single moment. Also, *BB* viewers can vote on who will receive special powers (like the "coup d'état" in season 11) or what types of food certain houseguests may eat for the week. This level of interactivity is unique to *Big Brother* and while it has not been successfully

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[6] For example, season 17 of *Survivor* was the first of the series to be shot entirely in HD making it one of the few network reality television shows to do so. Using high definition cameras emphasizes the filmic beauty and exotic locations key to the *Survivor* aesthetic.

extended to all reality shows, there are other ways in which networks attempt to get their viewers involved with the programs. Bravo and its parent network, NBC use mobile media much the way Fox does for *American Idol*, allowing the audience to vote for their favorite contestants via text message.

The second element of Kilborn's definition – the dramatization of real-life events – is perhaps the most contentious because of the misnomer *reality* television. As early as 1994 (in the case of reality television with Kilborn's article) and 1928 (in the case of documentary film, referring to Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*) the *real* has been a point of much debate. Detailing what is real and what is not real is futile. Consistently used in all forms of reality television, the use of non-actors placed in contrived situations is what gives the feeling of "realness." Further, the drama and appeal of watching actual people develops through the interaction of these participants. This element is perhaps the most unexplored aspect of reality television, hence my treatment of this unique narrative device in this project.

The third element of Kilborn's (1994) definition is the packaging of reality television. Essentially, no matter what else is included or not within the aesthetic or narrative structure, networks and producers make conscious decisions to market and brand a program as *reality television*. *American Idol* (Fox), *A Makeover Story* (TLC), *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (E!), and *Survivor* (CBS) despite all being drastically different types of content are all categorized under the mega-genre, reality television. Packaging a product is essential to its worth in the marketplace. When *Survivor* promos began in the summer of 2009, claims of villainy, strategy and danger filled the ad space promising the "worst villain yet!" (Burnett, 2009a).

While Kilborn (1994) offers a great place to start on the road to definition (Roth, 2003), it is helpful to note some of the things that are intrinsic to this mega-genre identified by other scholars. For example, Ouellette and Murray (2004) argue, "one of the most compelling aspects of reality television is the extent to which its use of real people or non-actors contributes to the diversification of television culture" (p.8). Ouellette and Murray (2004) go on to state that reality television programming:

> [P]romises to provide non-scripted access to "real" people in ordinary and extraordinary situations. This access to the real is presented in the name of dramatic uncertainty, voyeurism, and popular pleasure, and it is for this reason that reality TV is unlike news, documentaries, and other sanctioned formats whose truth claims are explicitly tied to the residual goals and understandings of the classic public service tradition (p. 2-3).

The aspect of choosing regular Americans seemingly presents us with a diversification on screen (based on ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other demographic components) that is non-existent in other television formats. For example, representation of various minority groups has increased as a result of reality programming (Kim, 2004). In season 13 of *Survivor* (Fall 2006) the cast was placed in tribes based on by ethnicity making the increase in minority representation the main event. The types of representation and whether or not they reinforce stereotypes is up for much debate.

Another defining aspect agreed upon in the scholarship is that the emotions of the characters are authentic (Hall, 2006), as I discuss at length in chapter 3. Smith and Wood (2003) state plainly that reality television programs share the same basic plot: "introduce a diverse group of people, put them into situations bound to induce conflict, and watch them squirm" (p. 1). According to Aslama and Pantti (2006) sharing emotions is part of the draw of reality television. Their claim is that reality television, a product of a

confessional and therapeutic culture, is rooted in the idea of sharing real emotions and feelings. In their framework of reality programming, Aslama and Pantti (2006) see reality programming as perpetuating Hochschild's (2003) managed emotions; a tendency in our age of consumerism to be in control of our feelings to the extent that they become commodity. Andrejevic (2002) echoes this idea in his understating of reality TV as a "form of entertainment and self expression" (p.251).

Based on these agreed upon concepts as well as those of Kilborn's initial definition, I propose a modified definition of reality television here: reality television is a mega-genre of programming in which the non-actor participants take part in shaping the narrative. In addition, these participants' responses to contrived situations are caught on tape and edited for dramatic effect. Shows like *American Idol* (talent competitions) and *Extreme Home Makeover* (makeover shows), among others, are not part of this definition. These types of programs do not have the same ingredients nor the same primary motivation as shows like *Survivor*. Instead these other types of so-called reality television are over-produced and manufactured. Much like other popular television, these programs follow a strict and predictable set of criteria. The suspense and narrative interest lies within these stringent parameters. For example, a brilliant performance by Adam Lambert drives viewership on *American Idol*. However, he would not and could not to touch the formal structure of the show, meaning he could not take control and ask America to vote for one of the judges. Whereas on *Survivor*, turning on Host Jeff Probst is cause for intrigue and excitement; the characters build the narrative structure to a greater extent. How they do that is the basis of my project.

Reality television history

The reason that reality television is so difficult to define is that its roots are numerous and varied. Reality programming can be part game show, part soap opera, part documentary, and part news event. In this historical treatment, I explore reality programming as it relates to the intersection of television history and documentary film. Technological advances and cultural attitude shifts also contribute to the foundation of reality programming as a mega-genre. In short our fascination with watching others is not a new phenomenon introduced by reality television. The contemporary burst of reality television programming is a product of a long progression of exploiting non-actors for the purpose of entertainment. The craft of eliciting narrative pleasures on film is over 100 years in the making.

The baseline assumption of reality television development is that there is a market for *the real* (Rose & Wood, 2005). In a post-modern world absent of an objective truth, and an ephemeral notion of *real*, we are systematically searching for technological advances that will capture a "more accurate" version of reality, even if it is someone else's (Rose & Wood, 2005). The desire to capture daily activities through a medium dates far back into art history and portraiture. Yet, the direct link to reality television can be found with the advent of photography and subsequently the Lumiéré brothers' use of their motion picture camera.

To say that reality television and documentary film are intertwined would be an understatement; they are cousins of the same paternal lineage. Barnouw's (1993) introduction to documentary film includes points of interest congruent with reality television's history – hence they're cousins, coexisting through the generations. One

brother married a social advocate/scholar while the other married a Hollywood starlet.

The primary differences are ones of pedigree and social desirability. In his historical

treatment, Barnouw (1993) outlines 12 eras of documentary film claiming the perspective

of the filmmaker as: explorer, reporter, painter, advocate, bugler, prosecutor, poet,

chronicler, promoter, observer, catalyst, and guerrilla. He admits it simplifies things, and

it is by no means a set of distinct eras with precise beginning and end points. In fact,

many of the eras bleed into each other, but overall, Barnouw (1993) offers an effective

way at looking at the history of documentary film.

All of these eras began with one origin: Lumiére's *Workers Leaving the Factory*.

In that film, Louis Lumiéré filmed people participating in banal activity, caught on film.

Early accounts of their exhibitions left people terrified and awed at the sight of people

moving on a 2-D surface (Barnouw, 1993). As the technology advanced so did the desire

for realness[7]; it was no longer interesting to watch people file out of a factory, now we

were anxious to see them in the strangest of circumstances to see their emotional

reactions (Funt, 1994).

Manipulating the camera and hence the audience member's view of reality

quickly followed. As the technology became more readily available filmmakers began to

experiment with the medium by taking the camera to remote locales documenting exotic

scenery and events. The general public saw, for the first time, far off lands and peoples in

a way still photography could not capture. Robert Flaherty's 1922 film *Nanook of the*

North was such a film. His successful documentary work on a primitive Inuit tribe came

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[7] Consider CGI advancements in film: many films today spend most of their budgets
making even the most fantastical look realistic.

under scrutiny and questions about the realness of his subjects; a critique that persists in today's evaluation of reality television.

Catching people doing things in everyday life (Kilborn, 1994) was the original concept for reality television, one that we have diverted from in the last 10 years. This idea originated, like many television programs, on the radio with Allen Funt's *Candid Microphone*. In his autobiography, Funt (1994) recounts his work in the Signal Corps during World War II, specifically the production of the *The Gripe Booth*. This radio program allowed GI's to vent their frustrations, but proved unsuccessful because as soon as the red light indicated recording was in progress, the subjects froze and no longer wanted to speak. In what would become his trademark style, Funt disconnected the red light and caught their aggravations candidly. Later this would spawn *Candid Microphone*, a successful radio program that recorded people unaware that they were the punch line to the joke. The program, picked up by ABC, premiered in September 1947 and lasted until 1950 and was translated into *Candid Camera* for television in 1948 (Clissold, 2004). While originally conceived as a type of social experiment, *Candid Camera* tapped into the awe and fascination that Lumiéré found with his French audience in 1895 – people loved seeing themselves (or people like them) moving on screen (Barnouw, 1993). In the 21st century we have not evolved much in that regard.

Despite their similar lineage, why is the phrase "documentary film" said with such reverence and "reality television" with malaise? The difference exists on two levels: distribution and content. First, documentary films are often in limited release at art house movie theaters, previewed at film festivals, or exclusively available on PBS. Television documentaries tend to hold onto this tone of prestige. However, in the world of

television, some programs are seemed more worthy than others depending on what

channel they air. For example, a documentary on the History Channel is likely to be taken

more seriously than one on the E! Network. But more important to my discussion here is

the question of content.

On this second level of difference, the content and portrayals of the non-fiction

subjects varies greatly. Reality television is created for solely for entertainment purposes

without concern for any educational value; its predominantly game-show format is

evidence of that. Reality television glorifies the deviance of its characters and promotes

the programs based on their behavior. This is so common that casting has become an art:

selecting people in such a way that will guarantee drama and hopefully some mayhem

(Carr, 2004; Baker, 2003). Documentary film, on the other hand, tends to deliver content

that has some social utility (Aufderheide, 2007). Whether an educational nature film, a

historical treatise, or one of advocacy exposing the plight of an unheard population,

documentary film is typically thought of as possessing a greater goal besides

entertainment (Barnouw, 1993; Aufderheide, 2007).

Despite these differences, which are embedded in our cultural understanding of

reality television and documentary film, there are far more similarities between the two

than just their historical origins. The types of people on reality television are motivated

by fame. Its producers have a vested interest in finding a star to reincorporate back into

the celebrity culture to gain status and recognition within the media (Turner, 2006).

Documentary film subjects tend to be selected for their story, just like their reality

television counterparts. Most often they are manipulated by the camera/filmmaker/editing

for the purposes of telling a coherent and interesting story. Dramatic, suspenseful and

deviant events are always included to further the narrative in both arenas. Perhaps most importantly, reality television and documentary film both purports a form of truth and the *real*, which is impossible to obtain because each episode or film is created, based on a particular agenda and perspective.

If people would take a closer look, they would realize that reality television and documentary film are not very different. Yet, differences exist that set them apart on the scale of 'respectability,' primarily because of their content. While many documentary films continue to profile more serious subjects of societal import, reality television imposes contrived situations on non-actors, to entice viewers to watch what they will do (Smith & Wood, 2003). Where reality television glorifies the crude and the ill behaviors of its participants, documentary films tend to use its subjects to promote the agenda and perspective of those who make them.

Running parallel to this history of documentary film is the emergence of television from radio, as evidenced by Funt's *Candid Camera*. Like many television genres, the roots of reality programming can be found in radio. Other radio shows at the time featured real people such as *Queen for a Day* (1945 – 1957) and *The Original Amateur Hour* (1934 – 1946), both of which had a long life on the small screen. The transition of programming from radio to television was commonplace at the time, yet the popularity and endurance of *Candid Camera*, the television version of *Candid Microphone,* was remarkable. The show lasted 19 years in its original run (1948-1967) and came back with anniversary specials and new seasons several times, the most recent of which occurred on the PAX network from 2001-2004. Toward the end of the show's

original run, came an era of cultural change that would help catapult the era of self into a

new dimension and would be paramount to current reality television programming.

After the "age of conformity" in the 1950s and early 60s a new era of "cool" and

irony dawned in the advertising industry (Frank, 1998).

> The central theme that gives coherence to the American advertising of both the early and late sixties is this: Consumer culture is a gigantic fraud. It demands that you act like everyone else, that you restrain yourself, that you fit in with the crowd, when you are in fact an individual (Frank, 1998, p. 136).

The phenomenon of the now self-conscious conformity that took place in the early part of

the 20th century spawned a series of behavioral experiments and psychological inquiry.

The results of these studies would later influence the creators of popular reality television

programs, (*The Real World* and *Survivor* to name a few) underpinning their shows with

situationist, social Darwinism. As McCarthy (2004) put it: "reality TV served as a place

where popular culture and social science overlapped via a realist ideal in which social

norms, mechanisms of conformity, ritualized scripts, and modes of interaction were put

on display" (p.22). The concern of conformity coupled with the heightened fear of

surveillance allowed for shows like *Candid Camera* to be successful (Clissold, 2004).

The Cold War era ushered in the new cultural curiosity of big brother and conspiracy-

type theories about the scope of interest in the lives of common citizens.

Stanley Milgram's *Obedience* and the Stanford Prisoner Experiment are two

examples of how social science research influenced reality television creators with a new

and entertaining way to present the intricacies of human nature. Both Charlie Parsons

(creator of *Survivor*) and Mary Ellis-Bunim (co-creator of *The Real World*) both cited the

infamous Stanford Prison Project as inspirations for their situationist reality television

concepts (Brenton & Cohen, 2003).

In the summer of 1971 Dr. Philip Zimbardo conducted "The Stanford Prison Experiment," a psychology role-playing experiment gone awry. The experiment was developed to explore the way in which people adapt to their given roles; exhibiting behavior expected for a given situation. In this case, Zimbardo used volunteers to act as either prisoners or prison guards. A fake police raid occurred in which the student volunteers were arrested and brought to a fake prison in the basement of the Stanford psychology department building. The study was meant to last 2 weeks, but after a matter of days a riot broke out, there were rumors of an escape and guards began exerting their power in ways not specified in the experimental design. Dr. Zimbardo too became immersed in the fake scenario. Not until a fellow researcher came to observe the "prison" was it clear that the experiment needed to be shut down. In less than a week, the volunteers, being paid only $15 for their participation, "reacted to the specific needs of the situation rather than referring to their own internal morals or beliefs" (Shuttleworth, 2008).

Milgram's *Obedience* project, conducted with the help of Allen Funt, creator of *Candid Camera*, also presented subjects with a morally questionable decision. In this experiment, participants were asked to shock subjects if they did not respond correctly to an answer. The subject was an actor and the shocks did not occur, but the volunteer was unaware of the electric impulse. Milgram was curious about the degree to which a volunteer will administer the shocks based on the requisites of the situation and the reward involved (Comstock & Scharrer, 2005). Milgram's film on the subject created controversy because of its manipulation of human subjects. As a result of such experimentation social sciences have much stricter guidelines when using human

subjects. However, regulations regarding participants' rights do not pertain to reality

programming.

In 1964, documentary style filmmaking and television met in the form of *Seven

Up!* This Michael Apted directed series (originally directed by Paul Almond (IMDB.com,

2009)) introduced BBC audiences to 14 children from various socio-economic

backgrounds and to follow their lives through time. The series was based on the old Jesuit

saying, "Give me a child of seven and I'll show you the man." Every seven years[8] Apted

created another volume of the series tracking the events of the participants lives. The

motive was pure enough – Apted hoped to explore the affects that varied levels of

education, money and social influence had on a child's life. The result was not what he

had in mind; instead he created a life in the spotlight for those 14 children. In short, *Seven

Up!* marked the beginning of creating celebrities or public figures from a format based on

real-life experience in the documentary television format.

This trend continued in the United States when *An American Family* aired in

1973. The program followed the Loud family over a 12-part mini-series aired on PBS.

Again, this family then lead a life in the public eye for most of the family, most, notably

Lance Loud, whose losing battle with AIDS was documented in 2000 with the PBS

produced show *Lance Loud! A Death in an American Family*. While *An American Family*

was not reality television per se, the seeds of reality television are evident in many ways.

Primarily because producer Craig Gilbert and directors Alan and Susan Raymond wanted

to capture the everyday lives of an average family (Ruoff, 2002), but the banality of

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[8] The Up! series consists of the following titles and their corresponding BBC air dates: *7
Plus 7* (December 1970), *21 Up* (May 1977), *28 Up* (November 1984), *35 Up* (May
1991), *42 Up* (July 1998), *49 Up* (September 2005) (IMDB.com, 2009).

everyday life and the imposition of cameras inside the home made documenting the slice

of life impossible. In order to make it a story worth telling a narrative was constructed

and the cameras and directors imposed on the family for a controlled amount of time.   In

both cases (*An American Family* and *Seven Up!*) the television documentaries presented

some type of social utility or human-interest story. Their production blurred the line

between documentary and entertainment. The major contribution here is the serialized

format. Reality television programming before *Seven Up!* and *An American Family* came

in episodic form (for example, *Queen for a Day* and *Candid Camera*).

Creators of *The Real World* were intrigued by *An American Family* and sought to

recreate and update the format. The opening of every season begins with character

voiceovers of different parts of the same script: "This is the true story... of seven

strangers... picked to live in a house...work together and have their lives taped... to find

out what happens... when people stop being polite... and start getting real...The Real

World" (TV.com, 2009). Choosing unrelated strangers to live together was a new

concept, but watching them in the everyday act of living was not. Also, the packaging

came at the right time as MTV was launching a slate of original programming. The

success of the myriad of reality television programs available (over 200 at last count

(realityTVmagazine.com, 2009)) is the result of the European networks' successful

dalliance in programming inspired by *The Real World*. After 17 years, the show that

started this new wave of reality television is still on the air.

Reality television scholarship and theory

Reality television research so far has largely focused on one or more of the

following questions: *What* is reality television? *Why* is reality television popular? What

are the *motivations* for viewing reality television shows? What are the viewer's

perceptions of reality programming? What are the various *types* of reality programming?

Other work in this area consists of exposés or fan guides to particular programs within

the mega-genre. In an attempt to briefly summarize the 15+ years of scholarship in this

area, I will focus on some of the most noteworthy scholarship from each point of inquiry.

Taxonomy

A common area of interest is developing taxonomy of reality television. As

demonstrated above, reality programming is difficult to define and trying to delineate the

various sub-genres can prove just as perplexing. However, the task is a necessary one and

is handled successfully with four important essays (Baker, 2003; Mast, 2008; Hill, 2005;

Ouellette & Murray, 2009), all contributing a unique perspective on reality television

sub-genre categorization.

In her attempt to make the definition of reality television more analytically viable,

Mast (2008) develops of taxonomy using a continuum. Her rationale embraces the fact

that reality television is dynamic and constantly changing. Mast (2008) argues, "the

hybrid nature of popular factual television asks for a dynamic approach, which thinks of

variations between and within categories in terms of sliding scales" (p. 18). She supports

her statement with a diagram depicting the various subgenres explored by other authors

such as: game show, dating, daytime TV: makeover, micro-world, soap/drama, talk show,

and other TV genre(s) (p.15). Mast differs from other taxonomies and claims that a

producer's decisions regarding program format exist on a sliding scale based on three

main ingredients: subjects, setting, span of time. Below is a recreation of her model.

Figure 1: Mast's (2008) diagram of producer's decisions
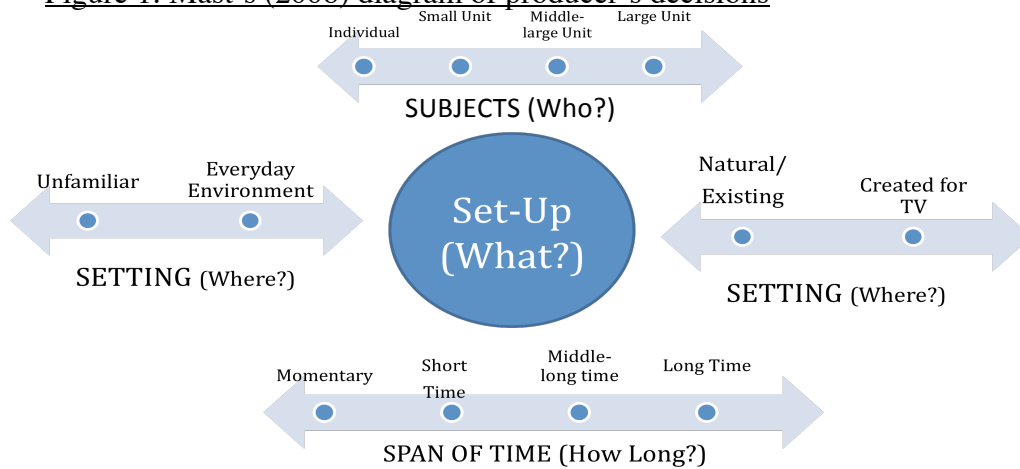
Mast (2008) describes her continuum-based dimensions as such:

> Each dimension represents a fundamental choice for any producer to make, whether it concerns the range of participants (individuals, small units like duos, couples or families, (middle-) large unites such as groups or communities), the precise location (unfamiliar or everyday surroundings, existent or manufactured) or the duration of the event (momentary, days, weeks, months), aspects that not only shape the eventual program form and content but also have significant ethical implications (p. 17).

Hill (2005) also suggests reality television be conceived as a continuum; however, hers is not as complex or dynamic as the various components of Mast's explanation. Hill's (2005) theory is that factuality of reality television exists on a sliding scale (p. 50). Her contribution is important because it demonstrates that *factuality* is not a necessary pre-requisite of reality television consideration.

In his work on the history of reality television, Baker (2003) outlines a 2x2 design in an effort to describe the sub-genres of reality television. His emphasis on the varying degrees of real and artificial is similar to Mast's (2008). However, Baker's (2003) typology does not account for the fluidity of the reality television *mega*-genre and instead presents dichotomous relationships between artificial and real people, and ordinary and extraordinary settings. The assumption in Baker's (2003) typology is that we can clearly

designate between each type of setting and individual. The absolute nature of this assumption is problematic and our ability to know what is "real" and what is "artificial" is what started the debate in defining reality TV in the first place!

Ouellette and Murray (2009), on the other hand, detail a specific breakdown of the various forms of reality television subgenre by name. Their list is helpful and one of the most comprehensive: gamedoc, the dating program, the makeover program, the docusoap, talent contest, court programs and reality sitcoms. For the current study, the gamedoc subgenre and its format as it pertains to *Survivor*, is of principal interest. The gamedoc, as its name suggests, is a hybrid of game shows and documentaries; its competition based premise combines with the aesthetic and storytelling qualities of documentary film.

As Nabi (2007) points out there are many ways to discuss these subgenres, but the ever-changing landscape of reality television makes it difficult to capture within a precise taxonomy. I agree with Nabi (2007) that these typologies "fail to capture the full range of reality programming," and they do not "articulate the qualities or program characteristics that define each category" (Nabi, 2007, p. 373). As demonstrated by the tremendous amount of work done in this area, scholars continue to define and categorize reality television despite these limitations.

Political economy of reality television

A treatise on the subject is incomplete without mention of the efficient economic model, created out of necessity, which has made reality television a viable and profitable industry. Therefore, the political economy of reality television is seen as a major reason for the ubiquity and dominance of reality programming on network and cable schedules.

As Raphael (2009; 2004) points out, we must realize that reality television is not simply a product of the creators and producers, or a reaction to audience demand, "or of a cultural, discursive, or ontological shift unrelated to the needs of those who run the television industry" (p. 119). Reality television is the result of several integrated and simultaneously occurring factors.

First and most paramount is that reality television programming emerged "as a cost-cutting solution" to the over-crowded television marketplace of the 1980's (Raphael, 2004, p. 122). An increase in cable channels, VCRs, and syndication left content producers needing more content, quickly and cheaply. Some strategies to cut costs were to expunge expensive labor and cut back on unionized labor (Raphael, 2004, p. 123). Much of reality television productions used freelance production crews, and very few writers and talent. According to Raphael (2004) some programs used lower production values as well – a strategy not employed by the most successful of reality programs, especially *Survivor,* a program that prides itself on its use of the most advanced technology and exotic locales.

Another cog in the machine that built reality television began in 1970 with the fin/syn rules. These rules limited the amount of programming networks could produce in order to allow independent production companies the chance to create prime time content and avert possible monopolies in the industry. When these rules were retracted in 1991, networks were free to produce and co-produce more, and combined with budgetary concerns, also contributed to the production of reality television. Most programs are co-produced by an independent production company in partnership with a network. In the case of *Survivor*, Mark Burnett Productions and CBS co-produce the show.

Finally, according to Raphael (2004), reality television is an attractive programming format because of its international marketplace viability. According to him,

> Because Reali-TV earns back its production costs with the first US network showing, any further syndication represents pure profit. U.S. Reali-TV has been sold overseas using two methods. Some shows are licensed outright to foreign broadcasters, the way most U.S. programming traditionally has been marketing… Many more shows have been formatted because of their tropical or local nature, however. This method involves selling or licensing the program's concept for local production with local subjects. (p. 129-130)

Based on these elements, Raphael (2004) makes a strong argument for the conditions surrounding the latest incarnation and proliferation of reality television programming

Magder (2009; 2004) claims that reality programming created a new business model for the television industry. Magder (2009; 2004) offers a comprehensive and succinct look at the economics of reality television. Unlike other types of programming that cost many millions per episode and rely heavily on advertisements, reality television takes advantage of three recent changes to television production: using the same format for production, integrating multimedia approaches to further exploit the program, and utilizing European programming formats (Magder, 2004, p. 145). Beyond these very important points is Magder's (2004) key claim that reality television has changed traditional revenue model; "we are entering a new era of product placement and integration, merchandising, pay-per-view, and multiplatform content" (p. 152).

Wright (2006) talks about the political unconscious as it pertains to *Survivor*. He demonstrates through quantitative analysis the class politics that exist within the program as they pertain to gender, age, race and class. His findings are significant because he explores the way in which political economy of the show impacts viewers.

Audience preference and perceptions: Why do people watch?

The extant scholarly empirical research in the communications field regarding reality television is dominated in large part by audience preferences and perceptions (Nabi, et al., 2003; Rose & Wood, 2005; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2006; Nabi, et al., 2006; Hall, 2006; Nabi, 2007; Nabi, 2009; Barton, 2009). Other cultural studies approaches have also dealt with content and potential effects of the *mega*-genre of programming (Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Andrejevic, 2004; Brenton & Cohen, 2003). As Nabi (2007) emphasizes, generic designation is not as important as the content itself:

> [T]he two characteristics most salient to audiences when thinking about reality-based programming are romance and competition. Further, though dating programs are, relatively speaking, a unique type of reality program, no other clearly differentiated group emerged. This is not to suggest that subgenres of reality programs do not exist in the minds of viewers or cannot be studied, but rather that the boundaries between and among potential subgroups are generally fluid. Thus research must be sensitive to the ways in which the programs considered within certain groups are similar and different to one another as well as to programs in other subgroups. That is the qualities of the programs are more important than the categories in which they might be placed (Nabi, 2007, p. 383).

Other studies using social science and cultural criticism lenses explore issues of race, fame and fandom with regard to reality programming (Bell-Jordan, 2008; Orbe, 2008; Collins, 2008; Squires, 2008; etc.). What all of the scholars have in common is that each one operates from the same fundamental point: reality programming is problematic. Much of the work exposes the flaws and not the construction; much of the extant research expresses concern for interpretations and implications of viewing without exploring the content. Therefore, my current project proposes a way to demonstrate that the realism experienced by viewers through character identity development is part of what makes the mega-genre unique.

Survivor

While reality television in general is a point of great interest, it seems that much

of the scholarship focuses too broadly on this mega-genre and does not concentrate

enough on the individual programs and their unique contributions to the media and

cultural landscape (Nabi, et. al., 2003). For the purposes of this project, the long-running

CBS program *Survivor* will be considered. Premiering in the summer of 2000, *Survivor*

has demonstrated it's indelible mark on reality television history due to its consistent

popularity, game format and ability to adapt and update itself when necessary.

Admittedly, the show does not garner the ratings it once did, yet *Survivor: Samo*a's clip

show airing on Thanksgiving beat all of its competitors and spent the season as the

highest rated reality program on television (Gorman, 2009). The fact that after 19 seasons

the flashback/recap show – with no new forward plot development – had the highest

ratings in its time slot was an impressive feat.

In 1997 Charlie Parsons and Bob Geldof created *Expedition Robinson* in Sweden.

After licensing the rights for a US version, Mark Burnett sold his idea to CBS in the Fall

of 1998 (Burnett & Dugard, 2000; Young, 2009). Its US incarnation, *Survivor* began in

May of 2000 and is currently[9] in its 22nd season. Burnett insists that *Survivor* is not a

reality show:

> Reality is a label some journalists created. What I do is unscripted drama.
> *Survivor* and *The Apprentice* put people into situations that aren't real at all. They
> aren't actually marooned on an island, and they aren't actually applying for any
> jobs (Young, 2009).

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[9] As of February, 2011.

The gamedoc[10] format (Couldry, 2004) of *Survivor* involves 16-20 contestants placed in a remote location where they live and compete for the $1 million prize awarded to the sole survivor. The cast is split into tribes and pitted against each other in competitions. Then, back at the campsite, the tribe members must learn to live together in hopes of winning challenges and the coveted immunity. Much of the drama exists not in the challenges, but at the campsite. The losing tribe at the immunity challenge is sent to tribal council where they must vote off one of their tribe mates. Each episode has two challenges, one for reward and one for immunity. The rewards tend to vary based on where they are in the season. The first reward challenge is usually for flint to make fire, then other creature comforts are awarded such as fishing gear, pillows and blankets, tarp, toilet paper, soap, or the much appreciated – food!

The host, Jeff Probst, has been with the show since its first season, a role that has won him 2 Emmys[11]. Through the years Probst has become more of an instigator at tribal council, the hours long meeting of the tribe at which they decide which one of them will be eliminated. The votes are cast in secret and host Probst reads them aloud and announces who will be sent home closing with his ominous line "the tribe has spoken" as he snuffs his or her torch, representing their life in the game (Probst, episode 1).

The cast changes from season to season. Exceptions to this rule are "All-Star" season 8 and season 16, "Fans versus Favorites." Season 20, also set in Samoa, was titled *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains*, and marked the 10th anniversary of the show. It featured

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[10] As the term implies, this is a hybridization of documentary style and game show format. Nabi (2007) claims that *Survivor* "is the ultimate gamedoc" (p. 374).
[11] The only 2 awarded since the 2008 addition of the Outstanding Host of a Reality or Reality-Competition Program

more all-stars from the past 19 seasons (Batallones, 2009). As Thompson stated in an

article for the *New York Times*, reality television "is the casting director's medium" (Carr,

2004). Without question, the cast is what propels the show because the cast is what

viewers are tuning into see. The emotions discussed earlier, and the authenticity desired

comes not from the challenges, but from the participants in those challenges. As such,

this study will explore the development of the cast members as they contribute to their

own character identity.

CHAPTER 3: PRESENTATION OF SELF IN REALITY TELEVISION

In *Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman's 1959 book, offers many insights that are relevant to the current media culture and to *Survivor*. Goffman's dramaturgical treatment of our social roles and his keen analogy regarding the performance of identity, make his assessment of character an apt one in explaining the phenomenon of reality television. As Turner, states, "much of the participation in reality TV is aimed at a certain kind of recognition of the self" (Turner, 2006 p. 154).

The current state of reality television is a product of our culture of the *self*. We are steeped in narcissism, and a never-ending quest for the authentic[12]. The combination of these factors suggests a natural progression in reality television from the scripted, formulaic sitcom, drama, or soap opera toward a type of storytelling that features ordinary citizens in a dramatic narrative. Contrivances, as I discussed in chapter 2, are standard in reality television, but they do not make the "journey" or the "experience" (Andrejevic, 2004) any less real to those who live through it.

The 21st century individual operates within a culturally reinforced desire to be a self-sufficient unit; one who derives his or her own happiness from the self and does not need to rely on others. However, the paradox lies in the individual's need rely on outside elements for self-esteem, social indicators of acceptable behavior and desires to be accepted by others. The complex struggle between being part of a collective and being an individual creates what Lasch (1979) refers to as a *Culture of Narcissism*. In this chapter, I explore the work of several notable authors, (Goffman, 1959; Lasch, 1979; Trilling,

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[12] Rose and Wood (2005) state, "consumers increasingly value authenticity in a world where the mass production of artifacts causes them to question the plausibility of the value" (p. 286).

1971; Rieff, 2006; and Hunter, 2001) to arrive at a clearer understanding about how and why *Survivor* is an accurate manifestation of the paradox that exists for the individual.

This paradox is the cornerstone of *Survivor*'s basic narrative: "Outwit, outplay, outlast" (the program's motto since the first season). The concept is basic: work with others, compete with others and make it to the end. In essence, this is the epitome of forsaking the group for the good of the individual. The group, or the tribe as it is called on *Survivor*, is an entity necessary until it isn't; until the participant realizes that s/he is best served by serving his/her own purposes, s/he will be loyal to their alliance or tribe. As in everyday life individual pursuits are pitted against the greater good. The paradox of the individual in real life is magnified on a show like *Survivor* because the participants are constantly forced to make a decision that is "good for the tribe" or "good for her/him;" in essence, an individual's survival is based on those around them (i.e. being voted out of the game).

The 21st century idea of the American individual can be traced to the 19th century rise of the middle class. This era marked an increase in formal social interaction and a new type of social role-playing. While effectively replacing religion, the strict rules and confines of acceptable behavior were also present in the parlor roles of mid 19th century homes (Haltunnen, 1986). In an effort to cope with this cultural change and the loss of a sense of religion, Freud's psychoanalysis and the rise of the therapeutic allowed for emphasizing the self rather than the community (Rieff, 2006). In order to organize this argument, I consider the following thematic elements within the individual's paradox: impression management and performativity, the rise of the therapeutic, and the increased desire for the sincere and authentic.

The dramaturgical identity and impression management

Goffman (1959) claims that individuals are constantly involved the performance of self in an effort to manage the impressions that we make on others. In order to order to do so, we adhere to a definition of our situation regardless of whether others are watching. In essence, Goffman's claim is that we are all performers, a concept that is applicable to reality television. The key element of his work is that he places the self in a dramaturgical context. By doing so, Goffman emphasizes role-playing. Performance "refer[s] to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). The performance of self on *Survivor: Samoa* is explored and this study. Goffman's work provides the foundational elements for the performance of the self, and offers a dramaturgical metaphor appropriate for understanding characters on the show.

Goffman also points out that the individual's performance conveys a connection that s/he has to the audience. The result is that we take on different social roles based on our audience. Goffman quotes William James in stating: "…we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct *groups* of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups" (p. 48). This is important because on *Survivor*: *Samoa* the self presented through direct address to the camera is a different self than the one presented to the character's tribe mates. Equally important in relating to the audience is developing a sense of uniqueness; the performer must make the audience feel like they share something special (Goffman, 1959, p. 49).

Perhaps one of the most intriguing elements of Goffman's pivotal work is his conceptualization of *regions* of the self, or "any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers of perception" (p. 106). The performance is the *front of stage self*; this is the role-playing and impression managing *self*, intrinsic to Goffman's thesis. The individual is not a constant performer, therefore Goffman describes the *backstage self*, "where the suppressed facts make an appearance… it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed" (p. 112). Again, the dramaturgical metaphor is apt because it describes the way in which we behave *behind closed doors*. At times a physical barrier, the backstage self is marked by the lack of an audience. Some backstage regions are known for their abolishment of standards of conduct and manners a place where the individual can drop their typical performance with others. Goffman's examples of such places are the locker room or a hunting lodge.

The front of stage performance space and backstage region can at times be one and the same. While an executive's office demonstrates his status and superiority to those who enter, it is the same place where he can loosen his tie and congregate in a less formal way with others of his own rank (Goffman, 1959, p. 126). As might be surmised from the previous examples, sometimes the behaviors associated with some backstage places can inspire an obligatory performance, thus making it a front of stage region.

Also, it is necessary, "for the performer to segregate his audiences so that the individuals who witness him in one of his roles will not be the individuals who witness him in another of his roles" (Goffman, 1959, p. 137). Goffman refers to this as audience segregation, and when this fails, impression management issues arise. Impression management, after all, is the most important aspect of the presentation of self. His

dramaturgical metaphor is aptly applied to my analysis *Survivor: Samoa* and I use his concept of impression management to understand the various performances portrayed on the show. Many more recent scholars have examined the theory of impression management as it pertains to organization psychology (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Westphal, 2010) and interpersonal communication (Schlenker, 1980; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Bolino, 1999; Kramer & Winter, 2008). However, for the purpose of this study it is important to understand Goffman's original work and his dramaturgical metaphor to explain impression management.

The therapeutic ethos

According to the therapeutic tradition, we no longer need to look to religion for explanations of life's biggest questions; instead, we need to look inward to discover *who* we are and *why* we are. Rieff (2006) and Lasch (1979) both argue that the dissolution of the church's influence in everyday life was replaced by the therapeutic sense of self. As Lasch-Quinn (2004) outlines succinctly, the therapeutic ethos, according to Nolan (1998) includes three major traits. First, and most importantly, "the individual is and should be free of any external moral authority or pressure to deny impulse for a transcendent purpose" (p. 5). This is appropriate when embarking on my exploration of character identity on *Survivor*, because as mentioned in the introduction, the show elicits a response from its participants that *anything goes*. The format of the show requires the abandonment of any sense of right or wrong, instead the desire for winning is the most revered character trait (Probst, 2009).

Secondly, Lasch-Quinn (2004) states that, consistent with MacIntyre (2007), within the therapeutic ethos the location of truth is in feelings. Therefore, not expressing

emotions is a failure to be authentic. As is the case on reality programs like *Survivor: Samoa*, expression of feelings is of significant interest to reality television viewers (Aslama & Pantti, 2006) and often defines how *real* they perceive the program (Hall, 2006) to be.

Thirdly, the new "priestly class" of therapists and psychoanalysts are the authorities helping us "make sense of life in the modern world" (Lasch-Quinn, 2004, p. 5, quoting Nolan, 1998). The new jargon of the therapeutic is at their disposal and only through their explanation are we able to understand what life is about. We no longer look to a higher power to explain what we cannot; we look to a renowned psychiatrist. On *Survivor* there is actually a resident psychologist who screens contestants and then treats each one after they are voted off (Seeber, 2001). Within the show itself, host Jeff Probst is the closest thing to a therapist in the way he asks characters to talk about their issues.

This concept of the therapeutic self is taught and reinforced throughout our culture. On *Survivor* there are aspects of the show that reflect therapeutic circumstances. For example, after being voted out, each cast member vents their feelings and reflects on their experience through direct address. This therapeutic purge emphasizes the role of emotions while simultaneously giving audiences closure and resolution – terms often found in the therapeutic lexicon. Tribal Council itself is a sort of group therapy session in which each tribe mate can voice his or her grievances. Likewise, the confessional nature of the direct address to the camera offers the cast member to explore his or her feelings with us as the therapist/audience. *Survivor* is a kind of therapeutic education, where getting in touch with your feelings and desires is paramount. Within this paradigm, as it exists on *Survivor*, emotions and the self are celebrated. If participants are being "true to

themselves" immoral behaviors are tolerated. The individuals cast on shows like *Survivor* are not interested in being role models. Instead they are there to play a game and win $1 million. Unfortunately, the unscrupulous acts are what make the show great and certain individuals famous. As a result, this type of programming rewards morally questionable behavior. In essence, the program is void of any evidence of a model for moral education – not that it would ever claim to have one.

Moral education is how a person's character and sense of right and wrong is developed from an early stage (Hunter, 2001). At the heart of Hunter's (2001) argument is the modern day ambiguity and uncertainty about what is appropriate and what is not in terms of both language and behavior. Hunter (2001) claims we lack character, and the moral qualities that help to define it, because of an inclusive vocabulary from the psychology regime that permeates our moral education. Since classical civilizations, an individual's character was reflective of a good society. As Hunter laments, moral education has been out-sourced and placed in the hands of our school systems and, more precisely, educators. Instead of resting within the community, the moral education of children has been standardized and government issued.

Our character, or the way we reach decisions based on our moral vision, is at stake in a culture without moral education. There is a consistent fear that morality always seems to be on the brink of demise with the dawn of each new generation[13]. Hunter's

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[13] Socrates is quoted as saying the following about the youth of his time: "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers."

(2001) historicist treatment of moral education leads to a clearer understanding how character has become a self-defined achievement of esteem instead of a personal manifestation of the greater good. He explains that moral education was previously dispensed by a combination of one's church, community, and family. Hunter (2001) defines morality as permissions and prohibitions that through ritual become a set of terms rooted in reality that can be applied to predict individual behavior as well as societal stability (p. 15). The key component of this definition is the ritual, which implies a social component placing morality into the educational domain; morality then is something that is taught and demonstrated by example.

The "common good" within a family is also lost because children are raised as individuals and not as members of the familial unit or their community. In short, socialization skills and being well regarded by peers is more important than contributing to the family and respecting authority (Hymowitz, 2003). The result is that family has been replaced by other agencies – government, friends, school, and television – as the primary educator for how the young generation should behave and exist in our society (Hunter, 2001; Hymowitz, 2003). Children are taught through media and schooling that they are unique and should be define themselves apart from others instead of trying to belong to a group. The affinity of self-branding (Chaplin & John, 2005) in society and to be distinguished from the rest is the new American dream: to be known and to be unique.

Applied to reality programming, the emphasis on individualism allows for people to knowingly go before a mass audience and have intimate details of their lives put on display for entertainment (Aslama & Pantti, 2006). The vulnerability of being judged by

others is outweighed by the opportunity for an experience that promises a level of fame

and notoriety. Yet, there is something missing in the critical view leading me to ask: why

would such large audiences engage with such programming? The answer is that we long

for something real and emotions (as noted in the previous section on the therapeutic

ethos) are the only sure aspect of our lives that fit that description (Aslama & Pantti,

2006).

Sincerity and authenticity

Sincerity is what the contestants hope to achieve within *Survivor*, whereas

audiences and producers are more interested in the authentic. Almost prophetically

describing reality television, as it exists today, Trilling (1971) explained, "The

entertainments appropriate to a republic are those in which the citizen, participating in his

own person, is reinforced in the sentiment of his own being and in his relation to his

fellow beings" (p. 65). Reality television is a manifest expression of this statement

because it highlights and creates a narrative based on personalities ("own person") as

they interact ("relation to his fellow beings").

The authentic is what we tune-in to see on reality programming (Rose & Wood,

2005; Aslama & Pantti, 2006). Authenticity is genuine and true without intervention of

the self. Therefore, when characters are perceived as playing too much or acting for the

cameras, *Survivor* audiences become frustrated.

Reality television is reflective of its cultural context wherein audiences are

interested in knowing what is authentic and sincere. Trilling (1971) argues in *Sincerity*

and Authenticity that the two terms are ephemeral and no longer hold much meaning the

way they maybe once did. However, gleaned from the extant literary treatment of

sincerity and authenticity, he offers a distinction between these two enigmatic values.

Sincerity, based on Trilling's (1971) work, is a construct of the individual's

representation of the self, as they believe themselves to be. The connotation is that to be

sincere is to play the role that one believes is their *true* role. In one of his many literary

criticisms, Trilling draws the following conclusion that is representative of this iteration

of sincerity:

> The demonstration concluded, it is agreed between Diderot and the Nephew,
> between the *Moi* and the *Lui* of the dialogue, that everyone in society, without
> exception, acts a part, takes a 'position', does his dance, even the king himself,
> 'who takes a position before his mistress and God: he dances his pantomime
> steps' (Trilling, 1971, p. 31).

Trilling refers to Goffman frequently stating that we are sincere to the extent that we play

the role that we believe we ought. Goffman (1959) states the following, lending support

for this understanding of sincerity:

> The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific
> location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a
> dramatic effect arising diffusely form a scene that is presented, and the
> characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or
> discredited (p. 253).

Authenticity, alternatively, is that which is not performed; it is the genuine

expression when one is not able to control his or her feelings. This can also take place

when sentiment is expressed without the pre-meditated intention. Trilling (1971)

illustrates this concept in his discussion of Wordsworth's poem *Michael*. When his son

dies, the father conveys no emotion. Some days he continues to build the sheepfold he

was working on with his son, other days he sits completely still doing no work. As

Trilling (1971) notes: "It would go beyond absurdity, it would be a kind of indecency, to

raise the question of the sincerity of this grief even in order to affirm it… he and his grief

are one" (p. 93). This all-encompassing genuine grief is what is referred to as authentic.

Trilling (1971) adds that the use of this term places more value on the nature of its being

and existence.

Conclusion

Trilling's (1971) definitions above can be applied to *Survivor: Samoa*,

demonstrating an important perspective of participation and spectatorship. The

participant's sincere character performance is met by the audiences' quest for the

authentic. When the back of stage self is betrayed in the front of stage forum like

Survivor, the audience gets to share in that special connection with those on the show.

This performance of self and the emphasis placed on the individual is the cultural context

in which shows like *Survivor* exist.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE THEORY, IDENTIFICATION, AND RESEARCH
QUESTIONS

The previous chapters carefully placed *Survivor: Samoa* within the reality

television mega-genre, and demonstrated the how the show is situated within a culture

steeped in self-exploration and impression management. Having established these

contextual lenses for my project, I turn to the narrative theory and identification theory to

frame my empirical approach to *Survivor: Samoa*. Each theory offers a unique

perspective to addressing my interest in how characters enact their roles and how that

affords them authorial power within the context of *Survivor: Samoa*. Typically, narrative

theory and identification theory are not used together. However, in this case these

theories are complimentary when applied to my project: the centrality of the character

within the narrative and the impact that might have on the participants regarding the roles

they perceive.

Narrative Theory

"Television is the principal storyteller in contemporary American society" (Kozloff,
1992, p. 67).
Due to the ever-expanding set of tools we use to tell stories, narrative theory is

useful in all types of media. Many scholars, taking a cue from film theorists, have used

the narrative approach to study meaning in television texts (Kozloff, 1992). Narrative

theory is not just concerned with the story being told, but how the story is told. Although

people associate narrative theory with literary criticism, it has become commonplace to

apply these methods to audio-visual media like film and television. Like most theories,

the evolution of narratives has experienced many changes. Currie (1998) asserts that it is

reasonable to "view humans as narrative animals, as homo fabulans – the tellers and interpreters of narrative" (p. 2).

Wigston (2001) introduces two points of view regarding narrative theory: the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. In his review, scholars like Propp (1968) and Todorov (1973), who analyze the way events unfold in the narrative to keep the story moving offer examples of the syntagmatic mode of narrative analysis (Wigston, 2001, p. 139). In contrast, the paradigmatic approach, under the Barthes model, seeks to discover how meaning is produced based on the various levels of narrative.

In their seminal essay on structural analysis, Barthes and Duisit (1975) outline three levels of narrative structure: functions, actions, and narration; all are "bonded together according to a mode of progressive integration" (p. 243). In other words, together these hierarchical levels present the narrative structure, but when considered separately can offer different points of analytic entry. The smallest structural unit exists within the level of "functions." The term implies that everything is significant and that these small units act as adjectives in the narrative to qualify the higher levels of the structure. When explaining the level of "actions," what Barthes and Duisit (1975) really have in mind are the characters or "agents of action" with "psychological consistency" (p. 256). Finally, the "narration" or the "narrative code" is the actual communication of the narrative that includes the two previous levels of narrative structure (Barthes & Duisit, 1975, p. 260).

Implied in their description, the "narration" level contains both a giver and a receiver (Barthes & Duisit, 1975, p. 260). This concept is similar to Lasswell's (1948) linear sender/receiver model. Much of the literature on reality television examines the

receiver of the narrative; other research concentrates on the giver, usually considered to

be the producers. I contend that reality television has an additional narrative contributor:

the character. According to Barthes and Duisit (1975), the character is simply part of the

narrative, not a "giver" of the "narration." However, in this project I argue that the

character can at once be *part of* and *giver of* the narration, placing him/her in an authorial

role.

As Barthes and Duisit (1975) further explain, the level of the narration is "the

code through which the narrator's and the reader's presence can be detected within the

narrative itself" (p. 260). Hence, there is an implication of both narrator and reader within

each narrative structure. In keeping with its documentary film roots, the narrator in reality

television is, "a disembodied voice, through voice-over narrations" (p. 79). On *Survivor*

the host, Jeff Probst, occupies this role. At the same time he is also one that claims

authorial control as an executive producer of the series. As Chatman (1978) points out,

narrator and author are distinct and not the same. The narrator is part of the narrative,

whereas the author is:

> [R]econstructed by the reader from the narrative. He is not the narrator, but rather
> the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative,
> that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these
> characters, in these words or images (Chatman, 1978, p.148).

Described in this way, Chatman's (1978) author is akin to the producers of the show who

create the fabricated situation of *Survivor: Samoa*.

In typical television narratives, the author is implied: "The 'implied author' of a

television show, like that of a novel, is not a flesh-and-blood person but rather a textual

construct, the viewer's sense of the organizing force behind the world of the show"

(Kozloff, 1992, p. 78). However, on certain reality shows, and specifically *Survivor*, Jeff

Probst is a flesh-and-blood person who occupies both the narrator and author

designations. The duality of his presence in the narrative is unique; he creates the fictive

world on the show as an executive-producer (or author) and he also comments on and

describes the story as it happens (narrator).

There is a distinction, too, between the *real* and the *implied* "givers and receivers"

of the narrative. The *real* author and the *real* audience are outside of the narrative

transaction because they are unknown to each other; the nuances and proclivities of the

actual television audience are not known in the way an *implied* audience is assumed. The

line between implied and actual is blurring with the increased use of blogs, Twitter and

discussion boards online; more than ever the actual audience is able to respond in real-

time to their perceptions of television episodes.

The *actual* audience is savvier today than ever before (Andrejevic, 2004).

Andrejevic (2004) makes this claim about the reality television audience in particular,

because they tend to see through the guise of reality to understand that much of what they

see is edited, contrived, and manipulated in order to make an entertaining program. Also

the "savvy viewer" (Andrejevic, 2004) remembers past seasons, the memory of which is

used to evaluate current seasons of their favorite shows, something that can make for a

successful *Survivor* character (Andrejevic, 2004).

Despite what they might understand about the production of a reality show,

audiences perceive certain amounts of realism within the narratives (Hall, 2006); almost

all of which revolves around some aspect of the character. Realism can take the form of

an emotional outburst or a trusting relationship formed in an alliance. This realism is

presented to audiences in ways to enhance the effect. For example on shows like

Survivor the elements of production are not hidden. The characters address the camera and many times we see sound equipment and even camera operators in the shot. As a result of this exposed production, the fourth wall is broken down and the characters have the opportunity to speak directly to their implied audience. Unlike the soliloquy and monologue of a play or novel, the direct address moments within the reality television structure allow the character to speak on their own behalf. Based on other narrative forms, this is a unique element of reality television.

Survivor is unlike other narrative formats because of this special juxtaposition of the real and the contrived. The fictive world the producers and set designers create exists for the sole purpose of the show, much like any other television program. However, despite all of the things that makes *Survivor* a fabrication, the characters exist, to some extent, outside of the producer's control. It is for this reason alone that this type of reality television is a unique narrative form. Therefore, I pose the following, overarching research question:

RQ1: *What evidence exists within* Survivor: Samoa *demonstrating that characters have some authorial power in creating the narrative of the show?*

Then as a follow up question, I explore how the show is the character's authorial power operates within the larger dynamic of the narrative:

RQ2: *How does the combination of authors – characters and producers – contribute to the narrative of* Survivor: Samoa?

The centrality of characters

Based on narrative theorists' definitions, character is defined as: "a paradigm of traits" (Chatman, 1978, p. 127); "a construct put together by the reader from various indications dispersed throughout the text" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2001, p. 36); and as an individual able to "care about something; to feel, implicitly or explicitly, that something

is important" (Swain, 1990, p. 1). According to Barthes and Duisit (1975) the character is the location of the action; it is because of the character that the plot moves forward and action takes place. However, in traditional narratives the action happens *to* the character *through* the author.

There are several different ways to conceive of characters depending on the academic discipline. Palmer (2004) designates 6 distinct ways in which Margolin (1986; 1990) explains the differing definitions of character pertaining to various modes of analysis. First, is the "grammatical person," attributed to linguistics, which indicates the character is the, "topic entity of a discourse" (p. 37). Then, within literary criticism, the character is a, "literary device" just one element of many used to achieve the aesthetic effects (p. 37). Next, narratology claims character as a "speech position" playing an integral role in communicating the narrative (p. 37). Within semiotics a character represents a set of signs or thematic element (p. 37). In story analysis, the character is simply an element in the structure of the story (p.37). Finally, in the area of possible-world semantics, the character is a "non-actual being who exists in a possible world and who can be ascribed physical, social and mental properties" (p. 38). According to Palmer (2004) character as the "non-actual individual" is the most suitable for all texts. However, in *Survivor* this definition does not hold because characters are actual individuals.

Therefore despite the many conceptualizations of character, the key distinction for my purposes is the way in which they can contribute to the narrative independent of the producer's control. My definition of character is: an individual constrained by their moral and physical qualities who, through actions and speech, contribute to the narrative. The

producers of *Survivor* control the characters' portrayals to a large extent. Included in this definition is the idea that characters, central to the action within the story, also act as narrator for his or her own narrative.

Another aspect of narrative theory and character identity development is chronology. The special chronology of television is the sense of liveness intrinsic to the medium (Kozloff, 1992; Kavka, 2008). We are lead to believe that we are seeing events as they unfold. As is the case with *Survivor: Samoa* – time is of the essence. Unlike *Big Brother,* it is not live, but it is chronological. We go from 20 castaways to 1; there is an order to that format. While some television formats use the flashback to remember past events, *Survivor* does not[14]. Instead the viewer must remember things said, challenges completed, and events that occurred in the past. In fact, the finale is the only time we see montages of past events. Otherwise, the entire season is based on a progression, or momentum forward to determine a winner based on the series of events. "Temporality is no more than a structural class of narrative (understood as discourse), just as in ordinary language, times exists only in the form of a system" (Barthes & Duisit, 1975, p. 252).

Barthes and Duisit's (1975) treatment of narrative structure shapes much of this chapter and how I will approach the text of *Survivor: Samoa*. In his dissertation, Smith (2005) demonstrates how narrative theory can be applied to reality television and specifically, *Survivor*[15]. Smith's (2005) study claims that the narrative structure is not new or different from traditional narratives. Instead, he concludes, "narrative is structured

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[14] Very seldom, the flashback is used to highlight a major plot point and more often, the flashback is used in a reunion or recap episode.

[15] His critical analysis concluded with his assessment of the narrative structure that through the manipulation of the producers of the show, the *reality* presented on *Survivor* perpetuates dominant ideology.

in *Survivor* to fulfill a cultural norm in society" (p.8). I disagree with Smith (2005) and believe that the character's authorial control within the narrative is evidence that *Survivor* represents a unique and important digression from the traditional narrative structure. The resulting episodes convey dominant ideological portrayals to varying degrees, but the same can be said for almost every other type of popular television.

Smith (2005) supports the use of Proppian character development in his exploration *Survivor*'s structure. Television scholars (Kozloff, 1992) often use Propp's (1968) typology of characters included in his seminal work, *Morphology of the Folktale*. Propp (1968) deconstructed the fairytale into parts to see how those components were related to each other and the story. In so doing, Propp defines distinct "dramatis personae" based on their "sphere of action" (p. 79). He, like Barthes and Duisit (1975), argue that the sole purpose of the character is to move the narrative along, which is accomplished through an act or some kind in relation to other acts. Propp's list of characters and their respective spheres can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Propp's characters and "spheres of action" (Propp, 1968, p. 79-80)

CONSTIUENTS	SPHERE OF ACTION
Villain	Villainy; a fight or other forms of struggle with the hero; pursuit
Donor (provider)	The preparation for the transmission of a magical agent; provision of the hero with a magical agent
Helper	The spatial transference of the hero; liquidation of misfortune or lack; rescue from pursuit; the solution of difficult tasks; transfiguration of the hero

Princess (a sought-for person) and Her Father	The assignment of difficult tasks; branding; exposure; recognition; punishment of a second villain; marriage. The princess and her father cannot be exactly delineated from each other according to functions. Most often it is the father who assigns difficult tasks due to hostile feeling toward the suitor. He also frequently punishes (or orders punished) the false hero
Dispatcher	Dispatch (connective incident)
Hero	Departure on a search; reaction to the demands of the donor; wedding. The first function is characteristic of the seeker-hero; the victim-hero performs only the remaining functions.
False hero	Also includes departure on a search, followed by reaction to the demands of the donor and, as a specific function, L

I point out Propp's typology because it is easy to see how one might be lulled into thinking about reality television characters as this simplistic and structured. In fact, maybe this is how producers would like to see their casts; if participants would fit so neatly into these parameters, it might make casting easier. However, many have argued the validity of the Proppian paradigm (for example, Kozloff, 1992, Bordwell, 1988, and most recently, Kavka, 2008), which I believe is inadequate when describing the reality television character as he/she exists on *Survivor*.

For my purposes, Kavka's (2008) description of the reality television cast member departs from the formulaic, preordained structure of Propp's typology. As I mentioned in chapter one, instead of operating as functional spheres, Kavka (2008) maintains that contestants are complex individuals. To summarize an earlier quote, Kavka (2008) argues that characters on reality television and in this case, *Survivor: Samoa,* are not just representatives of their gender, class, race, region, or any other demographically defined attributes. Instead, the characters are individuals that have a specific combination of traits

that make them unique. Audiences' interpretation of character is key since we tend to

make generalizations and snap-judgments (Devine, 1989). Therefore, in order to keep

audiences guessing it is in the producers' best interest to cast people who go against type;

they want to keep viewers interested and in suspense. Kavka (2008) states,

> Reality television, however, does not pretend to representativity. Indeed, the
> experience of the viewer of gaining intimacy with an individual *qua* individual,
> whether briefly or over an extended time frame, is the decisive factor in
> distinguishing what is and is not reality TV (p. 63).

Therefore, what is portrayed is not another example of a certain type of character, but an

entirely new individual for us to get to know.

This type of interaction leads us to media effects theories of identification and

parasocial interaction. The present study does not concern audience behavior, perceptions

or effects. However, I would like to briefly note that the events that unfold on television

and in other mass mediated forms have potential consequences when considering

audience behavior (Bandura, 2002; Cohen, 2001). While not always a negative

consequence, the discipline of mass communications media effects research has

demonstrated numerous ways in which media, such as television, can produce alterations

in behavior.

Identification theory and characters

Identification theory is one media effect that is relevant when considering how

characters perform their roles on *Survivor: Samoa*. Cohen (2001; 2009) offers a concise

definition of identification: "Identification requires that we forget ourselves and become

the other – that we assume for ourselves the identity of the target of our identification"

(Cohen, 2001, p. 247). In this way, I argue that reality television characters identify their

roles within the narrative and perform them. These performances are the result of their

own concepts of self and their perception of the character for which they were cast. Prior knowledge and identification with past participants on *Survivor* aid in that performance and justify their position within the larger narrative of the series.

Therefore, parasocial interactions (PSI), those relationships that viewers develop with television characters (Horton & Wohl, 1956), are just as important as identification. While markedly different from identification (Robinson & Agne, 2009), PSIs historically refer to characters in soap operas or news anchors, but now can be aptly applied to reality television. The PSI hinges on the one-way interaction in hopes of a two-way interaction. As Cohen (2001) points out, identification is more synonymous with empathy rather than fantasy.

> As compared to PSI, identification lacks an interactional component because when identifying, one lacks an awareness of the self, and therefore, the distinction between self and other – necessary for interaction – is missing. Identification with a TV character is based on a psychological attachment between the viewer and a character (Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999) but rather than leading to interaction with the character, it leads to imagining being the character (Livingstone, 1998) (Cohen, 2001, p. 253).

Viewer identification might be enhanced because of their perceived realness of the characters on reality television shows like *Survivor: Samoa*. This is particularly relevant because each season, individuals are cast from that same group of viewers. Newly cast participants' identification with past characters on *Survivor* will no doubt impact their own performances once on the show. On more than one occasion I found myself saying: "if that were me, I would have voted her out" or some such statement of identification.

Based on their parasocial relationships with past characters and their ability to identify with them, cast members on *Survivor: Samoa* are well positioned to make quick judgments of those around them. Their access to the audience through direct address allows for shared opinions and the cycle of identification and PSI to continue. Again, the

character's knowledge of what happened in previous seasons informs their performance and the way they regard others. Perhaps this is another aspect to the authorial power the character has within the *Survivor: Samoa* narrative. Therefore it is crucial to examine not only the dynamics of the character's performance on shows such as *Survivor*, but also the way in which they describe their fellow cast mates. Based on this concept of identity, I pose the following research question:

> *RQ3*: *How do characters contribute to their role identity, the identity of others on* Survivor: Samoa *and does this ability imply agency*?

The way characters describe and identify themselves and others will offer a fuller understanding of their performed roles.

Therefore, based on the distinct combination of narrative and identification theories my research questions address the possibility of a character-produced narrative, their subsequent interaction with the *Survivor: Samoa* producers. Since participants are pulled from the "savvy" audience there is a promise of participation that makes the viewer at home think, "that could be me!" (Andrejevic, 2004). Therefore, identification and parasocial relationships tend to be very strong (Giles, 2002), which helps to explain the large number of people capable of participating and their unflinching ability to perform their characters on *Survivor*.

CHAPTER 5: METHOD

Based on my research questions, I chose to perform a textual analysis using

Survivor: Samoa as the primary text and Jeff Probst's blog posts as the secondary one. In

this chapter I justify why textual analysis is the appropriate for understanding narrative

agency on *Survivor: Samoa*. I also explain the theoretical lens I used to focus my project

and keep it within the boundaries set forth by my research questions. In order to explain

the sample I used, I summarize the 19th season of *Survivor* and provide some definitions

to key terms and phrases used within the show itself. I then detail my analytical

procedure that lead to my results, which will be presented in chapters 6, 7 and 8. I

conclude with a summarization of my role as the researcher.

Television and textual analysis

Treating television programs as text is the hallmark of television studies. The

assumption here and especially within this project, is that television is a product of our

culture; it exists within and because of the modern mass culture. Therefore, as a cultural

apparatus television uses the codes and structures of our society to create versions of our

reality presented to audiences using tropes and other commonly shared norms. Fiske and

Hartley (2003) emphasized this point in their book *Reading Television*. They establish

that television,

> …presents us with a continuous stream of images *almost all* of which are deeply
> familiar in structure and form. It uses codes that are closely related to those by
> which we perceive reality itself. It appears to be the natural way of seeing the
> world. It shows us not our names but our collective selves (Fiske & Hartley, p.
> 17).

The use of codes as representations of our reality is an important aspect of creating the

narrative of *Survivor*. Therefore, in this textual analysis I explored the characters not just

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as representations on the screen, but as beings existing in the same world in which I live. Despite the contrived circumstances in which they do so, these people are enacting their own reality, improvising as we do in everyday life, and reacting to their environment.

McKee (2003), states in his guidebook to textual analysis that the method is about empirically exploring the way in which cultures make meaning from texts. Before embarking on my analysis, I needed to establish the context in which the text exists. The context of *Survivor* can mean a myriad of things: as a television program, its context within the CBS schedule, or within the Thursday night schedule; as a reality TV program, its context in the history of reality programming (previously established in chapter 3); as a series, its context are the seasons that went before. *Survivor*: *Samoa* exists within a larger cultural system in which the self is celebrated (as discussed in chapter 2). Exerting a unique personality is the goal of a perfectly achieved presentation of self, according to our individualist culture. Therefore, with these contextual elements in place, my textual analysis on *Survivor: Samoa* will explore the way in which characters are cultivated and situated as potential agents of the narrative.

Theoretical lens

Using the textual analysis paradigm I employed an in-depth view of not only the characters as stand-alone individuals, but also their impact on each other. I employed a unique theoretical lens that combined a narrativist approach to storytelling situated within the context of the therapeutic. Were my questions different, I could have chosen a typical television studies, or cultural studies lens, borrowing from Stuart Hall (2001), Fiske (1992) and others. Instead, I took a more individualist approach, consistent with contemporary public philosophy (Lippmann, 2003; Hymowitz, 2003; Lasch-Quinn,

2004). Also, as Kavka (2008) explains, characters on reality TV have personalities and idiosyncrasies that make them unique and compelling to watch. Therefore, I treated each character as a new location of meaning, instead of assigning meaning to them based on preconceived demographic notions. While ideological constructions were considered, the framework on the analysis was not exclusive to this view.

Sample

I analyzed the 15 episodes that made up the 19th season of the television series *Survivor* along with the blog posts that host Jeff Probst wrote for EW.com. This two-part sample allowed for a more in-depth look at the characters featured on the show, as well as a greater understanding about Jeff Probst's opinions. As an executive producer and host of the show, his dual role makes his perspective pivotal to how I analyzed the agency granted to the characters throughout the season.

   The show

As reported on *CBS Sunday Morning* (2010), *Survivor* set many of the standards that exist in most other reality TV formats today. The story of *Survivor* is rooted in a simple format consistent through all previous iterations of the series: 20 castaways surviving the elements in a remote and exotic locale to remain the sole survivor and winner of the $1 million prize.

Each episode pared down about three days worth of footage to include all spheres of action. At camp life, we witness the social interactions, strategizing and overall survival tactics of our cast. During challenges tribemates worked together (or individually depending on how far along it was in the seasons) to win a luxury reward or immunity. The luxury award typically involved food, an extravagant excursion (i.e. a helicopter ride

to a remote waterfall), or necessary items to make camp life easier (i.e. a tarp, or fishing equipment, etc.).

Tribal council was a ritualistic meeting of the tribe to determine who would be voted out of the game. Host Jeff Probst acted as moderator and probed the tribe members to expose strategic and social aspects of the game. As was often the case, Probst is able to reveal aspects of the social game that helped explain who voted for whom and how the tribe got along. Later on in the season, the last nine tribe members voted out of the game comprised the jury. From the time they were voted off until the final tribal council jury, members sat in on tribal council gathering information that will help them make their choice at the end. The jury was extremely important because they decided who won the $1 million.

I chose *Survivor: Samoa* because at the start of this project it was the most current, completed season. Season 19 was representative of the series as a whole and offered a compelling cast of characters to analyze. *Survivor*, as a series, was chosen for textual analysis because it continues to be successful and prominent example of reality programming. Also, it is the longest running competition reality show still on the air and its formula has been replicated through many other programs. Its longevity and duplication throughout the world[16] make *Survivor* one of the most important reality programs in history.

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[16] At last count, the show has been adapted for 43 different countries around the world.

Survivor: Samoa

Season 19 of *Survivor* consists of 16 episodes and premiered September 17, 2009 on CBS. Since its debut in May 2000, *Survivor* always airs on Thursday nights[17], with the exception of the live finale/reunion show that airs on Sunday nights. The season finale of season 19 aired on December 20, 2009.

The 15 episodes offered a succession of events that lead to the Natalie's victory and Russell H.'s demise; despite the many obstacles Natalie, and not Russell H. won the $1 million prize. From the beginning, Russell H. had his eyes set on wining the money and prove he was willing to manipulate, lie and sabotage his own team in order to do so. Throughout the game Russell H. and some other key characters made key strategic moves to alter the course of the game.

The 20 castaways were placed into two tribes: Galu and Foa Foa. In the opening sequence, the tribe members has to pick their leader based on looks alone, without being able to speak to each other. Mick was elected for Foa Foa and Russell S. for Galu. After competing in a challenge the newly formed tribes were sent to their campsites to build their shelters and begin the game. One new twist was that as tribes won challenges, they could select one tribe member to join their rivals for a day at their camp, picking up on information and other inside secrets. These chosen adversaries were also allowed to sit in on Tribal Council, but not permitted to witness the vote. This new twist allowed for some significant plot points, as I will describe in what follows. Below is a table outlining the airdates, titles, challenge descriptions and tribal council decisions for each episode. In

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[17] Starting with season 21, the show has moved to Wednesday nights.

what follows I will summarize key points to offer the reader a better understanding of

how the plot unfolded on *Survivor: Samoa*.

TABLE 2: Episode guide for *Survivor: Samoa*

Airdate	Episode Title	Challenge(s) - R = Reward, I = Immunity	Immunity Winner	Voted out at Tribal Council
9/17/09	1:The Puppet Master	I: Obstacle course	Galu	Marisa
9/24/09	2: Taking Candy from a Baby	I: "Schmergen Brawl"	Galu	Betsy; (Mike medically extracted from the game)
10/1/09	3: It's Called a Russell Seed	I: Swimming to retrieve pieces to a moving puzzle that must be assembled	Galu	Ben
10/8/09	4: Hungry for a Win	R: Bocce Ball I: Tightrope, followed by stacking blocks to create an 8' tower	Foa Foa	Yasmin
10/15/09	5: Walking on Thin Ice	R: "Survivor Smoothies" I: Hold a rope while other tribe threw coconuts into the net attached	Galu	Ashley
10/22/09	6: This is the Man Test	R & I: Blindfolded tribe members roll a sphere towards a rolling ball maze while a tribe mate in the sphere calls out orders.	N/A	Russell S. medically evacuated. No one voted out.
10/29/09	7: Houdini Magic	R: Memory game I: Used paddle boats to retrieve pieces to a puzzle that selected members put together	Galu	Liz
11/5/09	8: All Hell Breaks Loose	I: T-ball skee ball	John & Laura	Erik
11/12/09	9: Tastes Like Chicken	R: Split into two teams, each had to decipher an "analog" code and repeat to a blindfolded team member who used it to open a combination lock. I: Grappling hook toss to retrieve a puzzle piece to fit into a board which released more pieces one by one until all empty spaces were filled.	Laura	Kelly
11/19/09	10: The Day of Reckoning	R: Floating on gurney while 4 tribemates maneuvered a pulley system , one person had to move, in order, flags from one location to another. I: Two-part challenge in which characters won arrows based on how many tiles they could break with one rock. Then used the arrows to get as close to the target as possible in round two.	Mick	Laura
11/26/09	11: Never-seen-before scenes recap episode	N/A	N/A	N/A
12/3/09	12: Off with Their Heads!	R: "Survivor Auction" I: Endurance tested while holding a knotted rope attached to a heavy beam	Jaison	John
12/10/09	13: Damage Control	I: Bowling Tournament	Jaison	TC1: Dave

		I: Tribe members swam to retrieve sandbags. Once collected they had to launch them into their basket.	Brett	TC2: Monica
12/17/09	14: Two Brains are Better than One	R: Series of strings interwoven to support a large collection of coconuts. Tribe members pulled strings one-by-one causing coconuts to fall. The tribe with the least number of coconuts won. I: Tribe members counted various objects in a remote location and used those numbers to open a lock.	Brett	Shambo
12/20/09	15: This Game Ain't Over	I: While balancing a small Samoan statuette tribe members had to extend the pole it rested on after various lengths of time.	Russell	Brett

On the first night at Foa Foa Russell H. proved he was a scoundrel. He poured out water from his tribe mates' canteens, burned Jaison's socks and told a tall tale about his fake experience during the devastating Hurricane Katrina. Those that didn't trust him or were not loyal to him were voted out as soon as he was able to get the chance. By episode three he had found a hidden immunity idol, which granted the bearer immunity from the tribal council vote should they present it to Jeff before the votes were read, without any clues. He formed a quick alliance with Natalie and slowly let in Mick and Jaison into the fray after they proved loyal to him and his strategies.

Also on Foa Foa was Ben, a self-professed hillbilly who was crass, crude and as it turned out, racist. After being the first contestant *ever* to be kicked out of a challenge, the rest of the tribe started to see what Betsy and Jaison were seeing: Ben was becoming a liability. His volatile nature was out in full-force when he and Jaison argued about the racially charged comments Ben had made toward Yasmin (a Galu member) when she was sent to Foa Foa after her team won a challenge. This debate occurred at Tribal Council and with his prejudices and scathing temper, Ben was sent home that very night.

Galu was a tight unit, with one exception: Shambo. She was a more off-beat character and did not fit in with her tribe mates. The drama and tension that mounted between her and the rest of her tribe would set the course for the rest of the season. When Shambo was selected *twice* to go to the Foa Foa camp after Galu won challenges, she was feeling even more marginalized by her tribe. This trip to Foa Foa proved to be a pivotal plot point. She was welcomed at Foa Foa and felt more of a connection with them than her own tribe mates at Galu. This relationship between Foa Foa and Shambo would prove beneficial for all parties involved.

Halfway through the season, episode 8, the tribes merged into one. Due to Foa Foa's previous succession of losses, the odds were stacked against the remaining four tribe members. However, thanks to Natalie's persuasive capabilities with the Galu women, she convinced her former enemies to get rid of their own and Erik was voted out at the first tribal council after the merge. The reign of Foa Foa continued until the final episode when Brett, the only surviving member of Galu won his third immunity in a row. The Foa Foa four were forced to vote out one of their own, Jaison was the unfortunate victim in that strategic move.

Russell H., who heretofore had never won an individual immunity challenge, won the very last one, which guaranteed his spot in the top three and final Tribal Council. Subsequently, Brett was sent home and Mick and Natalie joined Russell H. for the jury's final vote. In the end, the jury found Russell H.'s lying and manipulating to be unworthy of the $1 million prize and instead awarded it to Natalie since her character exhibited more integrity and honesty throughout the game.

The blog

In addition to the primary text (the 15 episodes that make up *Survivor: Samoa*), I also conducted an intertextual analysis of Jeff Probst's weekly blog as it appeared on EW.com (*Entertainment Weekly*'s website). His synopses included great information about behind-the-scenes information as well as his opinions about the various cast members. Probst's role on the show was necessary to include because at once he is an executive-producer, host and character within the narrative. Also, it was pivotal in understanding the favoritism that emerged regarding Russell Hantz's character and the impact that had on the narrative at large.

Anyone familiar with the show understands the importance of Jeff Probst's voice within the narrative of the show. Therefore using his blog was the best possible way to understand what he was thinking throughout. His insights mattered both inside the game and outside in the context of his blog. He took this online forum, in the shape of his EW.com hosted blog, to address questions from fans. Incidentally, he would comment and react to what fans posted both in the comments section of his previous blog as well as other online viewer feedback. It was an interesting location where the producer of the show meets its audience. This provided a unique look into the narrative of the show and Jeff's role within it.

Procedure

The unit of analysis in this study is the character. As I have established in previous chapters, the character is the location of interest for this project and for *Survivor* in general. Therefore, all aspects of the character were examined: the way s/he interacts with others on the program, in their surroundings, and with the camera. As with most

texts, the character cannot be separated from the rest of the narrative. Therefore, filmic elements such as camera angles, setting, montage and mise en scene will all be considered in the development of each character. The socializations between tribe mates as well as the interactions with Probst was explored based on their contributions to both character identity and the story as a whole.

Each episode was viewed a minimum of 5 times (some were viewed up to 7 times to ensure I had accurately captured some thematic elements unearthed in the data analysis). Each viewing was purposeful and began with a distinct objective. The first viewing was a preliminary exposure to the show, while it was occurring within the season. In this initial screening, I discovered new plot twists as they occurred with no prior knowledge to the show's ultimate outcome. The next 4 subsequent viewings also occurred in sequential order as the season progressed, but were viewed on DVD copies of the original airings obtained through my DVR and recordable DVD player. Viewing 2 was met with the challenge of exploring how the cinematic aspects of the show contributed to the narrative. The 3rd time I watched the season I took careful notes about body language and the visual aspects of the character. The 4th and 5th screenings were highly concentrated on dialogue; I decided to transcribe (as accurately as I could) the spoken lines in an effort to truly capture the characters' voices in the final analysis.

After these first 5 viewings, I performed a preliminary data analysis in which I explored the notes and dialogue to understand the meaning of the text as it pertained to my research questions. From here, I uncovered many themes, some of which needed some clarification from specific episodes. Therefore, the 6th and 7th viewings were done with the purpose of looking for further clarification and making sure my themes were

exhaustive, based on my research questions. As McKee (2003) advises, this is the best way to ensure thorough results.

Once all the viewings were complete I hired a graduate student to time code the characters' appearances within each episode. Per my instruction, the media studies graduate student watched each episode carefully to time the characters significant appearance. The objective for this additional treatment of the text was to quantify which characters were allotted the most screen time. Based on my knowledge of previous seasons, and this season in particular, an appearance of three seconds or longer was enough to recognize a character as being part of a scene. Due to the fast-paced nature of the show, that meant a lot of appearances were not counted. However, the brevity of those particular appearances made them insignificant to my objective. This was done to understand in a formal, quantitative way, how much and how predominantly the producers featured each character.

I chose to use Probst's blogs as a secondary extension of my textual analysis. Therefore, once my episodes were analyzed, I used the emergent themes as a lens when examining the blogs. This proved a fruitful method since I was able to get the producer's perspective using Jeff Probst's own words[18]. Also, these blog posts were intended as a companion piece to the show and not meant to trump the show in any way; for my study and for the purposes of Probst's intent, the blog was secondary to the episodes.

Role of the researcher

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[18] There is nothing to indicate that someone else wrote the blog postings. The blogs were presented as being his own writing and was meant to be read from his perspective. Therefore, even if someone else did, s/he was careful enough to keep Jeff Probst's style of speech throughout.

As with any scholarly inquiry, it is important to address my role as the researcher since the analysis is subjective and the result of my life experience. I am a fan and avid viewer of the *Survivor* series. In May 2000, I was a reluctant viewer and even bashed the whole concept of reality programming. Then during season 7, the first All-Star season of *Survivor,* I began to thoroughly enjoy the show and questioned the realism being presented. In my undergraduate studies I explored documentary film, and fiction films based on true stories. Therefore, the concept of realism is something that has been part of my intellectual life for a long time. My scholarly interest in *Survivor* and other types of reality television is evident in my graduate work marked by my master's thesis and an undergraduate course I taught on the subject in 2008.

Further, I genuinely enjoy watching *Survivor* and believe that its place in our culture is not a sign of further cultural degeneration. Instead, my philosophical belief regarding *Survivor* is that it is a reflection of our culture's interest in individualism and the centrality of self. Also, I find the design of RTV story telling to be a unique narrative produced from a culture obsessed with fame and cultivating the self.

It would be impossible to approach the text of *Survivor* in an unbiased and unfiltered way. The lens of my experience with the show and other reality programming will tint my view and color my observations. However, I plan to explore the text keeping my inclinations in full view so as not to mislead readers or present my data in a way that would suggest any kind of objectivity. The current study is a subjective one and it is my hope that others will react to my conclusions thoughtfully and inquisitively. The aim of this study is to explore a phenomenon that I have observed in my dealings with *Survivor* and to understand how character identity is co-authored by the character him/herself. This

is a departure from other narrative forms, so I am aware of that constraint. The challenge of carving out this new terrain is obvious, so I embark with care and a clear course of action. In the future, I hope that this groundwork leads to further inquiry regarding character identity formation within audience perception studies and other aspects of media effects.

CHAPTER 6: PRODUCER CONTROL

Survivor: *Samoa*, as a text, provided several ways characters and the team of collaborators that put the show together each week shared authorial control. From my analysis I found three types of narrative agents that contributed to the storytelling process: the producers, the characters, and a then a unique mix of the two. While each influenced the other, it is necessary to separate these authorial powers because they served unique functions. Therefore, in the following next three chapters, each type of narrative agency is thoroughly examined using examples from *Survivor: Samoa*.

Results overview

In chapter 7 my results of the textual analysis helped me answer my first research question:

RQ1: *What evidence exists within* Survivor: Samoa *demonstrating that characters have some agency in creating the narrative of the show?*

The themes and subthemes uncovered in the analysis provided many examples for character agency. The characters, participants operating without a script, were allowed some authorial power based on their appearance, the manner in which they spoke and what they said, as well as their strategic game play. Further, these concepts belong to the larger construct of character performance: the enactment of impression management that each individual achieved within the confines of the contrived world of *Survivor: Samoa*.

In chapter 8, I answer my second research question using exemplars of character creation and juxtaposition; both are thematic elements of *Survivor: Samoa* that demonstrate how characters and the team of content producers work together to create a unique narrative.

RQ2: *How does the combination of authors – characters and content producers – contribute to the narrative of* Survivor: Samoa?

Since RQ3 was so closely connected to the answer of RQ1, it is also addressed in chapter 7.

RQ3: *How do characters contribute to their identity, the identity of others on* Survivor: Samoa *and does this ability imply agency*?

Specifically, characters contributed to their own identity and the identity of others through their character performance. Their ability to shape their identity was precisely what afforded them agency within the narrative, as demonstrated with RQ1. The choices they made regarding their appearance, what they said and how they played the game added not only to their identity, but also allowed them to exercise control over the *Survivor: Samoa* narrative.

In what follows, in chapter 6, I detail the power that the team of content producers had over the narrative as well. Despite no formal research questions regarding the producers (defined later in this chapter as a special group of staff members who were key decision makers for *Survivor: Samoa*) this would be an incomplete treatment of *Survivor: Samoa* and narrative control to omit such an integral group. Addressing their role within *Survivor: Samoa* also provides a more comprehensive framework when considering the characters' unique contributions. The following chapters are divided based on these three narrative agents, the producers, the characters and the dynamic interplay between the two groups of individuals that allow for a unique multi-authorial narrative structure.

The Producers

The primary difference between typical television programming and reality television like *Survivor: Samoa* is a lack of scripted characters. As with every type of

television show, *Survivor: Samoa* was a production that necessitated a collaborative effort on behalf of many individuals: creative producers, editors, set designers, camera operators, art directors, and other relevant staff. Their collective role is vital because they create the world in which the characters' experiences, dialogues, relationships and game play exist. The set designers made the challenges, and provided the primal, yet campy tribal council backdrop. The casting directors combed through the thousands of audition tapes and selected the best assortment of participants to play the game. The editors pared down the footage to create a cohesive narrative and added the musical crescendos when appropriate. The producers and executive team made the ultimate decisions about what aired, what the rules were, and also negotiated aspects of product placement, contracts with the network and the talent (i.e. Jeff Probst). This select group - set designers, editors, producers, and casting directors - will be referred to as the *Producers*. To be clear, the term "Producers" refers to the individuals whose title is producer along with others that contribute to the narrative of each episode. The Producers of reality shows like *Survivor: Samoa* perform slightly different roles than their fictional television counterparts because they give up a significant amount of power to the characters. However, the show itself is the result of the Producers countless decisions to create the finished product we watch on television.

Based on my analysis there were five ways in which the Producers contributed to the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. First and foremost is the *format* of the show itself. While relatively unchanged since the show's inception in May 2000, some vital additions were made over the last 19 seasons that introduced new elements such as allowing spies from the other tribe to visit camp, and hidden immunity idols. Also, *casting* represents

the Producers integral decision-point and had an immense impact on the narrative.

Additionally, the role of *Jeff Probst* as host and executive producer demonstrated how,

unlike other narrative forms, the Producers and the characters interacted within the

narrative instead of outside of or unbeknownst to the audience. The Producers condensed

the plot through *editing* the narrative into the 44 minutes allotted each episode. The use of

montage and clever editing exposed otherwise hidden elements of the narrative[19] while

hiding other aspects of the show from viewers, like a sound person's microphone.

Finally, the use of various *cinematic devices* including camera angles and shot

composition (or mise en scene) were important choices only the Producers could make.

All of these themes are explored to demonstrate the Producers collective power in

creating the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*.

Format of Survivor: Samoa

The format is the most tangible way that the Producer takes control of the

narrative. It is the fictive world the Producers created for the purposes of the show. In the

ten years that preceded *Survivor: Samoa*, relatively little has changed of the television

franchise's format. Specific elements such as location and nature, tribal merge and jury,

and immunity idols were all pre-meditated, prescribed and directly under the control and

manipulation of the Producers.

Location and Nature

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[19] Editing can allow for reaction shots, stolen glances and other narrative intricacies some of which might not have existed concurrently with the other material in the scene. Regardless, using editing in this way is one of the devices the Producers use to control the storytelling process.

Each season of *Survivor* is set in an idyllic natural locale. The visual cues of the untouched setting trick audiences into thinking that the Producers have not tampered with these exotic places. Even the constructed sets for challenges and tribal council are made of natural elements and not plastic or brightly colored. The participants live in a natural setting without the benefit of pre-fabricated structures or soundstages to provide the best lighting and other more typical television production elements. Despite the natural appearances, these locations are sufficiently scouted so as to leave almost nothing to chance. For example, while the Producers could not predict the rain, they could prepare for it and relish in the drama that it ignited with the *Survivor: Samoa* cast.

Preparations and pre-meditated choices were of the utmost importance regarding the location of each season. I assume that the Producers choose campsites that provide basic resources such as fresh water (often times found in reservoirs left by the Producers) and some kind of naturally occurring edibles. As such, the landscapes are typically jungles on the edge of a large body of water[20] in a warm climate. I also assume the Producers choose exotic warm climates because they allow for hunting, fishing and foraging necessary for their survival. These locations influence the participants' clothing choices; when the weather is warm people tend to wear less. While this might be a frustrating for the editors who must blur out exposed body parts, the lack of clothing provides a more titillating experience for the audience.

Another consideration for location besides climate is cost-effectiveness. Since the Producers do not pay their participants in the same way actors are paid on fictional programming, set design, travel and staff boarding expenses are the largest expenditures.

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[20] Of the latest 22 seasons, only 3 took place in arid or non-tropical locations.

Season 19, *Survivor: Samoa* introduced a new cost saving tactic in which two seasons were shot back to back in order to save money and resources (Lorren, 2010).

In addition to being economical, using the same location allowed for leveraging the extensive research and location scouting that were necessary to avert as many unknown circumstances as possible. Therefore, it is more than likely that the Producers knew they scheduled the taping of *Survivor: Samoa* to occur during Samoa's rainy season. The Producers would have had no way of controlling the exact amount and time of the rain that dominated season 19. However, they were most likely aware of the risks of a particularly rough outdoor experience when they selected Samoa during the rainy season. In fact, not long after season wrapped, a tsunami hit the region ('Survivor' Samoa SAFE, 2009).

Unlike recent seasons, surviving the elements was a poignant narrative element in season 19. Much like was the case in the earliest *Survivor* seasons (1 and 2), in *Survivor: Samoa* combating the elements was as essential as winning immunity challenges. More so than perhaps any other season, *Samoa* was the most arduous and taxing on the characters. In fact, we can attribute two medical evacuations to the intense weather and living conditions: Mike in episode two and Russell S. in episode six.

Characters' experiences and reactions to the unrelenting weather became part of their personalities and in turn, part of the narrative. While a subtler device of the *Survivor* series, how characters interact with nature was telling of their personality and shaped their personas. For example, Russell H. seemed to enjoy the unrelenting rain spanning almost a week, stating that it just made him stronger. He made this statement alongside a

miserable Jaison whose feet and hands were grotesque because of their constant exposure to the cold rain.

Jeff Probst commented about the rainy conditions in a voice over before episode seven:

> After 15 days the biggest threat to both tribes was the weather, especially Foa Foa. While the constant cold and rain sucked the life out of most of them, Russell [H.] thrived, as Galu, a break in the rain and their 9 to 5 advantage made things a lot more bearable… but the extreme conditions got to Russell [S.] who passed out due to extreme dehydration and exhaustion (Probst, episode 7).

As Probst pointed out, nature provided the most drama up to that point in the season. Even Russell H.'s villainy could not best Nature, since it was able to eliminate one of the strongest players in the season, Russell S. Therefore, Nature could be counted as an agent of control within the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa* and really any season of *Survivor*. The format of the show pre-determined where the season would be located, but it was Nature that determined how that location would play a role within the game.

Another example of Nature's influence on the game was during episode 5 when all of Foa Foa was forced under the shelter before tribal council. Ashley pointed out how Nature had literally forced them each into a corner for the upcoming vote:

> **Ashley** (*direct address*): Normally before tribal council, we're all running around scrambling and deciding how you're going to vote, but today we're all cooped up in the shelter and can't strategize. Can't do much without people hearing… I have no idea what everyone else is doing. (Ashley, episode 5)

Later on, even Russell H. the ultimate schemer of the season found he was at a loss because of the close quarters. The rain also affected performance in challenges; some contestants sat out of challenges due to overly soaked hands and feet that would shred in a contest that involved holding coconut laden nets with ropes (episode 5).

In a reward challenge (episode 3) before the rain Russell S., of the winning Galu tribe, decided that blankets and pillows would be the best choice over the tarps and fishing gear. Kelly, a member of the Galu tribe and major proponent of the blankets and pillows decision soon saw how shortsighted the choice was: "it's been a lot of water – the blankets are all wet. I'm actually regretting choosing the blankets instead of the tarp right now – it's just bad" (Kelly, episode 5). These essential items were provided by the Producer to protect the characters against Nature's elements because the Samoan rain forest location proved to be exactly what it was – a rain forest. It was unclear whether Russell S.'s decision to not opt for the tarp would have affected a vote in getting rid of a short-sighted leader, but it is for certain that the weather was to blame for his early departure from the game. Due to extreme exhaustion and dehydration, Russell S. was medically withdrawn from the game.

Nature also provided the backdrop for the entire season. The Producers used the best that Nature could provide in establishing shots, b-roll footage and framing each shot. The editors and cinematographers captured the gorgeous locations through close-up images of rain forest pests like ants and snakes as well as majestic views of tropical flowers and soothing beachscapes. The gorgeous shots taken from the air of the coastlines, the crashing waves, and the wild jungles demonstrated the beauty of Nature and emphasized its role within the show. Aerial views of the characters in the midst of battle (during challenges) placed them as mere specks in beautiful surroundings, which heightened the awareness of their dire yet trivial situation – battling on a reality television show in the middle of paradise.

Tribal merge and jury

In addition to choosing a location, the rules and ritual aspects of the show were vital foundational elements of the format of *Survivor: Samoa*. The Producers exercised this structural power to constrain the action as much as they could with their unscripted participants. The tribal merge and jury were pivotal to how the plot unraveled. The effect was particularly meaningful because the characters on *Survivor: Samoa* had prior knowledge of the format since they were all viewers of past seasons.

As even the characters acknowledged within the show, the tribal merge marked the point in the season when *Survivor* became a game played by individuals rather than tribes. It changed the tone of the game and was a predetermined way the Producer could shake up the tribes and change the dynamics between the characters. After the tribal merge, individual immunity was the prize at challenges and characters realized that the game was coming to an end.

For example, Russell and his tribe anticipated the merge on the day it happened; they were in tune with the format of the game and strategized on how to make it work for them. Their tactics, and dedication to stick together, despite the individualized nature of the post-merge game, worked in their favor. The tribal merge in any season is a pivotal plot point, but in the case of season 19, the Foa Foa tribe used their familiarity with the format advantageously: despite being outnumbered four to eight, three Foa Foa members made it to the final tribal council.

The tribal merge also marked the beginning of jury formation. The uniqueness of *Survivor* is that colleagues within the game decide the final winner: not the viewers, or a panel of judges, but the ones who were fighting to survive alongside the finalists. Other

reality TV programs have adopted a similar concept, but *Survivor* perfected this key format element. The result of having a jury of peers decide the finalists' fate was that it made the post-tribal merge social game all the more tricky.

Immunity idols

The other key element of *Survivor: Samoa's* format was the immunity idol. The Producers placed the immunity idol into the format of the show, but it was up to the characters to find it and determine how to use it. Like the tribal merge and jury, characters understood its importance from their knowledge of previous seasons. This vital format component also gave the remaining Foa Foa an edge after the merge.

The immunity idol added suspense and intrigue to a game already laden with social scheming, backstabbing and double talk. Since season 11, an on-set *Survivor* staff person hides an idol around the camp (or "exile island," as was the case with seasons 12 thru 14). Each clue to find the hidden immunity idol was earned or discovered at a challenge or within a reward basket. Once the immunity idol was found, the bearer could do what s/he wanted with it; they could give it away, keep it, use it as leverage with other players, and ultimately present the idol at tribal council to Jeff Probst, negating all votes cast against that character. The classic, "will they or won't they?" anticipation was at the root of the idol's drama. Sometimes, the strategy is to make the idol's possessor believe that s/he is safe and not at risk of being voted out. If that is the case, the participant could choose to not use it or to give it away[21]; there was risk no matter what. The idol promises

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[21] Giving away an immunity idol had only happened once up to that point in season 16 (*Survivor: Micronesia – Fans vs. Favorites*). It is still debated as the dumbest move in *Survivor* history because the poor young man, Erik, who gave his idol away, was promptly voted out that same night.

the power of immunity, which can mean the difference between going home and being a runner-up (as was the case in season 19 with Russell H.).

In season 19, the immunity idol defined a large part of Russell's success. He demonstrated how prior knowledge of the game and its format could be most advantageous to a character's strategy. Russell H. was the first in *Survivor* history to find a hidden immunity idol without any clues. In all, Russell found three hidden immunity idols. His possession of these vote-negating artifacts allowed him to coast through challenges and manipulate others into trusting him. Unlike Erik, Russell put his immunity idols to very good use.

Erik offered an example of what not to do with an immunity idol. With relatively little to guide him (he had a hearsay clue from Shambo), Erik also found an immunity idol. Unfortunately for Erik, he did not use his power wisely and instead became too confident in his alliance.

> **Erik** (*direct address*): Foa Foa – the only thing they have going for them is they have a new beach and new people to talk to. They're starting over. They're on day 2 I have the immunity idol and that's power in this game. They think they're going to make friends and we're like our name Aiga, it means extended family (sticks his finger in his mouth and make a gagging sound). Extended family? What's Samoan for get the hell off my island? (Episode 8)

In episode eight, Erik foolishly ordered the Foa Foa tribe to vote a certain way, which exposed his confidence and lack of faith in their strategic ability. As a result, he unknowingly became the Foa Foa target. At tribal council Erik did not play his idol, but Russell did. When he stood up Russell said, "If I have the immunity idol I might as well play it," (Russell, episode 8). Russell did not know that Erik also had an idol, but from the viewer's perspective, Russell's words could have also been advice to Erik. He also

had the idol and had he played it, Jaison would have left that night and the balance of power might have stayed with Galu for the remainder of the season.

The format provides a fictive world where immunity idols, tribal merges and juries exist. All of the contrivances of *Survivor: Samoa*'s format allowed for participants to develop into multi-dimensional characters throughout the season. For example, Russell H. presented himself as a keen strategist based on his knowledge of the game from past seasons. He sought out the idols without clues and used them wisely. Therefore, even when the Producers were able to exert their control through the show's format, it was up to the characters to decide how they would behave and react to the contrived situations.

Casting

The fictive world the Producers contrived on *Survivor: Samoa* was populated with non-scripted participants. Their words and behaviors did not have the benefit of a formal script. Instead, their actions and speech were based on their own perceptions within the show and the experiences they brought to the game. Despite their "actual" people status (i.e. not paid actors), these participants were carefully selected, or cast. There is a science to casting that ensures the most drama and inspires the most intrigue (Carr, 2006). Hence, it is up to the casting producers to perform due diligence when selecting each person: background checks, psychological testing, and extensive interviews part of this process. When they see the audition tapes and meet the prospective cast members, the casting producers can understand how that person's character might develop within the format of the show. So, when they met Russell Hantz they must have felt they happened upon a gold mine (Probst, 2009).

As Kavka (2008) stated, these individuals are not necessarily types, but variations of types. Her point is apt because casting directors must be careful to not cast based on stereotype. Instead they're tasked with selecting a diverse group of participants who will be entertaining and interesting to watch. Much of what makes people interesting on shows like *Survivor* is conflict. Therefore, casting is as much about casting interesting people as it is about predicting the conflict and drama that will arise with a specific *group* of people. Each person is selected as part of a whole, not as simply an individual. They must exhibit enough personality to survive not only the elements of the game, but the non-scripted format. Jeff Probst commented in his blog on episode one of *Survivor: Samoa* that Russell H., "writes and delivers some of the greatest material ever heard on *Survivor* in 20 years" (Probst, 2009).

Despite their best intentions and scrutiny in selection, the Producers can only control so much of what the cast does. Therefore, the casting directors must make sure in all their efforts to choose Their impacts on the narrative and the relationships they build are what make for interesting television. That said, the cast of *Survivor: Samoa* could be segmented into those who are good at playing the game and those who aren't; those who fit a type and those who don't. When looked at from afar, each character must fulfill some type of schema for us to be able to recognize and set up expectations from that character. Like any other performed narrative, the cast is essential. However, within *Survivor: Samoa* and reality television programs like it, the cast performs without a script.

Jeff Probst – Host & Executive Producer

Jeff Probst is the perfect man for the job if only for his name: Probst – part probe, part host. His role on the show is nuanced and has evolved over the last 10 years from being a charming "host" to a full on "probe," poking and prodding contestants to say what they really feel and let the more reticent speak their mind.

Photo 1: Jeff Probst. Photo credit: CBS.

Jeff Probst, the dimpled, handsome former entertainment TV magazine anchor, has a double role as executive producer and host of *Survivor*. Therefore, he's of great interest in understanding the extent to which the Producer controls the narrative. While in other texts, the Producers (or author) is implied and typically an imaginary orchestrator, Probst is out in front of the cameras summarizing plot points, picking on characters, and probing for juicier details to incite drama at tribal councils. His role as the meddling host has emerged over time and in season 19 was evident as he reacted to body language in challenges and murmurings at tribal council. He was at once all knowing and unaware. He is the sole human constant of the show for the last 10 years. He knows the game the best of anyone and his role has evolved from observant host to outright instigator within the narrative. Probst even became romantically involved with one of the characters after the show aired (Julie Barry, *Survivor: Vanuatu*, season 9), making him one of *them* also. In essence, the role of Jeff Probst can be summed up as being both within and outside the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. In order to describe what this means, I offer examples of Jeff Probst's presence within the challenges, tribal council, and voice-over narration

throughout the show. I also point out his position outside the narrative through his online

presence (via his *EntertainmentWeekly.com* blog).

Probst, the connector

Probst's wit and straightforward manner invites a trusting relationship between

the audience and the host. Like a typical game show host, Jeff Probst linked the audience

to the characters on *Survivor: Samoa*. His role was to keep us up to speed with what was

happening within the episode through voiceovers and play-by-play recounts of the action.

Probst bridged the gap between audience and narrative the way a sportscaster or news

reporter does; he told us what we needed to know from the Producers' perspective.

Jeff Probst introduced almost every episode with these words through voiceover:

"Previously on survivor" (Probst, episode 2). His narration was interspersed with scenes

reminding viewers of what had happened on the season to that point.

> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): Previously on *Survivor* - both teams have been hammered hard
> by the rain.
> **Jaison** (*in scene*): Never in my life have I been this cold, and my hands this
> destroyed, and my feet look so destroyed. [we see close up shots of his feet and
> hands shriveled and swollen from the constant rain.]
> **Kelly** (*in scene*): Now all our blankets are wet, they're really no good. We're all
> shaking it's freezing.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): After a reward, Galu has plenty to celebrate.
> **Laura** (*in scene/voiceover*): That looks so good! [Cut to image of Monica
> crouched on the ground biting into sausage on a stick.]
> **Russell S.** (*in scene*): after this I'm gonna [sic] take the other team by myself.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): The only storm they couldn't weather was Shambo.
> **Shambo** (*in scene*): Escaped chicken! Escaped chicken! (We hear this cry as we
> see the jungle with a chicken flying around.)
> **Laura** (*direct address*): Shambo's a complete Gilligan who just messes things up
> all the time.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): On her second visit to Foa Foa, it became clear that this was the
> tribe she belonged to.
> **Shambo** (*in scene*): I'm really happy to be here.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): Russell on the other hand had no friends, only targets.

> **Russell H.** (*direct address interspersed with images of each person that he mentions*): Marisa threatened me, Betsy threatened me – anytime anyone threatens me, they're going home.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): And when Liz confronted Russell…
> **Liz** (*in scene*): You are lying to me.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): …she became next on his hit list. But after Liz's strong effort in another loss, Russell put his vendetta against her on the back burner to jettison the weakest player.
> **Russell H.** (*in scene*): [Holding up his vote.] It's because of me you're going home. I'm out here playing for the $1 million - never trust me.
> **Jeff** (*voiceover*): With only 5 Foa Foa left, Liz is going to need a miracle to survive Russell's cruel intentions, assuming they all can survive the conditions. Fourteen are left. Who will be voted out tonight?

His relay of information was both a recount of what happened before and a promise of what was to come. The question at the end implied a potential plot spoiler – would Liz be going home? Each episode had Probst in voiceover summarizing the show for the viewer at both the beginning and end of the program. We were told, through Probst's voice, who to be concerned with, who to follow and what to expect. His words matched the images shown and his witticisms extended beyond the typical campy host fodder into the observational and insightful.

However, the use of Probst's voiceover was not as one-dimensional as telling what happened; the Producers' motivations can be deciphered when exposing the various layers of meaning behind these introductions. Probst's role as the connector was to tell the audience what happened in relation to what was about to happen; he connected the audience to the narrative through his voice. The ritual of the disembodied narration was reminiscent of a documentary film trope and automatically imbued the words with a certain level of trust. The omniscient Jeff Probst could offer us more information because he had the benefit of seeing all of the footage; his narration was done in post-production and the temporal quality of his words implied this look back on what had happened.

The result of this trust was that we, the audience, fell prey to the foregrounding that occurred within Probst's voiceover commentary. For example, early on Probst emphasized Russell H.'s antics and began every[22] episode highlighting some thing or another that Russell had done in the previous episode. This was remarkable because unlike all the other characters, Russell was the only one to receive this type of treatment. Since the audience trusted Probst to tell us the most succinct version of what was happening they took for granted that Russell was the most important person to watch out for in *Survivor: Samoa*. Unbeknownst to the audience at the time, Russell H. was already cast in season 20, *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains* as a member of the villain's tribe (Denhart, 2009). Therefore, it was in the Producer's best interest to foreground this larger than life character, Russell H. Featuring Russell H. occurred most effectively through Probst's narration at the beginning and end of each show.

Another key component of Probst's role as a connector was his commentary throughout the show and within the challenges and tribal council. In episode 1, Probst remarked at how heavy the bundle of logs was to lift and how strong Russell H. must be because he carried them, instead of rolling them like the others. His running commentary sounded like a sportscaster relaying each play. For example, in episode 1 he said: "Russell unlocks the chain, he's got no problem with that first bundle of logs! Erik gets his first bundle…" (Probst, episode 1). His enthusiasm and commentary made him at once an observer and a participant, allowing for viewers to feel like they were part of the

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[22] Probst highlighted him in his voiceovers at the beginning and end of each of the 14 episodes (this did not occur in the beginning of episode 1 because we did not know him yet).

action. For example, in the final challenge Probst's commentary mixed with the editing

of sweating brows and teetering pole towers provided ample suspense: .

> **Jeff Probst:** One Foa Foa, one Galu. There are no secrets out here - Brett needs to win this. This is quite possibly the million-dollar challenge. Wind is starting to pick up now - affecting both guys. [Cut to both Brett and Russell as they begin teetering a bit] Good recovery! [Cut to a series of close ups on their hands adding another pole and their focused, concentrated looks as they increase the height of their poles.] Take your time; you have plenty of time to make this transition. [Brett quickly goes for his. Russell waiting until the last possible second.] Another successful transition! You're now at 7 feet. [Cut to Russell's hands shaking.] Brett's starting to wobble. [Cut to Brett moving his feet and trying to maintain balance.] Nice recovery! This is a showdown! Russell's now starting to wobble. Brett falls off! Russell wins individual immunity! His first and it couldn't have come at a better time!

Probst's description of the wind, calling our attention to the characters as they struggle to

balance the figurine atop the extended poles and his overall excitement in delivery

connects to audience to the action. Not only does his narration serve as a connector, but it

also tells the story with the benefit of time elapse. Therefore an extensive sequence was

shortened to combine the most important moments of the scene (Barthes & Duisit, 1975,

p. 269). Therefore, the full hour and a half long challenge was not needed because of

Probst's exciting and suspenseful narration highlighted the key points. In addition, the

audience understands the importance of the challenge: "Brett needs to win this." Also, the

viewers can connect to the dramatic suspense of the situation ignited by the wind causing

problems and the drawn out process of adding poles to make the figure balancing act all

the more difficult. With the images alone we could understand the suspense through

clever editing, but with Jeff's voice we are connected to the narrative because his

personality and perspective ties us to the events (Barthes & Duisit, 1975, p. 262).

Probst, the character

In addition to connecting us with the narrative, Jeff Probst existed within the narrative as well. He was a special kind of a character within *Survivor: Samoa*. He was scripted to some extent, unlike the other characters. As the host, his character did not evolve the same way the others did. As to be expected from a congenial host, audiences are not privy to the personal aspects of Probst's life the way we are with the other characters. For example, Jaison's desire to live up to his father's good example, Shambo's tragic loss of her siblings, or Laura's propensity to ride a Harley motorcycle with her husband to the local Starbucks were divulged throughout the season. However, such personal details were left out of Probst's character. In fact, ever since the beginning of the franchise we have learned relatively little about him on the show, save for a few references to his mother. Audiences do not expect to learn about the host, but Probst operates in a different realm. He is hardly just an observant host; Probst connected with the characters that influenced the narrative.

In addition to Probst's fly-on-the-wall commentary in challenges he lived up to his name of the "probe/host." He asked questions in order to draw out feelings, strategies and alliances. For example, in episode 15 Probst increased the tension at the start of an already high stakes challenge. It was the 2nd to last challenge of the season and Brett was the only Galu member left. After calling the remaining characters into the scene, Probst probed with the following questions:

> **Jeff** (*in scene*): Final five - Natalie Russell, Brett wearing immunity, Mick and Jaison. Russell as we go into this challenge, is it still the Foa Foa Four against the guy in purple?
> **Russell** (*in scene*): Yes it is! [Close-up of Brett reacting, then cut to Mick smiling as he put his arm around Brett's shoulders.] That's it.

Jeff (*in scene*): [To Brett] Does that energize you or make you feel like you gotta [sic] watch your back everywhere.

Brett (*in scene*): It's an individual competition, so it's definitely a motivator to know that I've got four people with the sole goal of just beating me. So yeah, it's definitely a motivator for me.

Jeff (*in scene*): You've had it two times around your neck, let's see if you can do it a third time. I'll take it back, Brett.

At that stage of the game, it was obvious that Brett was the one at the greatest disadvantage since he was the only one outside the Foa Foa alliance. Despite how obvious this was Probst asked the question to inspire Brett and provoke the others. Unlike the characters he provoked, Probst had a script and was privy to the Producers' agenda, since he was part of that group. In an effort to emphasize the underdog narrative, Probst's probing question was serving the Producers' agenda to create the most drama. The tactic seemed to work since Brett won immunity again and the Foa Foa alliance was forced to vote out one of their own.

Probst's provocation might have inspired Brett, but in another example Probst outright changed the outcome of the game. For the first time in the series he wholly influenced the outcome of a challenge in episode 2. In this challenge, 6 characters were in a fenced off arena (3 per tribe) and 6 others were on opposite, raised platforms (3 per tribe). Those in the arena wrestled their opponents for a ball to toss to their tribemates on the platform so they could shoot the ball into the basket on the other side of the arena. The challenge was extremely physical and for the first time in *Survivor* history someone was ejected from a challenge. During the challenge, Probst had the following to say:

Jeff (*in scene*): You [to Ben] are right on that line of getting ugly. There is [sic] no more warnings. Consider yourself warned if I see anything resembling a cheap shot, you are out of the challenge. [Ben kicks Russell S. in the back of the leg.] That's it! Ben you are out!

Probst warned and then disqualified Ben from the "Schmergen Brawl" competition. Probst was in the scene and had to react to the overtly violent and unsportsmanlike antics Ben and others exhibited. After the warning, most characters calmed down. But Ben pushed further until he was thrown out and even at tribal council he was still on the attack, this time the target was Probst. He reasoned that his poor sportsmanship was because he didn't realize they were "playing by your sissy rules" (Ben, episode 2). His rude remark elicited an incredulous eye roll from Probst, who was now firmly planted into the narrative and part of the story.

Like challenges, tribal council (as evidenced above) was another location where Probst exhibited his role as a character. He provoked the tribe members and asked questions that placed them in precarious situations. In one instance he asked Ashley (episode 1) if performing poorly in the challenge would dictate how she would vote. She responded, "No, it's a game. We have to vote someone out. I think we all did our best and unfortunately, they beat us" (Ashley, episode 1). Mike chimed in and said, "I disagree, I think they were lucky that they won!" (Mike, episode 1). In earlier seasons, Probst might have asked more probing questions such as "why do you think that?" However, this more involved Probst had this to say: "Birassi! You're kidding me! You were nowhere close! We'd still be there if you finished!" (Jeff, episode 1). This was a great example of how Probst became a character in *Survivor: Samoa* and influenced how viewers understood the narrative. His voice was clear, his motives were unclouded by desires to win the game, so therefore we trusted him and tended to share his viewpoints.

Probst, the critic

Probst as a character and connector made him the quintessential critic for *Survivor: Samoa*. Beginning with season 17 (*Survivor: Gabon*) Jeff Probst wrote for a blog posted on *EntertainmentWeekly.com*[23]. Probst posted to his blog the morning after each episode aired. The structure of each weekly post included insights about the game both from a personal perspective and a behind-the-scenes vantage point. He would explain why things happened the way they did and rationalize some of the most deplorable behavior. Probst stated what was acceptable, deplorable, and what was just good strategy, no matter the moral consequence. He allowed us to reconcile morally questionable decisions in the name of game play. There was little that Probst felt was unacceptable, because to the host, executive producer, and official blogger of the show, he believed that those playing to win were the ones who were playing the best game.

In terms of game play, it became clear early on that Probst valued style over substance and shallow controversy over deeper social issues. For example, after a racially charged debate between Jaison and Ben, Probst commented on the men's different rhetorical styles rather than the substance of their argument. Probst stayed neutral on the topic of the argument and in doing so, he missed an opportunity to discuss the clash of racial tensions and how important it was to understand the power of language on a deeper level. Instead, Probst offered a heavy-handed interpretation of the debate exalting Jaison's superior debate skills and intellect. It might have been his veiled way of saying that he agreed with Jaison, but he never took the opportunity to discuss the deeper issue

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[23] Starting with season 21 (January, 2011), Probst started his own website where he posted his thoughts and comments on each episode. He still provided answers to a few questions the EW.com writers asked, but his formal episode recap existed on his new site.

that really mattered in this scene. Probst claimed Jaison *interpreted* Ben's comments as

racist; I would have gone so far as to say they actually *were* racist. Therefore, even as a

critic, he never steps too far out of his role as one of the Producers of the show.

Despite his flimsy interpretation of the racial debate, Probst continually opines

about the culture of *Survivor* and offers insights into his own moral philosophy while

doing so. He truly believed in the motto of the show *Outplay, Outwit, Outlast*. In fact, he

might add to that, 'by (almost) any means necessary.' Probst described his perception of

some of *Survivor: Samoa*'s most unsavory characters in his blog post of episode 2:

> Let me explain how I look at moments and people like this…I just observe. I'm a
> human being on this planet living just like you. People like Russell, Ben, Yasmin
> – they live here too. People fascinate me. We are all doing what we think is best
> for us at any given moment. It's easy to judge. Others and ourselves. I do it all the
> time. When I first met Russell I said to everyone else in the room, "That guy is
> pure evil." But he's on this show, he's doing what he's supposed to do – which is
> play *Survivor* how he sees fit – and I respect him in that sense. Making up a story
> about Katrina is downright despicable but so is lying about your dead grandma.
> "It is what it is." You can get mad at me or you can join me in taking a step back
> and just listening and observing and hoping that karma catches up and people get
> what they deserve. Then again, it is *Survivor* and sometimes karma takes a
> vacation. (Probst, 2009).

Probst admitted he enjoyed sitting back and watching people be despicable; he reveled in

the evil and found it to be perfectly acceptable within the game of *Survivor*. He never

apologized for his stance on evilness, instead he justified it because of the game. Probst

condemned those that didn't appreciate the game in the same way he did: a social and

physical game where lying and manipulating are the foundational elements for good

strategy.

In addition to providing his views on morally questionable game play, Probst also

understood the importance of narrative control. In two examples, Probst provided specific

behind-the-scenes information about how decisions he made could alter the game. In the

first example, Probst described how a flippant decision about how to execute a task

changed the challenge:

> When explaining the challenge to the Survivors I always give them a chance to
> ask questions before we run the challenge. Someone asked if they could push their
> boat instead of using paddles. Usually this is a terrible idea as the water gets too
> deep to do any pushing and the paddles are much more effective. So, without even
> consulting John Kirhoffer our Challenge Producers, I said, "Sure. Knock yourself
> out." Turns out I was wrong. That one little decision completely changed the
> challenge. It took out all of the drama of having to figure out how to paddle while
> fishing for the puzzle pieces. I knew it moments after the challenge started, but
> there wasn't anything I could do – the decision had been made. It was still a fair
> challenge, so it didn't affect the game, but my decision changed the design of the
> challenge and as a result it didn't run as well as it should. That's all on me. I blew
> it. (Probst, 2009).

This glance at what we did not see during the episode provided the audience with some

insight into how much the Producers controlled the narrative and plot. Probst admitted

this freely and his openness about the process made his voice even more legitimate; he

did not need to tell us this story, since it was not obvious on the show that there was an

issue. Therefore, his admission had two effects: it demonstrated how influential his

decisions were on the narrative and made the readers feel like they had some exclusive

insider information.

In another example, Probst demonstrated how much power the Producers

continually intended to give to the characters. During episode 6 audiences saw Russell

S.'s very dramatic medical evacuation. Probst recounted the story and explained how the

Producers' believed in letting the characters "play the game." He made an interesting

argument:

> When a Survivor appears to be in trouble, our first rule is to give them the chance
> to save themselves or see if one of their tribemates can help them before we make
> any decision about sending in medical, safety, or our water rescue team. We do
> this because it is their game, their adventure and whenever possible we want them
> to make the decisions about their fate (Probst, 2009).

Therefore, even in Russell S.'s extreme case, the instinct was to let the characters go so they could determine the plot of their story. Clearly, they did not wait long since Russell S. was in a lot of trouble medically. Yet, the impression was that every effort was made to ensure that the plot was as much untouched by the Producer as possible.

Probst, as a critic, also readily acknowledged how vital the characters' own words were to the narrative. Operating without a script is the cornerstone of *Survivor*'s unique type of television narrative. Probst argued that the best reality stars are the ones who use this aspect to their best advantage. In the first couple lines of his first blog post of the *Survivor: Samoa* season Probst said, "The truly great reality stars of today… often write their own material as well!" Later he professed, "I love Shambo! Shambo is the prototype for what we look for when casting *Survivor*. The voice, the walk, the hair! I think *Survivor* fans are going to adore Shambo and root for her to win." In these two statements he has confirmed to his blog readers that characters are stars because they make themselves stars. Their own power over their character is what affords them the ability to be one of the best. All the Producers can do is select them to be part of the cast and the rest is up to the characters.

Probst was at once inside and outside the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. He was as antagonizing and judgmental as we (the audience) were, but he did so from the inside. When our opinions coincided with his, it offered a heightened sense of trusting him. Probst was an expert of the game, he had the most insight and in the end he was the one who withheld the most information from us. He knew from the first blog post that would be in the final tribal council. His calculated maneuvering threw us off the scent and kept us watching throughout the season

Cinematic devices

In addition to Probst's unique roles, the Producers' control over the show was evident in the basic act of capturing the characters on tape and translating it into a 42-44 minute program. The cinematic qualities of *Survivor: Samoa* demonstrated the show's documentary film roots and were apparent as I investigated all aspects of the narrative. I use term *cinematic device* to describe all of those elements that contributed to the narrative using the technology of the medium. The camera operators and editors manipulated the high-definition technology through what they chose to shoot, how they framed the shots, and then what they selected for on-air presentation. There were many examples and interesting uses of cinematic devices and an entire study could focus on *Survivor*'s use of them. However, for the present study, I focused on two vital cinematic elements: mise en scene and editing.

Mise en scene

The most concrete way to understand how the Producers controlled the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa* was in what they chose to put on the screen and how it appeared (the mise en scene). The final product (i.e. each show that aired) demonstrated the Producers' ultimate control: they chose the structure of the content, or how the story would be told. Their editing choices were limited to what the camera captured, so it is important to understand each shot as part of the larger narrative. The use of establishing shots and camera angles were pivotal in creating the narrative from the Producers' perspective. Had the cameras been in the hands of the characters, we might have an entirely different view.

Establishing shots

The establishing shot located the viewer within the narrative so as to reorient the perceived audience about where they were in the story. *Survivor: Samoa* had the benefit of beautiful scenery and unusual creatures to effectively use the establishing shot. In addition these gorgeous landscapes and seascapes had the effect of transporting viewers to the exotic Samoan locale. In the first moments of the season, host Jeff Probst talked directly to the camera while it zoomed out to and extreme wide shot. By the end of his introduction to the season we saw him on the rocks with waves crashing all around him; it was remarkable! Next we cut to the cast members in their canoes, paddling and looking forward as they approached the beach. Close-ups of the soon-to-be introduced characters were interspersed with direct addresses to the camera. The epic music highlighted their ascent onto the beach from their canoes. The introductory sequence was so strong that when the music faded and we heard Jeff Probst welcome the new survivors[24], it seemed almost anti-climatic. Still, the production values inherent in *Survivor: Samoa* contributed to the exoticness and otherworld feeling that the show achieved.

Another noteworthy use of the camera was in establishing our place within the plot. Before each new scene, we were presented with a location and day title (e.g. Foa Foa Camp, Day 7) on the screen in the unique *Survivor* font. Usually the image in the background was of the tribe's flag or some other obvious aspect of the respective camp. These brief titles brought us back to the timeline of the narrative and allowed us to keep track of where we were in the story.

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[24] While also the name of the show, Probst and others in the media tend to call the cast members "survivors" in lieu of calling them cast, characters, or any other designation.

Camera angles

Survivor's documentary film roots are evidenced in the style of camera work throughout each season. In *Survivor: Samoa* examples of sweeping landscapes a la a National Geographic style documentary, and the contrived confessional set ups demonstrated a more epic and filmic aesthetic. In contrast the cinema verité approach within the camp offered a completely different visual making us feel like we were part of the action instead of watching a movie. The paradox of the two styles was appropriate for a program steeped in the realism of characters' non-scripted lives on camera while existing in a fictionalized world created by the Producers.

The choices while filming the show onsite were vital to what was later edited by the Producers; if they didn't catch it on film, it could not exist in the narrative. Unlike fictional programming, scenes with the characters could not be reconstructed since they weren't formally structured originally. Therefore, the in-the-action camera crew had to choose carefully when creating their shots. As much as possible, the mise en scene, or all of the elements of the camera's frame, needed to be deliberate and constructed. Examples of this in *Survivor: Samoa* were especially pronounced in the composition of the direct address shots. In episode one, Russell H. sat perched on a rock at the edge of a cliff with the ocean behind him. It was a beautiful scene for sure, but it also conveyed a sense of authority as he professed that all the others are his little puppets to be thrown away when he is done with them.

As was the case with Russell H., certain camera angles were chosen to convey particular insights into the characters' personae. In episode two, for example, Yasmin was up in the branches of a tree with her legs wide open, wearing a skimpy tank top and

her bikini bottoms, and shot from slightly below. This scene exhibits the Producers deliberate construction of the mise en scene to shape our perception of her story. Visually the image evoked a seductive invitation: a conventionally attractive, shapely woman with legs spread open while on a branch of a tree hovering above the male gaze in a dominating position. It was a lustful image, yet the aural aspects of the scene - her lament about how uncomfortable she was and how "nauseated" she felt (Yasmin, episode 2) - were counter to the visual. This scene captured all these aspects of Yasmin's character and neatly framed it in this confessional: she was abrasive, yet sexual, and in a compromised position. Yasmin's physical position, up in a tree, was a figurative reference to her impossible position within the game; she was likely to be voted out next.

Unlike Yasmin, Betsy did not fit the societal definition of attractive and youthful. Instead she was more matronly and conservative in her dress. To that end, the cameras did not show as a much of her full body. In contrast to Yasmin, when Betsy was in direct address to the camera we usually saw her in medium shot, just below her shoulders. Even in a less formal mise en scene when she walked with Russell H., she wrung out her swimsuit and just as it appeared we might see a glimpse of her stomach, the scene cut to another angle of Russell H. reacting to her words. In that same scene, instead of seeing her full body as she arched her back and put up her long hair (a favorite *Survivor* shot), again, we saw her in a medium shot with her ponytail holder between her teeth. She was not sexualized because she did not fit the conventions of beauty and youth; therefore the camera angles emphasized that aspect of her character.

The camera crew in these examples is an extension of the Producers power of presentation. Another noteworthy example of their ability to capture the essence of a

character using camera angles occurred in episode five. As I discussed before, this was the scene where the Foa Foa tribe was forced to remain in the shelter huddled together due to the rain instead of being able to discuss, out of earshot of the others, who they wanted to vote out at tribal council. . Natalie suggested they all "vote for who they think" should go home, and while the rest of the tribe mulled over that idea Russell approached the shelter. When he stopped at the entrance he remained standing, his hands were extended up to lean onto the roof of the shelter while he leaned his head in towards his tribemates and out from the rain. In his authoritative, heavy-handed way he asked them if anyone wanted to go home. As he spoke I could almost imagine puppet strings coming from his fingers above his tribemates. What a thoughtful composition of the shot: the camera angle had the tribe members at eye level and Russell was hovering above, while his massive hands held onto the eave of the shelter. His famous puppet speech was not lost on this camera operator as s/he got the most opportune shot of Russell forcing his tribemates to make a decision about who to send home.

Editing

As I've demonstrated throughout this chapter, the Producers' control was omnipresent within the *Survivor: Samoa* narrative. Their ability to shape the story and present it to the viewers was most evident in the editing process. First, the editors and the executive producers (including sometimes network executives at CBS) have many decisions to make about what makes it to the final program. Therefore, the audience must trust this throng of people to provide them with the most accurate version of the events that occurred. Since I am dealing here with manifest content and not presuming what

might have been left out, I too put my trust in the editors to tell the story in the most effective way.

Editing is vital to story telling within the reality television mega-genre. Filming occurs 24 hours of the 39 days the characters are in the game. Each show takes place over a three-day span. So how did they make choices about what to keep and what to omit? It is not just one editor or one producer who made these decisions; a team of professionals mines the footage to create the best possible story. As with all television narratives, creating a show is a long process that requires scripting, storyboarding and other practices used in fictional television and filmmaking. The key difference for *Survivor: Samoa* was that the events had already taken place, so it was the Producers' job to formulate the story after the fact.

In essence, editing was the most important aspect of creating the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. Editing created the flow and tempo of the story; it allowed for a lingering look at a character's reaction; it overlaid audio onto an illustrative video.[25] Editing entailed viewing footage of the events and choosing which scenes to include and where to place them in order to construct the narrative. Watching the daily images unedited would most likely be incredibly boring and uninteresting since events most likely unfolded slowly and not in the quick progression they are presented in each episode. *Big Brother*, another example of this type of reality television, offered exclusive content to online members who could watch the banal unedited footage of events as it happened. *Survivor: Samoa*, in contrast never offered such a service, so the Producers had to pare down 3 days worth of footage from several cameras into a 42 - 44 minute

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[25] The Producers' use of juxtaposition will be discussed in detail in chapter 8.

episode. Principle to this process was making sure that the narrative flowed from one show to the next. Also, as is a frequent practice, each episode had a theme to establish it as a single unit of entertainment.

Subtleties of editing

The Producers successfully achieved a consistent level of interest in the edited narrative by infusing it with subtleties and nuance that enhanced the story-telling experience. These clever touches provided a subtle commentary to the scenes and quietly reminded us of the Producers' perspectives. The art of subtle editing choices underlined a character's traits or emphasized a plot point. Without these sexual allusions and slight foreshadowing hints, the plot could carry on without notice, however the narrative would not be the same. These finer aspects of the Producers' control enhanced their project of creating the narrative, adding wit and a wink inherent to the *Survivor* franchise.

One great example of this occurred in a scene with Laura and Monica, two very attractive Galu members. During episode three, we were still getting to know the characters and the relationships they had with each other. The narrative began to establish the special and close relationship between Monica and Laura[26]. In one particular scene after Galu won the controversial comforters, pillows, and towels, Laura and Monica shared a special moment together in the shelter. Monica snuggled with the comforter and lay next to Laura on the pillow. Laura then proceeded to rub her back in a loving and motherly way while telling her how proud she was of her performance in the last challenge. The scene ended and cut to the next image of waves erupting through a small

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[26] In later episodes, Monica referred to Laura as a motherly type and Laura regarded Monica as a daughter-figure mentioning that they even looked alike.

opening in the coral reef along the coastline of Samoa. This image we've seen before in other iterations, so it is at once familiar and entirely suggestive. The exploding white crest of the wave in relationship to the women caressing can be read as an overt innuendo. This image provided a visual reference of arousal at the two women touching each other, despite how innocent. This is a subtle inference and did not provide any forward movement of the narrative; if this image were taken out I doubt anyone would notice. However, the fact that the Producers found it fitting to include is of most interest. In a sophomoric and silly way, the Producers exposed their dominant male perspective in reaction to two conventionally attractive women touching each other.

Another example, which also provided evidence for the Producers' male gaze, was emphasized by the music and imagery. The male gaze is a filmic term coined by Laura Mulvey (1975), which implies that as viewers we are positioned as male because of the dominant role men have in our society. So while, even as a heterosexual female, I am still positioned objectify the women on screen because the camera lens does. Despite the gender or sexual orientation of the camera operator, *Survivor* consistently uses the male gaze to portray women in an erotic way. For example, in episode eight Natalie washed her lacey yellow underpants and hung them on the tree. Washing clothes and undergarments must have been a common occurrence around camp for anyone with a knack for hygiene. Yet, this particularly banal act was included while an untold number of other such activities were excluded from the final cut. Therefore, the inclusion of this scene was of no narrative influence except to showcase Russell H.'s reaction and further emphasize his perception of Natalie as an object. The music in the background was suggestive in its obvious ode to the overly synthesized melodies used in pornographic

movies. The Producers used this footage to portray Natalie's naïveté at absent-mindedly hanging up her lingerie while Russell H. loomed behind her. His stare was creepy and the music emphasized his seediness. However, on another level we had yet another example of Russell H. perceiving Natalie not as an equal, but as a pawn or another "puppet" for him to throw away in the trash. His misogyny throughout the season was evidenced here with his loathsome ogling, which the Producers emphasized with their typified music choice.

While sexual overtones abound in the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa* (and most other seasons as well), the nuances of editing serve other purposes like foreshadowing. In episode six, for example, the Producers alluded to some rough times ahead for Russell S. with the subtle use of music and editing. It was another episode wrought with rain. The crashing waves, the unrelenting visual of the storm on the water gave way to an extreme long shot of Russell S. fishing at the ocean's edge. As we cut to an extreme close-up of Russell S.'s face the music changed to an eerie series of synthesized bells and flutes signifying something ominous. His eyes wearily closed and opened; he looked unsteady and not well. While we knew from previews that something would happen to Russell S. in this episode, but we did not know exactly what or when it would occur. This moment established a starting point for Russell S.'s downward spiral into dehydration and exhaustion. The scene was so brief that it could be missed if not for the poignant vacancy in his eyes as he shut them for just a moment too long; it was a subtle signal that his time was limited.

Soundtrack

Evidenced in the examples above regarding gloomy harmonic warning of Russell S.'s dire condition or the overt use of campy music to accentuate Russell H's crude leer, music was an essential aspect of the Producers' authorial control. As with most television shows and films, the soundtrack made an important contribution to the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. A surge of drums emphasized a victory in an immunity challenge, while a flute's melody promised a better day for a character waking after a tough night of rain[27]. The score of *Survivor: Samoa,* and all *Survivor* seasons, tended toward the use of tribal beats of drums and exotic horns. Like *Peter and The Wolf,* the use of familiar tunes helped to identify characters as we got to know them. For example, military drum rolls within a scene often preceded Shambo, due to her Marine Corps background. Ben based on his self-proclamation, as a hillbilly was prone to having a banjo tune during his pivotal scenes.

In one particular scene the use of soundtrack, camera angles, effects and editing all came together in an effort to interpret a particularly interesting plot twist. In episode twelve, Dave offended Shambo in his typical acerbic fashion. Shambo's arch nemesis, Laura, was voted out the prior night, and it was clear that Dave was now becoming the next one on her "hit list." On night 28 the Producer gave us a spectacular scene that underscored Shambo as she relayed, via voiceover, her dream about voting Dave off at the next tribal council. The use of night vision camera lens, the erratic editing style and eerie discordant strings recalled a horror movie montage or some equally campy homage.

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[27] In episode 7, John wakes and yawns to the sound of flutes in a classically inspired morning-style melody.

In her voiceover Shambo told us that God gave her a special talent to see the future. However, as she spoke the Producers created imagery more akin to being possessed by the devil; the sped-up footage of her twisting and turning with the night vision green and black to present an even more mysterious and spooky feel. The score, the editing, the mise-en-scene, all contributed to Shambo's slightly off-her-rocker character and planted the question, was Laura all that bad? It seemed that Shambo would go to great lengths to convince her fellow tribemates that they should vote off her new nemesis regardless of who it might be.

Conclusion

The Producers have the ultimate control in storytelling. They determined the major components of *Survivor: Samoa* since they established the format, decided who to cast and how to edit the raw footage into 15 compelling episodes. The art of editing cannot be understated in *Survivor*. The subtle implications of a strategically placed wave crashing to shore and the use of footage to prepare us for a twist in the plot were devices the Producers used to create the narrative. Jeff Probst was the embodiment of the Producers, and he acted on their behalf when probing for more information and asking tough questions in tribal councils. However, the content of the story was not entirely in the Producers' control since the characters were unscripted. It was the piecing together of events, and their choices in how those events were portrayed that fell directly into the Producers' domain.

CHAPTER 7: CHARACTER PERFORMANCE

The Producers decided what was aired on television, but the characters of *Survivor: Samoa* provided them with the raw material; each character was the author of his or her own material. Unlike other narrative forms, the characters did not have a script, so their performance was of their own design. Performance, in this context, is defined as a series of characters' choices in appearance, their voice within the narrative, as well as their strategic game play. In short, how they talked, the way they looked and how they behaved and interacted with others all originates from a perceived sense of self. Their decisions defined how the story unfolded and were the critical essence of their agency. In this chapter I explain how the amalgamation of these choices are at the heart of what makes characters authorial entities within the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*.

Based on the definition I introduced in chapter 1, agency is the ability to make decisions within a pre-determined social construct. *Survivor: Samoa* fit this definition since the format was known and characters operated within the context of past seasons. Therefore, they understood how their performances might be conveyed, and also how they contributed to the greater narrative of the *Survivor* series. For example, making the 'biggest blindside in *Survivor* history' is a goal mentioned several times on this particular season. As I mentioned in chapter two, *Survivor,* and reality shows like it, assumed the audiences' had an interest in extreme social situations. In this case, this cast was placed superficially with a never-before-linked group of strangers and forced to live out their time in the game with each other; cooperating, working as a team, plotting against each other, etc., all while playing a game to win $1 million.

These characters were once audience members; therefore they were positioned within the text with an imagined understanding of how they would be perceived. The characters then were aware of the possible judgments and other opinions their performance might receive from the at-home audience. With this knowledge they performed their perceived roles within that social context as well as the one the game created. Each participant arrived with her/his own set of values and personality, once on the island s/he existed in a fabricated social situation in which s/he had to survive. These fundamental aspects of character – his or her personality and the choices s/he made - were self-managed and presented to a wide audience for the sole purpose of consumption. In what follows, I discuss these concepts of choice and authorial power to explain the answers to two of my research questions:

> RQ1: *What evidence exists within* Survivor: Samoa *demonstrating that characters have some agency in creating the narrative of the show?*

> RQ3: *How do characters contribute to their identity, the identity of others on* Survivor: Samoa *and does this ability imply agency*?

Key to answering these questions is an understanding of the exaggerated way in which performance was at the core of these characters as they created the plot of *Survivor: Samoa*. As I mentioned in chapter five, my analysis of the text was rooted in the dominant patriarchal institution of the television industry and reflects the male gaze of the camera (Mulvey, 1975) and Jeff Probst's narration of the story.

Character performance

First, let me address some key terms already used here that are integral to explaining the themes found in *Survivor: Samoa*. Of principal concern is this concept of character. In previous chapters I explained that the term character has a myriad of definitions. For this analysis, the term is used to define character as an embodiment of a

participant's performance. This separates the participant becomes the character through

the act of his or her performance. According to Goffman (1959), the distinction is that the

performed character,

> [I]s not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (p. 252-253).

His definition here emphasizes and places the "crucial concern" on how the audience will

regard the performance. On *Survivor: Samoa* the character performances were presented

to both a real audience – the other characters within the show – and an implied audience

– an unknown mass of viewers that once counted these very characters as members. They

were not created in a vacuum nor did they emerge as characters from the Producers'

imaginations. These characters were willing participants, cast from thousands of

auditions to appear on the show.

The characters' existence within this cast also can affect their performance.

Haltunnen's (1982) definition of character emphasizes the ways in which the self

understands impressions of others: "The term *character*, in fact, could apply not to the

lump of wax itself but to the impression made upon it" (p. 4). Therefore, each aspect of

the character's performance is in a constant state of both regarding her or his presentation

to the audience as well as modeling others' performances. This process is called

"impression management" and is the essence of the character's performance. According

to Goffman (1959), impression management is crucial to the dramaturgical explanation of

our social selves; we are social beings, constantly assessing others and pre-occupied by

their regard for us.

Toward the end of his seminal work *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) emphasized that the use of the dramaturgical metaphor for explaining impression management and social interactions was just that, a metaphor. However, 50 years later, it makes for an apt description of impression management, as it exists on shows like *Survivor: Samoa*. As in everyday life we learn about impressions from others and understand how others will regard our performances through experience. This same learning process exists in hyperbolic form on reality TV shows like *Survivor*. Characters learned how roles on *Survivor* were perceived and performed to those expectations or, sometimes, against them.

Each performance is less an instance of "acting," in terms of simulating perceived roles, and more an "'acting out,' a performance of the self which creates feeling" (Kavka, 2008, p. 25). Put another way, viewers relate and engage with the characters because of the 'realness' of their performance (Rose & Wood, 2005). This is essential to understanding the unscripted nature of the characters' performances: the Producers are not able to direct or impose these authentic moments, nor are they able to prescribe sincere performances. These authentic moments – the raw and visceral ones performed without knowing it (Trilling, 1971) – were the ones we hope to see as an audience. The sincere performance is what the character performs such that their actions and words are aligned with what they believe to be a true representation of their *self* (Trilling, 1971). Therefore, the addition of emotion to the constant impression management is apt: the characters conveyed emotions and exposed their 'actual' personalities, which leads to a more effective audience engagement and investment in the story.

The following excavation of performances in this chapter places emotions as a tenable concept (Hochschild, 2003, p. 221). Emotion, in this context, is defined as the visceral reaction and physical expression of the underlying personality that can at once betray the character's presentation and justify their role. For example, Monica suggested to Russell H. that his alliance might not be trustworthy when she confronted him with his secret of being a millionaire. His reaction was raw; he was visibly flustered and aggressively questioned each person in his alliance as to who told his million-dollar secret. He got angry and was not able to hide those emotions. His paranoid performance was at once a betrayal of a unflinching villain, but at the same time proved that his secrets and his trust in others was vital to his perception of his position in the game. In everyday life, we all participate in the craft of self-production (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, *Survivor* and shows like it capitalize on individuals' emotional performances as they are placed into a fiction-like world where they must 'be themselves' without a script.

Agency existed within the overall performances of each character. Based on the text of *Survivor: Samoa*, there are three aspects of performance that demonstrate the characters' authorial contribution to the narrative to answer RQ1: appearance, the non-scripted voice, and strategy. Each character, through using these devices created their identities, not from whole cloth, but simply performed their *self*. Hence, their identities were the root of their authorial power since they could perform any way they wanted in order to alter their presentation.

In addition, they way characters interacted with others on their tribe is another vital aspect to his or her performance. Therefore, to answer RQ3, characters' ability to

create their identity implied narrative agency. Also, through the lack of scripted dialogue and their strategic alliances they helped to create the identity of others.

Appearance

How we look is directly linked to how others perceive us. Fashion and other aspects of appearance are reflections of character and can be manipulated to alter impressions (Haltunnen, 1982, p. 66). While some aspects of appearance cannot be controlled, society has invented all sorts of diets, cosmetics and other ways to make ourselves more attractive and allow us the ability to alter our physical appearance (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). How we present ourselves to others is at the forefront of our thoughts, especially on a reality television show like *Survivor*. The choices in clothing, hairstyles, and other contributing factors to their physical appearance were all decisions the characters on *Survivor: Samoa* made that lead to a more definitive understanding of his or her personality.

Within the construct of the game, appearances were the basis of first impressions, just as they are in everyday life. "Since the reality that the individual is concerned with is unperceivable at the moment, appearances must be relied upon in its stead" (Goffman, 1959, p. 249). On the first day of the *Survivor: Samoa* tribemates were asked to make decisions based on appearance alone; an aspect of the game that has until recently only been implied, not overtly required. Therefore, the way a character looked was a primary clue into the person's personality and provided the basis for a first impression. For example, in the beginning of episode 1, before she had a chance to interact with Russell H., Marisa wisely explained: "there's a guy who looks as tough as nails. He's like a pit bull! I wouldn't want to mess with him!" Her instinct based on his appearance was

correct; at the first tribal council, Russell H. orchestrated the decision to vote Marisa out of the game.

In recent seasons participants have been prompted to wear certain colors to designate what tribe they are on in the beginning. According to Jeff Probst's blog characters were coached on what to wear:

> We encourage them to wear clothing that best represents their "real life" back home. We do this because that is part of the idea of the show – a group of people from different walks of life, who find themselves stranded together. If we left it up to them everybody would wear adventure wear and all look the same. It would take away from the show. We typically have their tennis shoes and bathing suits waiting for them at their camp to even things out (Probst, 3/14/2011, JeffProbst.com)

The Producers allowed the participants to represent their personality through their clothing choice. Each person's decisions about clothing marked his or her individuality. Further, each clothing choice was not meant to be representative of a population, but instead style of dress reflected the perceived self (Kavka, 2008). Therefore, clothing choices were part of each character's performance.

Clothing choices and regard for physical appearance are different for men and women in contemporary American society. Walking into any department store one can notice there are exponentially more choices for women than men when it comes to fashion. The societal construct of differences between men and women extends into all aspects of appearance. Principally the differences for men and women are based on sex appeal. Women's scant clothing compared to their male counterparts more covered up tendencies is reflective of contemporary fashion in general. For example, swimsuits for men tend to cover up much more of their bodies than the ones for women. Therefore in what follows I separate my analysis of men and women primarily for the reasons already mentioned.

Before exploring the appearances of men and women on *Survivor: Samoa*, it is important to understand that women and men are equally conscientious when it comes to presenting themselves on television. Rarely does a *Survivor* contestant not fuss and primp during the season. A great example of this is exhibited between rivals Marisa and Russell H. Both chose to wear accessories that were decidedly not add any value to their experience. Marisa's floral headband did not prove effective at keeping her hair out of her eyes when performing in the agility portion of the first challenge. Russell H.'s fedora was only helpful in covering up his baldness for the introductory part of the episode. He had to

Photo 2: Marisa, episode 1. Photo credit: CBS.

remove it at the beginning of the challenge since the hat proved to be a nuisance. Russell H.'s hat became a bit of a trademark; in

Photo 3: Russell H., episode 4. Photo credit: CBS.

future seasons he also wore a similarly styled fedora.

The women

The women of *Survivor: Samoa* were as individualized and unique as the different women we encounter in everyday life. However, unlike our day-to-day run ins with others, these women were hand-selected to be part of a larger narrative that started with the first installment of *Survivor* in May 2001. Appearances were essential to their performances. Due to the diverse and numbered examples that appeared before on the show, the women of *Survivor: Samoa* had enough context to understand that their physical representation of self was important. To see what I mean, the following examples regarding Natalie, Shambo, Laura and Yasmin demonstrate that women's appearances were directly associated with their performed roles within the show.

These roles are not of the Proppian kind or even the *Real World* casting typology. In fact, it seems the women of *Survivor: Samoa* operate under the contrarian example of performing against type just enough to keep the narrative interesting. For example, Natalie might be conventionally perceived as the "Southern belle" or maybe a "blonde bombshell" by looks alone. She had a gentle disposition while exuding grace and good manners throughout the season. This innocent demeanor was at odds with her mostly exposed breasts, which seemed to be in a constant state of breaking loose from their restraints. In short, Natalie was conventionally beautiful; she was kind to everyone and well liked among her tribe mates. Her naïveté and natural charm worked well together as a fruitful strategy; throughout the season the men on her tribe, especially Russell H., did not think Natalie would be competent enough to win the game. Despite the accusations of riding Russell H.'s coattails, Natalie won the game by being nice and kind to others.

Photo 4: Natalie on the beach with her modified sundress. **Photo 5**: Natalie in her bikini at camp on the beach. Photo credits: CBS.

Natalie's clothing choice, as a reflection of her personality and what she might wear in everyday life, told an interesting story. She donned a yellow strappy sundress, the epitome of summertime casualness. The pale pink string bikini gave another impression of conventional female sexuality. To further contribute to her sexual appeal, we later discovered she also wore lacy underpants, which we saw when she washed them on camera, hanging them to dry on a tree. However, despite her more risqué clothing choices, Natalie maintained a child-

like innocence within the game. Her clothes represented that: while skimpy one, her

bikini blush pink and girly, not leopard print. Her clothing choices were delicate and

traditionally feminine, with a sexuality that underscored the rest of her performance.

These pre-meditated choices regarding her appearance represented how she could control

her impression on others.

For example, as the dress she was wearing began to stretch out due to wearing it

everyday (and the fact it was made of cotton), Natalie fixed this problem by tying the

bottom skirt into a knot and making it shorter and easier to manage in the physical

challenges (See photo 4). While this was a seemingly utilitarian choice, the result made

the dress even shorter and sexier. Her tossed-up hair was also a decision based on

maximizing comfort and effectiveness in challenges. However, from time to time, she

had her hair down and styling it in such a way to suggest that she wanted to properly

present herself attractively. These subtle moments exemplified her preoccupation with

her own attractiveness and awareness of constant surveillance and impression

management.

Her small bikini was another clothing choice that contributed to her perceived

character. Her physical stature was petite, but her large breasts were in contrast to her

otherwise small frame (see photo 5 above). The triangle top on her pink bikini

emphasized not only the voluptuousness of her breasts but also contrasted the seeming

innocence of her yellow cotton sundress. The chasteness and purity of her performance

had a sexual edge because she chose this bikini. She performed her sexuality by wearing

such a small swimsuit, which became increasingly difficult to keep on properly as Natalie

lost weight throughout the season due to low food rations. So despite what might be

perceived as a contradictory performance through her clothing choices, Natalie instead

presented herself as savvy, attractive, and wise to how she was perceived by others. She

knew[28] that for some she must be a sexual being, others, a naïve "prayer warrior"

(Natalie, episode 14) intent on keeping her integrity and helping others in any way she

could. I do not mean to suggest that she was malicious or cruel in her manipulations, but I

do believe that she knew for most of the game how she was perceived and performed the

role she felt was necessary. She knew what would advance her in the game, and part of

that was to remain dainty and feminine, two characteristics that she knew her alliance

members would not find threatening[29]. This worked to her advantage and helped to shape

her character.

On the opposite side of the societal norms of femininity was Shambo, who

according to an interaction between some of the Galu men in episode six was

facetiously referred to as one of the guys. She was rejected by the women and

ridiculed by the men for not fitting into their construct of femininity. This was

one of the many reasons she was ostracized from her tribe mates.

Photo 6: Bio cast ph[...]
Photo credit: CBS

Her real name is Shannon, but since she wore her hair in the mullet style held

back with a bandana her friends gave her the nickname "Shambo" in the mid-1980s; this

was an obvious homage to Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo* who wore a similar mullet and

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[28] In her final tribal council speech she argued that it was part of her strategy to be more mild-mannered and unassuming so as not to pose a threat to Russell H. Her declaration indicated she was well aware of the social game and the changing roles necessary to succeed in the game.

[29] There were several references Jaison and Russell made equating femininity with weakness. Ben, while not in Natalie's principal alliance, but in her Foa Foa tribe, also held similar beliefs. Weakness and femininity as a theme emerged in this season, as did the concept of female strength making women a threat.

bandana. Her character was also defined by her status as an ex-marine sergeant

personified through her clothing choice and appearance. As we came to discover later on

in the season, Shambo worked as a cook, and retired from the marines some time ago.

Despite this, her marine corps training defined her as a tough, hard-working woman. She

performed the role of one who was in tune with nature and eager for competition. Her

tribemates continually ridiculed her look and later on Host Jeff Probst also joined in the

chiding.

Unlike Natalie, Shambo was decidedly more covered up when it came to her

wardrobe. Her shorts and purple tie-dyed t-shirt did not over emphasize any part of her

anatomy. For example, in episode three the tribes were given their bathing suits. Shambo

took a much more practical route than her fellow female tribemates and opted for a sports

bra and swim shorts rather than a more risqué triangle top bikini. At this point in the

episode, Monica, Kelly and Laura flaunted their figures, striking a *Charlie's Angels* pose,

while Shambo extolled the comfort of her sports bra, eliciting an "eek" from Russell S.

This small moment in the episode presented an excellent example of how characters

created their identities through clothing.

Photo 7: Screen shot of (from L to R): Kelly, Monica and Laura striking a *Charlie's Angels* pose. Photo credit: TVFunSpot.com

While the other women were more scantily clad

than Shambo, their sexuality was further emphasized

through their posturing and posing based on their self-

selected costumes. Kelly, Monica and Laura were

consistently presented in their yoga poses and

sunbathing routines, while we saw Shambo hard at work[30]. Shambo's clothes were meant to serve a function: to be comfortable and provide coverage while engaging in work and competing in challenges. Whereas the other women of Galu (Laura, Monica, Yasmin and Kelly) chose clothing that would flaunt their figures on camera. These choices were made beforehand and influenced how the characters performed within the narrative.

Laura was presented as a confident, attractive Hawaiian woman who referred to herself as "grandma" on several occasions, despite being only 39 years old. Her long black hair, toned physique and exotic look were a strong presence within the series. Laura's crucifix necklace, sometimes worn as a bracelet in the image below, was an outward sign of her Christianity. In her first conversation with Russell she discussed her faith and formal theological education. These aspects of her appearance contributed to her character. As Kavka (2008) describes, these characters were not playing to a type because they, like people in our everyday lives, became nuanced individuals. In Laura's case, her unique combination of sexuality, professed faith, and age made her an unlikely "older woman" type on *Survivor: Samoa*. Instead of covering up her body or behaving like an archetypal grandma, Laura socialized with the younger women while sun bathing, practicing yoga and gossiping.

Photo 8: Laura. Photo credit: CBS.

Yasmin won the prize for the most ineffective and odd clothing choice: black, strappy, high-heeled sandals. Along with her skintight jean shorts, low-slung tank top, and perfectly coiffed hair, Yasmin did not conjure the image of a survival expert. Yasmin

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[30] The juxtaposition and editing used to create characters are elements that will be treated chapter 8.

was a hairstylist from Detroit who was not interested in the nature aspect of the survival

game; she was a competitor, not a nature lover. Her body was athletic and shapely. She

chose to flaunt her toned figure the way many of the women did, wearing only her buff as

a tube top and bikini bottoms. Yasmin's athletic form was showcased during each

challenge as she performed well every time. At camp, she chose to not participate much,

saving up her energy for challenges. Each of these nuances of her character made her

who she was and informed her performance.

The men

Like the women, the men's looks and clothing contributed to their performances

and how they presented themselves to each other and the *Survivor: Samoa* audience.

Unlike the women, the men's clothing choices were not as sexually charged as the

women's. I attribute this to the way in which the camera treated the men as well as the

overall societal norm of female sexuality and the way it is performed within fashion. As I

mentioned previously, the men tended toward utilitarian clothing options. Historically,

men are not objectified in mainstream entertainment media the same way women are.

Despite this lesser degree of objectification, the men were showing just as much skin.

The men, like the women, existed in the warm climate, at the water's edge, which

prompted them to be shirtless most of the time. The men tended to wear swim trunks and

the *Survivor* buff which usually was worn on their head, wrist or around their neck to

keep warm at night.

In the first few days, the men and women only had the clothes on their back.

Much like the women, many of the men resorted to wearing their underwear as a

makeshift swimsuit. In the very first challenge, Jaison and John were selected to

represent their respective tribes in the swimming leg of the challenge. In this brief

moment, the choice each man made would be our initial impression of their performance.

Jaison, a tall, conventionally handsome African American man disrobed from his cheery

yellow dress shirt and khaki pants to reveal a swimmer's physique – broad, toned and

lean. Without hesitation, he threw off his clothes, down to his boxer briefs, so he could

swim without restriction in the challenge ahead.

John, on the other hand, a rocket scientist and semi-pro soccer player, also tall and lean,

Photo 9: Jaison and John enter the ocean for the swimming part of challenge 1, episode 1. Photo credit: CBS.

only took off his purple, black and white plaid button up shirt, leaving his rolled-up jeans, belt and sneakers on for the swim. Immediately, because of this choice we have a clue into one trait of these men. Jaison was interested in demonstrating his swimming prowess, whereas John wanted to look handsome

during his performance. In the end, the jeans might have slowed John down and he did

not look nearly as handsome when he was stretched out on the sand exhausted long after

the challenge had ended.

As the season moved on, Jaison was consistently outfitted in his signature yellow

button down dress shirt with his swim trunks. Despite being physically fit, Jaison always

had his shirt buttoned up. This fit the stereotype for a *buttoned-up* Harvard educated

lawyer who also studied at Oxford. By the second episode his crisp yellow shirt was dirty

and tattered, but Jaison's consistency in dress implied he wanted to look the best he could

under the circumstances. He was highly educated and should be taken seriously; his

clothes were part of that performance.

Even in the most extreme circumstances, Jaison would not alter his image. Later

in the season as the rain caused immense turmoil for both

tribes, Jaison still refused to take off his soaking wet long

sleeve shirt. Instead he sat crouched in the leaking shelter

in his drenched shirt showing the camera his hands and

feet, which were grotesquely wrinkled from the non-stop rain.

Photo 10: Jaison showing the camera his waterlogged hands, episode 5. Photo credit: CE

His misery was manifest in his posture, hands and feet. In other parts of the season we

might regard Jaison as particularly whiny and delicate. However, the sight of his hands

and feet demonstrated how extreme the conditions were. Audiences saw these images on

more than one occasion to emphasize that the rain was not a joke; it had repercussions on

the narrative and affected the characters in many ways.

The rain also negatively affected Mick, who was also in the Foa Foa tribe and one

of Jaison's trusted alliance members. We could see this in the way he crouched with

rounded shoulders up against a tree hoping to keep him warm and protect his head from

the incessant drip-drip-dripping of rain. Unlike Jaison, Mick tended to have his shirt off.

His finely sculpted stomach and arms were no doubt the result of some significant time

spent at a gym (and not on a farm since we knew that he is a doctor). Mick, a

conventionally attractive white man with bright blue eyes, dark brown floppy hair, was

not always shirtless. In the first episode he chose to wear his jeans with a bright red t-shirt

and a khaki blazer. While not a typical suit jacket, his blazer choice signified his preppy

style that was a societal mark of professionalism and status. It looked fashionable and

commanding. When his tribemates selected him to be a leader of his tribe, many of them

referenced his blazer in their description of him. This one article of clothing might have

won him the title of leader of the tribe. He rarely wore it after that first day and instead decided to show off other aspects of his performance as the ruggedly handsome "Mick Dreamy" (Shambo, episode 3).

It was no coincidence that the two men who were wearing sport coats were chosen to be the leaders of their tribes. Russell S., the leader selected for the Galu tribe, also presented himself with an air of importance because he chose to wear his sports coat almost all the time he was on *Survivor: Samoa*. This evidence suggested that both tribes saw a simple clothing choice as a symbol of trustworthiness and leadership skills. Much like Mick, Russell S. decided to not wear his shirt for most of the game; however, he did (almost always) wear his sport coat sans shirt. Despite not wearing a shirt underneath, the sport coat offset his dreadlocks making him look distinguished yet hip and not stuffy. Russell S.'s compassion came through in his gentle leadership manner, but his authority was never questioned and I wonder if it might have had to do with his ever-present sport coat. Mick was not as well respected, but he too was not often found wearing the one piece of clothing that landed him his honorable title.

In addition to Russell S.'s muscular physique and a seemingly constant smile his expressive eyes conveyed his emotions to an extent unmatched by most of the others on his tribe. Later, in episode 6, it was these expressive eyes (as I described in chapter six) that gave us the first cue that something might be wrong with Russell S. As they fluttered in exhaustion we could tell that Russell S.'s relentless work ethic might affect his future performance in the game. Like almost every character on the show, the rain took its toll on Russell S. in the most extreme way – it caused him to be medically evacuated. Despite

that fact, his clothing choices, emotive expressions and warm smile made Russell S. highly respected on his tribe.

The other Russell, Russell H. did not have *any* of these qualities – he did not have a warm disposition, he was not well liked and frankly, his tolerance of all things miserable was extremely high. Unlike the other three men I've described, Russell H. embraced the rain – literally! During the same episode where we saw Jaison's mutilated feet and hands, we have an image of Russell H. with his arms outstretched and looking up to the sky and said: "This is not a big deal. In fact it makes me stronger!" (Russell H., episode 6).

Photo 11: Russell H. and Natalie, episode 1. Photo credit: CBS

Russell H.'s appearance also contributed to his character performance. He was a white, short, stocky, balding man with missing teeth. Instantly, he made an impression on his tribemates. Marisa commented that she thought he looked like a "pit bull" and that he was aggressive. This was an apt description and part of his character performance of a game-focused player. He wore stained light grey briefs, no shirt and a fedora to cover up his balding head. Even after getting his swim trunks in episode 3, Russell continued to wear his stained underwear. He gave an air of not caring about his appearance. However, as previously mentioned, his fedora suggested a degree of vanity. Also, the self-selected costume accessory was an iconic homage to the Prohibition era gangster style, which was consistent with his tough-guy, amoral performance.

With the exception of the fedora, his appearance aligned with the character he hoped to present: the Southern, country boy. He was missing teeth and spoke with a strong Texas accent. Russell's stocky stature made him look strong, and his tribe leader, Mick, seemed to agree since he was selected to do the heavy lifting portion in the first challenge. While he struggled slightly, he managed to carry the unbearably heavy log clusters to their designated spot. As Russell H. did so, his sneaky smile and shifty eyes also gave clues into his manipulating and conniving game play from the outset. As in everyday life, first impressions and appearances shaped our perceptions of each of the characters

Photo 12: Russell H. carries the log bundle in episode 1. Photo credit, CBS.

(Haltunnen, 1982). Throughout the season was the way the characters looked, and choices made with their clothing revealed more and more about their character performances that might not have been intimated in that first impression. Mick and Natalie are great examples of this. Each character could have altered their presentation with a different clothing choice, or the slightest change in hairstyle. A great example of hair styling affecting performance (besides Natalie and Shambo) is Dave from Galu. Most of the time he had his long hair pulled back into a low ponytail with his buff to cover his balding head, but there were a few times when it hung loose around his face in crazy curls.

These two looks portrayed his dual role within the show, the deep thinking yogi (hair in a ponytail) and the impulsive instigator. These examples above all indicate how appearances contribute to the performance. Most importantly, the audience had clues

Photo 13 & 14: Dave Ball. Photo credits: CBS.

about the character performances with relatively little information, save for their

appearance (Goffman, 1959). Therefore, like other aspects of their performance, the

characters' appearances must be constantly managed to ensure that they are presenting

the most accurate version of themselves as possible.

The Un-Scripted Voice

What the characters said and how they said it were aspects of their control over

the narrative that profoundly shaped their performances. In essence, the characters, on the

fly, in the scene, were writing the story of *Survivor: Samoa*. This was integral to reality

shows like *Survivor: Samoa* and made the characters central to the narrative – not just

because they performed the plot, but because they wrote their own lines. Without a script,

their words and actions shaped their performances.

For example, the "Fallen Comrades" tradition was a format element the Producers

imposed that required each of the remaining four characters in episode 15 to describe

their relationships with the others. Every season[31], the finalists must walk a path marked

by the torches of their "fallen tribe mates" and remember each one since "each person has

played some part in how I got to where I am now" (Brett, episode 15). All the remaining

Aiga members related a characteristic or story to those that were no longer in the game.

Immediately following was a brief scene in which the described tribe mate said

something that evidenced what was said about him or her. These were the enduring

impressions that served to remind the characters as well as the audience who each person

was in the final episode. It was a way of looking back without making it a full-on

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[31] After 21 seasons, *Survivor: Redemption Island* (season 22), was the first to not include
this segment.

flashback style episode. What was most poignant was the air of seriousness and compassion that followed on this rite of passage. There was a thankfulness that loomed, but every so often, there was a disparaging remark of a former tribe-mate. For example, Mick said of Ben "he had no idea how to play it socially, I wasn't sorry to see him go" (episode 15). The "fallen comrades" segment solidified the perceptions of those who were out of the game and positioned the characters that remained. This was the ultimate example of how characters created each other's identities through their own unscripted voices.

Through this unscripted voice of the character's performance I offer examples of what Goffman (1959) calls the backstage and front stage presentations. First, his use of the term backstage implies that there is a sphere of a character's performance that is not witnessed by the audience. However, this is where I depart the most from Goffman's construct because the nature of reality television is that there *is no backstage*. Instead, many of the typical components such as fixing hair, brushing teeth, bathing, picking one's nose and sleeping are all done with the cameras watching. However, we never see the characters go to the bathroom, so thankfully, that element is still saved for the backstage. For the most part, the entirety of the characters' existence was out in front for us to see in edited form based on the Producers' discretion.

Sometimes the audience might get a glimpse of the backstage of the actual production. For example, when Russell S. was medically evacuated almost every façade was broken down in that sequence. Russell S. stopped performing his "unstoppable" leader role, Jeff Probst stopped playing his host role and the camera and microphone operators even stopped performing their roles of being invisible entities. The medics

rushed out, heretofore unseen, took center stage and deemed Russell too ill to proceed with his performance on the show. Russell in a moment of pure emotion begged to stay in the game as tears from his glassed over eyes ran down his dust-covered face. It was one of the more authentic moments of the show, especially for Probst who never seemed to falter in his matter-of-fact role as host. In this scene he exhibited an authentic performance of concern. It was yet another example of how the characters, including Jeff Probst, and their performances – both sincere and authentic – are the unscripted fodder of the *Survivor: Samoa* narrative. However, while almost all of the show (with the exception of some things Jeff Probst says and does) is unscripted, it does not imply authentic moments should be considered back stage examples. Instead, it is important to see the entirety of what we see on television as the front of stage performance, whereby the back stage material is unknown to us.

Idiosyncrasies such as accents, tone, vocabulary and the like are all pertinent aspects of performance so vital to the unscripted nature of the show. Therefore, what the characters said and how they said is another aspect of their performance that they control. I found three sub-themes inherent to the character's control over the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*: what characters said when they described others, how they spoke to each other and how they talked about themselves. Each of these modes of verbal expression was part of a character's *self*-presentation that they deemed most consistent with their perceived role on the show. Therefore, characters offered us plenty of examples of how they perceived themselves and others on the show in their own unscripted words. This is a unique aspect of this type of reality television and is what separates *Survivor: Samoa* and shows like it from other popular narrative forms.

Shambo and Laura

On *Survivor: Samoa* the act of talking about others contributed to the audience's perception of the one speaking as well as the one being spoken about; the duality of each utterance made the act of talking about someone a wealth of analytical interest with regard to character performance. In the end, perceptions from others were just as adept at formulating character perceptions as the ones gleaned from first hand performances.

For example, Shambo detested Laura and vice versa. While it was unclear where Laura's disdain came from, it was clear Shambo annoyed her and that was enough. She stated that: "Shambo is a complete Gilligan who messes up all the time!" (Laura, episode 6). She also made fun of her appearance and claimed she was socially awkward and strange. The irony of her statement was that Laura's own social game was what got her in trouble. She made an enemy out of Russell H. and was then blind to the possibility that he could find another immunity idol without clues. Her lack of strategic intuition lead to her demise and her lack of social skills made her an enemy of the Foa Foa tribe – a lethal combination in the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*.

Shambo had a plethora of jabs at her rival, most often in the confessional forum of direct address to the camera:

> **Shambo** (*direct address*): Laura is the head viper; she is the viper queen of Galu. She is the snake to the tribe, she is an evil demon, she is the beast. Laura is the first one to go in my mind since day one (episode 10).

Her sharp tongue was every bit a part of the character Shambo performed. Calling Laura a viper queen was inherently different than saying she was mean and cruel to her. The women were adversaries and that defined much of their performances on the show.

Shambo likened her role to that of an outcast teenager and Laura the leader of the popular girls. When describing an argument the two had over canteens, Shambo said:

> **Shambo** (*direct address*): It's not really a fight about canteens as much as it is the way she treats me on a regular basis. It's almost like those popular girls in high school that are cheerleaders that want to snub their nose the people that don't fit into their circle. I'm done with her. I have no use for her. Done (episode 8).

As Shambo stated, the root was a rivalry reminiscent of high school drama – Laura the popular pretty girl and Shambo the awkward, tomboy, geek who resented her status. This long-told pervasive rivalry of high school girls within U.S. culture provides the basis for not only their relationship but offered an underdog aspect to Shambo's performance: Shambo felt sorry for herself and played the role of the misunderstood victim. Her performance was not always consistent in that respect, but when it came to Laura it was. Shambo was to be pitied and Laura was to be reviled.

Despite her own insight of reliving a familiar high school scenario, Shambo still succumbed to the rivalry in spite of herself. In an unexpected twist, Shambo imparted a very private story about her brother and sister who both lost their lives to cancer. Exposing herself in such a vulnerable way was surprising given her disdain for Laura. However, this was consistent with the high school girl narrative in which she thought maybe by confiding something in the "popular girl" she might win her favor and her pity. Shambo's outpouring was met by Laura's wickedness; instead of comforting Shambo during her breakdown, Laura was shallow and insincere. She complained that the sun had gone away, thus disrupting her sunbathing, and then weakly patted Shambo on the knee saying "awww, Shammy" in a pathetic attempt to console her. The choice of words, "come on! Where's our sunshine!" showed Laura was lacking compassion and being self-centered. Based on this scene, Shambo was depicted as a sad woman trying to connect with anyone, even her archrival, and Laura as a self-centered phony.

The scene above was from the recap show, which aired Thanksgiving Day (11/26/09). In this episode we were exposed to "new strategies, new insights and new scenes of your favorite castaways" (Probst, episode 11). As with any voiceover in the beginning of the episode we were told what to expect and this interaction between Laura and Shambo offered a deeper understanding of the dynamic between Laura and Shambo. The above conversation happened on day 23 of the 39-day adventure. On day 27 Laura was voted out. I would expect that Shambo's contempt, mistrust and victimized persona would disappear as a result of Laura's ousting, but instead, she found a new target in Dave. So despite her bullied persona, she did not seem to want to let that go when Laura was ousted from the game. Instead, she decided that Dave her new adversary. Via direct address and proclamations to her tribe mates, Shambo made it known that Dave was on her short list to be taken out of the game because of his ill treatment toward her.

Jaison and Ben

Like Shambo and every other character, Ben's performance affected the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. The way he spoke to the camera in direct address and to his tribemates exposed how he wished to perform his character within the show. In episode 1, Ben declared his performance when he proudly announced at camp that he was a hillbilly and would not apologize for his lack of social graces. For his tribemates and the audience at home, his performance took on a new connotation filled with the culturally produced stereotypes associated with the pejorative word: "hillbilly." His performance and admission propelled him from a funny-dressing, lanky young man into a loud-mouthed hillbilly. In episode 3 he even went so far as to say:

> **Ben** (*direct address*): Mick's not an outdoorsy guy like myself. It didn't surprise me – I tried to show him, and give him some tips. It didn't really help. Without my help these people will die. I saved the day once again! (episode 3).

Ben's confidence in his camping abilities came through here and he compared himself to the leader of the tribe. In turn he thought being a survivor of the elements made him the best contestant on the show, despite lacking both social skills and physical potency. Further examples of his self-described hillbilly performance – the anti-cosmopolitan – were demonstrated in the way he spoke to the women of his tribe. When talking to Russell and Liz he said: "Not to put you girls down or be chauvinistic, but you girls won't be able to do it. You're just going to waste it [the flint used to make fire], so don't even try to do it!" In saying he's not chauvinistic, he was actually being chauvinistic. Further depleting his character's appeal, Ben (in the same segment of episode 3) asked Natalie if she had "pooped" yet and how he had "the biggest poop of my life." Ben's uncouth demeanor and sexism was all befitting a self-proclaimed hillbilly according to culturally shared stereotypes. His performance was not well received by his tribe mates. So, despite thinking that his contributions were vital to his tribe's survival, his tribemates did not, and voted him out after a very hostile exchange between him and Jaison.

Jaison, a lawyer by trade, had more sophisticated debating skills than his "hillbilly" counterpart, Ben, as evidenced by their heated argument at tribal council in episode 3. Ben and Jaison were arguing about things Ben said in the previous episode to Yasmin. The dialogue was as follows:

> **Jeff Probst** (to Russell): You're a guy who likes to get scrappy. Explain to me what's going on between Ben and Jaison.
> **Russell** (to Jeff): I think it's just that Ben said some negative things that might have been racial.
> **Jaison** (interrupting Russell): They *might* have been racial?! Ok…
> **Russell** (continuing): …and I think that changed the way Jaison looked at him.

Jeff Probst (to the Foa Foa tribe): You guys still have a chance in this game. You're down four after tonight. Is there anyway that you can heal this wound?

Jaison (to Jeff): I have to draw a line in the sand. There is no [sic] million dollars that is worth me sitting up with him anymore. I sat here and watched him scream at Yasmin at camp and here saying incredible things. Is there a way to patch this rift? Don't think so. I'm just not going to sit here and listen to this guy - I'm just not.

Jeff Probst (to Ben): Ben, big reaction from him.

Ben (to Jeff): Everyone here knows I have been consistent from the get-go. I have not started one fight here.

Jaison (to Ben): No, that's not even what I'm talking about, it's more about the ghetto trash that you tried to called her.

Ben (to Jaison): If she's from the ghetto and she's trashy, she's ghetto trash, I'm sorry! That's not racial at all; it's where you're from and how you're acting.

Jaison (interrupting Ben): If that's really what you think Ben.

Ben (continuing): So, if you can't understand that…

Jaison (to Ben): Let me make another point then Southern guy, and your Southern ways. Do you really think that you should talk to a woman that way? Southern Gentleman?

Ben (interrupting Jaison): You know what? If she's going to speak to me like that

Jaison (continuing): Do you speak to a young lady that way?

Ben (to Jaison): She's not a lady!

Jaison (to Ben): really? She's not a lady? I mean, come on!

Ben (to Jaison): Ladies have manners. Ok? I mean this girl right here (pushing Natalie on the shoulder) Southern; has manners. Says "Yes sir," "yes m'am," "please," "thank you."

Jaison (to Ben): Ok

Ben (to Jaison): So Yasmin's being a bitch! She's not a lady! I mean it's not that hard, there was nothing racial that I said! Strictly what I saw.

Jaison (to Ben): If you say so.

Ben (to Jaison): So if you want to call it a racial game and play *that* card, then go for it buddy!

Jaison (to Ben): You should have some sensitivity to history, and historically when certain comments are made and directed at certain people it is because of race. If what you're telling me is that what you said had no racial context, then maybe Yasmin was right, you are ignorant! Maybe you really don't get it!

As a lawyer, Jaison calmly laid his argument down. His rational approach was in stark contrast to Ben's bombastic, profane language. Consistently, when Jaison talked, he had more refined inflection in his voice and tended to use complete sentences with bigger words than many of his other tribemates. Jaison was performing his role as the Ivy League educated lawyer in the midst of a heated racial debate. His desire to perform

nobly and honestly was at the root of this argument. He conveyed not only intelligence on his side of the debate, but he also performed the way a morally grounded person might: standing up for the racial injustice when no one else would. When Ben called Yasmin "ghetto trash" at tribal council several faces reacted to this, but no one said anything. Jaison warned his tribe that if Ben stayed, he would leave. He stuck to his moral ground and would not waver.

Jaison's performance, or *voice*, in this scene, was consistent with who he *wanted* to be – a moral, good person who fights for what is right. We get these intentions not just through his language here, but also in episode 11 where he discussed how much he admired his father for those qualities; being tough, standing up for what is right and being a strong African American man.

Taking this performance a step further, imagine if Jaison spoke more the way Ben did. If Jaison's temper flared, and he started cursing and carrying on in a less refined manner the performance would have changed. Therefore, every word and intonation contributed to Jaison's character. Alternatively, Ben's tone made his looks less intelligent, stubborn and above all, racist. Ben was not as effective with his debate skills nor was he as sophisticated. Jaison and Ben were at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum and positioned themselves that way through their performances.

Russell H. and everyone else

In what she called theatrical performance of self (p. 196), Haltunnen (1982), like Goffman (1959), stressed the importance of the dramaturgical metaphor because for each performance there is an audience. As with every television show, the audience is of utmost importance since a show is deemed successful based on how many people are

watching. Therefore, to guarantee the most viewers, Producers on *Survivor* needed to make sure the show stayed interesting. Characters were aware of this and understand that in order to be featured in the final cut one had to provide a compelling performance. Russell knew this more than anyone else on *Survivor: Samoa*.

Like Ben, Russell H. also performed a quasi-hillbilly character complete with his thick Southern drawl and his pot-bellied, missing-tooth visage. Russell H. used his backwoods accent to cultivate a certain type of character, one that might be sympathetic to others on his tribe. In the first episode when Russell H. gave his fake hurricane Katrina story, the other Foa Foa tribe members sympathized with him and took him at his word. They had no reason to believe he was lying since the details of his performance seemed authentic. Namely, he had a regional accent befitting a New Orleans citizen. In fact, many tribe members commented on his "Southern gentlemen" persona, simply because of his accent; an attribute Russell H. was aware of and helped to concoct.

Of all the characters, Russell had the most flair for using metaphors and hyperbolic language. Several of his tirades became sound bytes repeated many times through the "last week on *Survivor*" portion of the show. One such speech came in the form of a direct address to the camera after a scene in which Marisa confronted Russell.

> **Russell** (*direct address*): How do you come to me and threaten me? And telling me you aren't comfortable [sic]? You threaten me - you're gone. My tribe will do anything that I tell them. I'm the puppet master, when I'm finish [sic] with them, I'll just throw them in the trash (episode 1).

His speech conveyed a lot about his character. First, his use of the word "threaten" was of interest. In the actual conversation, Marisa told Russell that the fact that he was talking to everyone was making her "wary" (Marisa, episode 1). For Russell, being told that someone was *wary* of him was an affront. He wanted to maintain his trustworthy status

(at least for now) and the fact that she knew he was manipulative made her a threat. However, use of the word *threaten* conveyed a different meaning. The way Russell used it in his little speech to his other tribe mates implied that she "threatened" to get rid of him. He took her wariness to imply that she would get rid of him, thus she threatened him. It is an interesting use of language because it turned a quasi-innocent confession into something bombastic and worthy of eviction from the game in Russell's eyes.

His puppet master mini-monologue was something that was replayed continually throughout the season. No matter if he was in an alliance with someone or not, Russell found fault in anyone; no one cold be as great at the game or as smart as he was. The first day he declared how unintelligent the women were and how he created a "dumb-ass-girl" alliance. Also, after an entire season of defending Shambo, he suddenly began mocking her hairstyle and odor. Like this one, most of his attacks were mean and personal and not the result of any personal insult to him. Therefore, his slander against others seemed tactical so he could feel superior.

Russell's metaphorical speeches were his trademark and pointed out how calculated his moves and manipulations were. Based on his knowledge of the show's format, Russell H. knew that what he said and how he said it mattered. The more bombastic and over-the-top, the better the chances that his self-written monologue would appear in the Producers' final cut. Another speech that highlighted his self-designated elite status, a running theme for his character, was in reaction to the 15 days of rain his tribe had to endure. In a direct address to the camera he said:

> **Russell H.** *(direct address):* Worthless, no good, nothing [he says while eating a banana], it's… where they all from? New York City? "I gotta [sic] stay dry, I can't get my hair wet." They [sic] crazy. I don't know they might all start sucking each other's thumbs. A bunch of babies, that's why we lose the challenges,

because they're weak. "Uh, I'm so tired!" Don't stop until you throw up, pass out, something. If you don't throw up in the challenge then you didn't do your job. I don't know how to help them. I don't think it's gonna stop raining (episode 6).

We see again his clever use of language was something that elevated his character to that of a manipulator, not just of minds, but also of language itself.

The unscripted voice and the direct address

While there were exceptions like tribal council confessions, most characters tended to speak her mind the most openly in the direct address format. In this forum, characters were secluded from the others and seemed to step out of the game into this therapeutic confessional space. While speaking directly to the camera, characters offered their commentary on their experiences and feelings. The effect was that of narrating their story through their own unscripted words. Through this device, the language of the character often changed, compared to the way they spoke when surrounded by their tribemates. This clued the audience into ulterior motives, ultimate strategies and true feelings about others. Also, the direct address offered an opportunity for viewers to learn more about not only the character speaking, but also the one(s) being spoken about.

In fact, this device was so effective in positioning character performances that Producers broke through the subtleties of the direct address and forced first impressions into the plot. As previously described, in episode 1 Probst asked the newly marooned cast to make snap judgments and choose a leader. This person then had to make decisions based on looks and behavior as they rowed ashore to determine which tribe mate will participate in which portion of the challenge. As host Jeff Probst demanded, there was no talking to each other. His voiceover emphasized the importance of impressions and judgment within this challenge. To further stress this point, the Producers spent much of

the first segment of episode 1 presenting direct addresses from each new character. Each new clip revealed how a character felt about his or her new tribe mate(s).

For example, before she was voted out, thanks to Russell H.'s plot, Marisa had this to say about him: "there's a guy who looks as tough as nails, he's like a pit bull, I wouldn't want to mess with him that's for sure" (Marisa, episode 1). Betsy then discussed how her policewoman instincts told her not to trust anyone in the game, especially Russell H. In both cases, the perceptions proved true; Marisa did "mess" with Russell and was voted off; Betsy chose not to trust Russell and was also voted off. Therefore, as with all aspects of the unscripted voice, we learned about the person speaking as well as the ones they were speaking about in this direct address format.

As episode 1 continued, viewers had numerous opportunities to understand how characters perceived those around them through voiceovers taken from direct address scenarios. For example, before the first challenge, we heard Mike in voiceover, with his heavy New York City accent, talked about Mick's choice of Jaison as the swimmer for the team. Mike relayed that "Afro-Americans aren't known to be swimmers" (episode 1). Mike stereotyped Jaison based on his race and ended up looking like a fool. In the next scene Jaison breezes through the water portion of the competition and reveals that he was on the national water polo team. The message conveyed in this scene was not so much that Jaison performed against type. Instead, Mike's character was unfolding as latently racist and out of touch; his performance in this case was self-incriminating.

The final point regarding the unscripted voice was characters demanding to understand the true intentions of others' performances. In Goffman's (1959) terms, a

"team" would put all duplicitous suspicions to rest since he defined it as: a group of performers working in cahoots toward a unified understanding of the situation. Fundamental to this definition is the agreed upon desired outcome. So, in a game where the Goffmanian "team" could potentially be an advantageous byproduct, characters rarely knew the actual aim of their tribe mates. This happened in heated discussions around camp and most prevalently at tribal council. It could have been as simple as Liz asking Russell H. if he was lying to her about an immunity idol, or it as dire as being asked point-blank about one's motivations during the final tribal council. In fact, the final tribal council is aptly described as the time when voted out characters get to question the performances of those that remain.

At final tribal council ousted characters were permitted to ask the final three characters about why they should win the $1 million prize. These sometimes poignant, yet most often bland and incoherent, cross examinations were performed earnestly by characters that, for a short moment, had the focus of the camera lens once again. Each season one character seems to steal the show in this regard; for *Survivor: Samoa*, it was Erik.

In what was the most notable final tribal council performance, it was notable that Erik was still holding a grudge. After a major blindside, Eric became the first member of the jury and was able to watch all the despicable behavior from afar, unhindered by game-play since he was already on the jury. His speech was poignant and posed the biggest moral question of the season and perhaps the game of *Survivor* itself:

> **Erik** (to Mick, Natalie and Russell): I'm going to try to keep this brief. But I don't need anything from any of you. Mick, day one they put a leash and necklace around your neck. I will go 39 days and struggle to find a reason why you deserved that title. You did nothing [pounds his fist for emphasis] you did nothing

with your team, you did nothing to encourage them. No one on your team had any guts. You're responsible for that. Russell, this person, we have nothing in common. You played an unethical game. You admit you played an unethical game. The crazy thing about it is, you're sitting there and I'm sitting here. Did you get to the right place by doing the wrong thing? I've never been in a situation in my entire life where that is the case. (Cut to Russell fixing his bandana on his head). But you sit there proud of it! Natalie, people will call you weak - people will say you are undeserving. But you know what? Why are those characteristics any less admirable as lying cheating and stealing? Why does he get a free pass, but your way of playing is admonished? If there's one thing that I learned in this game, it's that perception is not reality! [He almost shouts this *at* the jury] reality is reality. And you are sitting there and that makes you just as dangerous as those other guys. You would say that you are probably the least deserving of the title sole survivor. But maybe, just maybe, in an environment filled with arrogance [points both fingers at Russell] and delusional entitlement [cut to Mick who gives a look like, "what?!"] maybe the person who thinks she is the least deserving is the one that deserves it the most. You've got my vote. I hope you get four more. (Erik, Episode 15)

Erik questioned a key aspect of the game – game play. He, like only a few others in the storied history of *Survivor* have, asked the moral questions: what makes someone who played an unethical game more deserving than someone who was carried through but played with integrity? Typically, the answer would be the unethical person – the one who played the game at any cost. However, as this cast proved, they were a set of different types of characters. Throughout the game and their performances, there were countless mentions of integrity, honesty, trust, and loyalty. These aspects were clearly important to this game, yet they were not qualities that true game players, such as Russell H., ever tried to attain. Frankly, most of the others were just as unethical and cruel. Erik for example, was ruthless when it came to his judgments on Mick and Jaison. In addition, after Russell S. left the game, Erik and the other Galu men rigged a vote to make Shambo leader in hopes of getting her to align with them. On the other hand, Russell H. never tried to pretend he was anything other than what he was: a game player no matter what

and he exploited any altruistic qualities in others in hopes of winning. In the end,

Natalie's more righteous character won the $1million prize.

These examples demonstrated not only how a character's voice contributes to

their performance, but also how his or her experiential baggage and outside-the-game life

entered into their performance within the show (Kavka, 2008). Each character

performance was laced with personality, bias, and individual experience. We cannot

separate the character on the show with the individual outside of the show. Therefore, the

unscripted voice of their performances - what they said and how they said it – was

essential to how characters' exerted their authorial power within the narrative of

Survivor: Samoa.

Strategy

In *Survivor: Samoa* strategy was the ultimate personal choice; the Producers

could not control how each character would strategize. From a game standpoint, the sole

purpose of *Survivor: Samoa* was to win the $1 million prize. With only a limited set of

rules, the opportunity for game play and strategy was critical to how characters

performed. Based on his speech, Erik had determined that the winner should be rewarded

for playing the game best – a subjective decision for each person to be sure. The jury was

also claiming to vote for who *deserved* to win, not just who they wanted to win. The

underlying rationale was that determining the winner was based on who had the best

strategy: who played the game best?

Playing the game was exactly what the participants signed up to do and it was the

one thing they could not prepare for in advance. Appearance and the manner of speech

were two elements that, to a certain extent, characters brought with them into the game of

Survivor; alternatively, strategy was created based on the dynamics of the tribes, the challenges and social factors of the game. Some characters might have had a preconceived idea of their strategy that would inevitably change based on the evolution of the game. For example, even Russell H., the strategic mastermind, would not have predicted he would vote out Liz before the merge prior to his arrival at Samoa. The simple fact is he did not know Liz or the threat she posed! Strategy therefore was the amalgamation of reactions and behaviors employed by each character to do what they deemed necessary to advance further in the game. This aspect of the character performance was an integral part of their agency since it so heavily relied on deliberate decision-making based on their social situation (in line with the definition of agency itself!).

Strategy appeared in several forms within *Survivor: Samoa*: alliances, shared information, and perhaps the most obvious, voting decisions. The most salient aspect of these strategic forms was the character's *perceived* sense of implementation. Like the rest of a character's performance, his or her perception as well as the perceptions of those around her or him was key to how the narrative unfolded. Characters would sometimes confide in each other and/or to the audience about their strategic maneuvers. For the most part, the audience was always in on the strategic decision making throughout the game. The outcome was that audience members could see each character's integral role into the development of the plot, even if their strategy turned into folly.

For many, the key strategic error was trusting Russell. Ashley, Liz, Jaison, Laura, Shambo, John and Brett all fell due to Russell's strategic move to end their time in the game. His air of trustworthiness was set by the amount of information he gave them as

well as his southern-boy charm. The sharing of information about found idols or insights into how they should play the game endeared him to many of his tribemates, if only for a moment. These two aspects were what made him a threat to many others. Therefore, at tribal councils, despite their best efforts, Russell H. almost always seemed to get his way either through convincing others to vote his way or using a hidden immunity idol.

When it came to strategy and decision-making, Russell H. was the best of his season and arguably one of the best in the history of *Survivor*. As he stated repeatedly, he was on *Survivor* to play the game and to win the prize. In episode 11, Russell revealed that he was snuggling at night with the women on his tribe to keep warm. He claimed that although utilitarian, that even this was a strategic maneuver because the women would think that Russell's cuddling was the result of his romantic interest in them. This, if it were true, would place them in a position of power knowing that they could control Russell since he was attracted to them. After exposing this strategy via direct address to the camera, Russell went on to explain his perspective of the game:

> **Russell** (*direct address*): This is a game we're playing. You're supposed to lie, cheat, and steal. What I do out here, my mom's probably gonna [sic] be pretty damn embarrassed. My wife's probably gonna [sic] be pissed off! I love my kids and my wife with all my heart; I wouldn't do anything to hurt my family. Everything I do out here is playing the game. Everything I do is strategic… everything (episode 11).

This speech eloquently (as usual) summed up not only how Russell played the game, but also how he perceived his tribemates were lacking. He inferred that if they did not lie, cheat and steal that they were *not* playing the game. Russell had several other moments where he called the rest of his tribe morons for not thinking ahead and for not playing strategically enough.

Part of Russell's strategy was to be proactive and manipulative. Based on his perception of the game and how he had seen it played in the past, he believed this was his best strategy to win the $1 million prize. He convinced his tribemates into voting the way that he wanted them to on a consistent basis. Russell shaped their temperament towards each other by instigating arguments and dumping out drinking water from canteens; and most importantly, he offered trust to those looking for it.

Russell's proactive nature and understanding of the game were also evidenced when he found 3 hidden immunity idols, all which changed the game considerably because of thwarted voting strategies. In the final episode, when he was talking to Mick and Natalie around camp, he tried to intimidate them by extolling the virtues of his game play and maligning theirs claiming there is no way they could beat him based on his performance. Mick and Natalie agreed.

Having a good strategy meant developing and cultivating a strong alliance. In terms of character performance, having an alliance was vital to not only longevity in the game, but also in maintaining "the relevant definition of the situation" (Goffman, 1959, p. 104). Goffman's definition of "teams" is apt for understanding the role of alliances not only with regard to strategy and how those decisions support the character's position of authorial power, but also how the characters performing as a unit can contribute to his or her own performances. Goffman's (1959) notion of team, "may be defined as a set of individuals whose intimate co-operation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained" (p. 104). Part of this definition also includes an aspect of secrecy and conspiracy among the team members in order to keep hidden exactly what is to be maintained. Part of the art of forming strategic alliances was understanding who

your "team" mates were. Trust was a word commonly used, but rarely realized on *Survivor: Samoa*. "Teams," as Goffman uses the term, are constantly fluctuating as alliances are created and broken. At different points throughout the game various characters felt that they were on Russell's "team" and realized quickly they were not: Russell and players like him throughout *Survivor* history have the ability to create "secret societies" (Goffman, 1959, p. 105) and then dismantle them all within a single episode. Instead of the implied permanence of Goffman's "team," the *Survivor* alliance was not meant to last because of the format of the show – each episode one person must go home until there is only one! Therefore, as with most of Goffman's contributions to this project's understanding of character performance, *Survivor: Samoa* and shows like it, hyperextend his constructs when it comes to the dramaturgical participant within the show.

Russell H. created the strongest alliance in *Survivor: Samoa*. On the first day, he walked along the beach four separate times with four separate women. He told each of them that they should form an alliance now and stay true until the end of the game. While not an unheard of strategy, what worked so well was that he promised the same thing to so many people and made them secret alliances to better his chances at none of the women discovering his ploy. According to Russell this was his "dumb-ass girl alliance" (Russell, episode 1).

Creating alliances was important to the character performance and how it was maintained. Cooperation of a "team" (Goffman, 1959) can be the difference between betraying "backstage" information and sustaining the appropriate "front of stage" performance. This is what made them a team and not a group. A group might not act in

concert with the agreed upon "definition of the situation" (Goffman, 1959, p. 104), whereas a team is always like-minded about the end goal or outcome. For this reason alone, alliances were important because of their profound affect on voting at tribal council. By acting as a "team," one remained true to his or her alliance. What happened at tribal council was permanent[32]; a character's choice for whom to send home could not be recanted. If someone was voted out, they were no longer in the game. Therefore, being fully aware of your alliances intentions and the intentions of other alliances *before* tribal council was important so as not to be at the receiving end of a blindside.

In what was the most prominent strategic alliance from *Survivor: Samoa*, the Foa Foa four, was born out of necessity; Russell H., Mick, Jaison and Natalie were the only four surviving Foa Foa members at the merge. In order to stay as strong as possible, Russell encouraged the others to remain true to Foa Foa and he would take them to the end. His plan worked and along with strategic moves by his other tribemates, the Foa Foa four remained intact. It was not until the final five when Brett, a Galu member, was immune from the vote that they were forced to vote out one of their own: Jaison.

Natalie, who was the key element of his alliance, had an executed her strategy in the opposite way. She chose to play "with integrity" (Natalie, episode 15); this paradox of game styles made them the perfect pair. She did everything she could to keep her strategy intact and in the end it won her the $1 million prize. Her most overtly aggressive moves were convincing the Galu tribe to vote for Erik after the merge and killing the rat in

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[32] In the most recent installment of *Survivor* (season 21, *Redemption Island*), characters voted out are sent to "Redemption Island" where they have the opportunity to be allowed back into the game after surviving a series of duals. In every other season of the show, this return to the game never happened.

episode 9; both acts were plays for survival. Persuading the Galu women to vote out Erik

was her key move in the game. From that point, the cracks in the Galu alliance were

exposed and Natalie helped to foster the infighting with the supposedly tight group that

made the majority. The rat, something that had little to do with her strategy and more to

do with her need for food, also affected how we perceived Natalie, soon to be dubbed

"Ratalie" by Jaison. This humorous moment showed her as more powerful and in control

than ever before. Her slight frame, donning a skimpy pink bikini, stealthily snuck up on

the rat. Then while clubbing it she apologized to God and the rat. It was a moment mixed

with humor, strength and the signature Natalie innocence; it was a classic *Survivor* scene

and enhanced her character's performance.

Keeping an alliance strong was essential until it wasn't needed any longer. In the

game of *Survivor* characters understood the importance of a strong alliance, but the best

strategy could be abandoning your alliance at the most opportune time. Unfortunately for

Galu, they did not operate so deftly with their strategic play. The Galu tribe learned

immediately after the merge that "a group can't be tight if one of them isn't" (Jeff Probst,

episode 10). Or, put another way, a "team" isn't a team if one person is not in agreement

of the definition of the situation. In episode 8, the two tribes merged and Foa Foa, a true

"team" in the Goffmanian sense, was able to infiltrate the not-so-aligned Galu alliance to

oust Erik, a key threat from the Galu tribe. Once an alliance shows a crack, the

breakdown is imminent and the stronger alliance tends to win.

The voting process was always telling when it came to alliances. Who you voted

for exposed your alliances and strategy. Despite any ties to others in the game, the vote

was a solitary task marked by a long walk between the rest of the characters and the

voting hut. Once there it was the character with a lone marker and piece of parchment. The formal elements of the voting scenes marked the individualistic nature of the vote. These votes were what ultimately influenced the outcome of the game and offered the best evidence for how each character's performance was integral to the how the story progressed.

A great example of this resulted in the most dramatic of vote of the season, aside from the final vote for obvious reasons; John's tiebreaker vote sent Laura home. The old Galu tribe thought they were a solid and loyal alliance within the newly merged Aiga tribe. During the first of two tribal councils in episode 10, Laura and Natalie were tied after the first vote. The Foa Foa four (Mick, Russell, Jaison and Natalie) plus Shambo all voted for Laura. The other alliance, the former Galu (minus Shambo) voted for Natalie. As the rules of the game stated, in the event of a tie, all of the tribe members had to vote again this time only for the two that are in the tie. If there was another tie then everyone would draw stones and whoever got the wrong colored stone was out of the game. Not wanting to leave his fate to a random draw, John switched sides. Before tribal council Russell promised him that a Foa Foa member would be the next voted out if he would vote for Laura. This crucial alliance betrayal cost both Laura and John the game. After Laura's torch was snuffed, Host Probst aptly stated: "Since the merge there have been three very surprising tribal councils. I don't know if it's Galu, Foa Foa or Aiga [the name of the newly merged tribe]. And I'm guessing you guys don't either." (Probst, Episode 9). This key move shook up the Galu alliance and cemented the Foa Foa four's allegiance. These individual decisions changed not only the game, but also the character performances within the game. John was now a betrayer, Galu members now felt more

vulnerable and less confident, and the Foa Foa four felt a greater sense of achievement.

As was the case with all of the above examples, the characters, without a script,

maintained significant authorial control based on their decisions and character

performances within the *Survivor: Samoa* narrative.

Summary of Character Performance

Within *Survivor: Samoa*, characters exercised a relatively large amount of control

over the narrative when compared to other popular television narratives. Two of the three

research questions posed at the beginning of this project were considered in this chapter:

RQ1: *What evidence exists within* Survivor: Samoa *demonstrating that characters have some agency in creating the narrative of the show?*

RQ3: *How do characters contribute to their identity, the identity of others on* Survivor: Samoa *and does this ability imply agency*?

Evidence of agency within the narrative was explored through three key themes that

emerged from *Survivor: Samoa* – appearance, the voice of the character's performance,

and his or her strategic game play. Decisions made in order to support and uphold that

performance altered the trajectory of the narrative. It is in this essential claim that

characters are agents within the narrative of *Survivor* and shows like it.

In terms of narrative, while all three aspects of agency were equally essential to

the art of character performance, strategy, more than the characters' voices or

appearances, were crucial to what actually happened. This means that alliances, voting,

decision-making and any other form of strategy were all integral forces of agency within

the <u>game</u> of *Survivor*. Unlike any other type of narrative, *Survivor,* and shows like it,

allowed the characters to make their own decisions without a script. Like real life, we do

not always have control over what decisions are made for us. For example, on *Survivor:*

Samoa, Erik did not realize that his tribe had turned against him, and decided he would be

the first member of the newly merged tribe to be voted out. While Erik did not exercise

agency in his own ousting, his tribemates did and most importantly, the Producers did

not; neither Jeff Probst, Mark Burnett nor any of the other producers, editors or

technicians had control over Erik's or any other *Survivor* character's dismissal. An

exception to this rule would be in the case of medical emergencies. In those cases, it was

up to the on-site medic to determine if someone was well enough to continue. We saw

this happen twice in *Survivor: Samoa* with Mike and Russell S.

At the end of the season, it came down to which character had the best strategy,

and even then it was not up to the Producers or viewers to decide. Instead the format of

the show dictated that a jury of the final three's peers determined who won. In a

remarkably interesting final tribal council, Erik used his opportunity to ask questions to

sum up his perspective about strategy and what made a good strategy. His speech was a

quintessential final tribal council speech. Perhaps one of the best speeches because it

exposed some of the key questions about the *Survivor* game: is being sneaky, malicious,

manipulative and conniving the correct strategy, or is taking a less dominant, less adverse

role the better way to play? He answered his own question saying it was the latter and

voted for Natalie. Based on the final vote, it was assumed that the majority of the jurors

agreed.

In summation, not only did characters enact their individual performances through

appearance, what was said and who each person aligned with, each one literally decided

the other's fate and determined who won the game. In the beginning of the season, no one

knew for sure who was going to win. Most sporting events are not that ambiguous in the

beginning because we can know certain statistics about teams to gauge who is better.

Survivor's narrative revolves around how 20 unique characters strategized, without a

script, and voted to see who won $1 million.

CHAPTER 8: SHARING AUTHORIAL POWER

As I have demonstrated in the previous two chapters, *Survivor: Samoa* offers great evidence to suggest that both the Producers and the characters exert authorial control over the narrative. But, what happens when these distinct groups combine, or work in concert to create the narrative? Based on the previous pages, it is agreed there is no single author. Therefore *Survivor* and reality shows like it are exercises in shared authorship (to varying degrees of success depending on your perspective). Therefore, the following describes the themes uncovered in my analysis of *Survivor: Samoa* that indicates a co-opted relationship between the Producers and characters. This collaboration is one in which the Producers, as I explained in chapter 6, have the ultimate authority. Regardless, the unique and mutual manipulation that takes place between the Producers and the characters is exemplified by the clever use of juxtaposition and how compelling characters are created.

At the beginning of this project I posed the following research question regarding this concept of shared authorship:

RQ2: *How does the combination of authors – characters and content producers – contribute to the narrative of* Survivor: Samoa?

I assumed that these distinct groups of authors would have to collaborate in order to achieve a successful and cohesive narrative thread. In what follows I offer two ways - juxtaposition and character development – in which the Producers and the characters work together in creating the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa*. Neither is exclusive to reality television or any one narrative form, but rather they are time-tested devices for thoughtful narratives. However, these storytelling fundamentals take on new meaning in reality shows like *Survivor: Samoa* because the characters have no script.

Juxtaposition, for example, can allow for characters to tell their own story using their own voice based on how the editors choose to order certain scenes and audio clips. Character development too becomes distinctive because of the multi-authorial collaboration. In what follows I will explore *how* these classic elements pertain to *Survivor: Samoa*.

In general, the relationship between the characters and Producers is a co-opted one; the Producers use the raw material the unscripted characters provide to make it into a cohesive narrative. The term *co-opted* implies a power dynamic between the two sets of authorial agents. As described above, the Producers have the ultimate control over what we see, but the characters have the exclusive task of providing the content. The power dynamic shifts between the two groups. The characters are able to use the platform of *Survivor: Samoa* to garner their modicum of fame, establish themselves as unique individuals, or have "and experience of a lifetime" (Jaison, episode 14). Despite the multiple perspectives contributing to the plot, in the end the Producers ultimately control the narrative and what audiences watch on their televisions. The most savvy of characters understand the co-optation and use it to their best advantage: like Russell H. for example.

Therefore, when storytelling is shared the narrative becomes much more dynamic, but in order for this to happen the characters must be unscripted. Were they scripted *Survivor: Samoa* would just like any other entertainment program. In general, the plot is shaped by the events and the narrative is formed by the way those events are relayed to the audience. Within *Survivor: Samoa* the characters worked with the Producers by cooperating and abiding by the rules; they obligingly existed within the fiction-like construction of the game. Before they were allowed to travel to the exotic locale, each

character signed away all rights to their story on the show and allowed the Producers to tell it at they see fit. This agreement was the first formal cooperation between the two types of authors.

This collusion was not unique to *Survivor* or reality television in any form. Documentary filmmakers also have a similar agreement; they orchestrate the various moving pieces of the narrative in order to create a cohesive text. However, the subjects of a documentary film and the characters of *Survivor: Samoa* are markedly different. Principally because of the superficial setting where the show takes place. Subjects of a documentary film are typically filmed in their own unique habitat and their performance within that habitat is the main interest in their story. In contrast, the characters of *Survivor: Samoa* are placed in a fictive-like world that barely resembles their own.

Another difference exists in the reason participants are selected. On *Survivor: Samoa*, participants are chosen to be part of a larger cast – not part of an organic entity that existed before the interference of filmmakers or producers. Therefore, both the setting and process for selection separate the subjects from the characters regarding documentary film and reality TV shows like *Survivor: Samoa*. Making this distinction is important because it also demonstrates that the use of juxtaposition and character development, while common storytelling devices, are decidedly different when examined within different contexts. In what follows I offer a typology of juxtaposition and two great examples of how character development is a collaborative effort: Shannon "Shambo" Waters and Russell Hantz. Both are crucial to creating the narrative of the show and are evidence of a multi-authorial effort.

Juxtaposition

Editing, as I discussed in chapter six, is the placement of images and audio next to each other. Or, as Pudovkin (2004; 1926) stated: "[Editing is] a compulsory and deliberate guidance of the thoughts and associations of the spectator… coordinated accordingly to a definitely selected course of events or conceptual line" (p.10). For my purposes, I treat editing as the thoughtful creative process and *juxtaposition* as the end result of that endeavor. The Producers of *Survivor* crafted plot points and characterizations through the use of clever juxtaposition. Juxtaposition simply means putting two things side by side, from a standard dictionary definition (dictionary.com, 2011). However, as any professional communicator (journalist, film maker, TV producer, writer, etc.) can agree, the selection of the two juxtaposed items is crucial (Caputi, 1991). Since Raymond Williams' 1976 book on the subject of television, TV scholars have been exploring the "flow" of programming (Caputi, 1991). In addition, it is crucial to understand the "flow" within a program to help uncover the "hidden messages" that Adorno (1957) refers to, which are worthy of critical attention (Caputi, 1991, p. 34). Therefore, based on the way it emerged within my analysis of *Survivor: Samoa*, juxtaposition is defined here as the way the   flow of editing creates meaning (Caputi, 1991, p. 34).

In his article about editing, Pudovkin (2004; 1926) articulated several ways in which editing can be used to take viewers on a psychological journey. Editing can be metaphorical, imply time progression, oppose contrasting scenes for dramatic effect, or simply be a helpful explanation for what audiences are about to see (Pudovkin, 2004;

1926). In a similar fashion, I found three principal ways juxtaposition contributes to the

flow of the of *Survivor: Samoa* narrative. Each of these styles required the collaboration

and co-optation of the characters and the Producers. Juxtaposition within *Survivor:*

Samoa allowed for multiple unscripted and scripted (i.e. Jeff Probst) voices offering

perspectives on the same scene. Despite the seemingly democratic nature of giving

characters their own voice, the ultimate control lay in the Producers' hands. In what

follows, the evidence from the textual analysis demonstrated how the Producers deftly

employed the art of editing to juxtapose aspects of the narrative to co-opt the characters'

voices and actions. The effect was a powerful way to shape the narrative.

I identified three ways juxtaposition was used to convey hidden messages within

the text of *Survivor: Samoa* (Caputi, 1991). First, *contradictory juxtaposition* is a

combination of audio and images that disagree with each other. Typically, contradictory

juxtaposition was used to provide evidence for a lie, or a skewed self-awareness; mostly,

the second image or audio clip would negate the message relayed in the first one. In

contradictory juxtapositions, typically the Producers used the characters' words and

actions against them in order to provide a more "honest" portrayal of that character. The

co-opted nature of this type of juxtaposition clearly places the authorial power with the

Producers, as they use the characters' raw material to create a compelling narrative. The

use of contradictory juxtaposition is a staple in most visual media and used very

effectively in *Survivor: Samoa*.

Another type used in this season is *complimentary juxtaposition*, which is

essentially the opposite of the contradictory kind. This was used most successfully when

a character was telling a story about some event and the Producers used the audio on top

of video to bring his or her story to life. The effect gave the character a narrator's voice within the narrative. This was powerful because it emphasized the role the character had in the process of storytelling; it highlighted the character's ability to create the narrative as well as his or her own identity.

The final type of juxtaposition identified in the textual analysis is *associative juxtaposition*. As the name suggests, it placed audio and images or two images back-to-back with objects or statements that were related to each other. A frequent device of the Producers, associative juxtaposition was exemplified in the use of b-roll footage. For example, images of a snake or a spider in a web were often juxtaposed with a scene in which a character had exhibited qualities of a snake (being conniving and sneaking up on their prey) or that of a spider (luring their opponent into their trap, only to devour them). In *Survivor: Samoa,* the creepy crawly of choice was the crab, as I will explain later. The use of associative juxtaposition was a sometimes-subtle way in which the Producers created characters.

Contradictory juxtaposition

Contradictory juxtaposition is a helpful device the Producer exercised to use a character's words against him or her on *Survivor: Samoa*. An aspect of storytelling borrowed from fiction, it demonstrated how the Producers could manipulate a character's performance. On sitcoms and other fictional narratives, the script indicates precisely when a character must betray an aspect of their previous performance. On *Survivor: Samoa* these moments were not scripted and were dramatically emphasized through contradictory juxtaposition.

The purpose of this narrative device was not only to catch characters in the act of lying, but it also presented opposing sides in a succinct way without much obstructive imposition from the Producers. By simply placing the two images (or image and audio) next to each other the contradictions made themselves known by even the most unsophisticated viewer. Savvy viewers (as Andrejevic (2004) calls the reality television literate) have an especially fun time with all sorts of juxtaposition because it is used often and well throughout the season. The very nature of an unscripted narrative hinges on the effective use of juxtaposition. Therefore, on shows like *Survivor: Samoa* the dramatic effect of using this device to highlight contradictions made it all the more purposeful.

As I mentioned in chapter 7, Mike Barassi weighed in on Mick's choice for Jaison to complete the swimming portion of the first challenge. As he questioned Jaison's ability to swim because of his race, his direct address changed to a voice-over. We cut to the scene as he finishes his statement with Jaison dominating the swimming portion of the first challenge. In this example, the Producers used Mike's words against him to make him look foolish, out of touch and racist. Mike's contradicting voice-over juxtaposed with images of Jaison's performance seemed to emphasize that previously held biases were going to be tested in this game. Interestingly, before Mike's comment, Jaison admitted that he expected his tribe mates to assume that he would not be a good swimmer; this prophecy was actualized with Mike's comment. Also, later we learn that Jaison competed on the national U.S. water polo team.

Consistently, the Producers used the art of contradictory juxtaposition to make characters look silly, and allowed the audience to witness the characters' performance betrayals. For example, Shambo, in episode two went fishing and returned with nothing.

The inherent drama in the last sentence would be enough to warrant an eye roll from the average viewer who knows that Shambo must be in trouble if she cannot help to provide food for her camp[33]. The Producers drew out this event to emphasize this part of her character performance – despite touting her capable survival skills Shambo failed miserably – and justified Shambo's position within her tribe. Leading up to this moment Shambo discussed how hard she worked and her resentment towards her tribemates for lounging around all day.

> **Monica** (*direct address*): Shambo says spear fishing is her thing, so I hope she comes back with some fish [back in scene she sings a song with the words "fish in my belly" as she cuts up a plantain]
>
> **Kelly** (*to Monica*): She's been gone for a while, so I hope she caught some fish.
>
> [Cut to Shambo floating on her back with non-diagetic Hawaiian ukulele music. Her fishing gear rests on the shore of the pond while we hear Shambo's voice-over to this scene]
>
> **Shambo** (*voice-over*): I haven't had anything close to a bath in days. I did some fishing, but couldn't catch a thing. I can't see anything even with the mask and this murky water.

The contradictory juxtaposition here highlighted Shambo's inept fishing abilities and accentuated her obliviousness to her tribe. Even her words were contradictory: she starts of explaining how she needed to float in the water since she hadn't bathed in days, yet the water was too dirty to see anything. Her character performance, in her mind, supported her self-perception. However, her actions, as the Producers adeptly pointed out, did not live up to her own standards. Instead of working hard, she was portrayed lazily floating in a swampy pond. This was not a manufactured scene, it actually happened, unscripted.

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[33] At this early stage in the game, those that are helpful around camp are valuable since they must hunt and forage for all of their food. Historically, characters tend to get a pass for the first few tribal councils if they can provide for their tribe.

There were two contrasting elements for the audience to enjoy, which those in the scene did not have the luxury of observing. First was Shambo's malign of her fellow tribemates' questionable work ethic juxtaposed with her back float in the pond while her tribe was thinking she was fishing. Second, was her tribe's wish for her Shambo/Rambo persona to bear fruit in the form of fish, juxtaposed with her back float in the pond. These two contradictions justified the Galu tribe's frustration with Shambo. In a simple little montage the narrative nuances unfolded offering insight into character relationships. This scene also served as an invitation for audiences to make their own judgments about Shambo's character Each character within in the scene contributed to these narrative points, but it was the creative juxtaposition of events that made them meaningful to the audience.

Like Shambo, other characters tried to present themselves as one thing, but their performances were betrayed when a strategically placed contradictory juxtaposition proved them false. First, there was Jaison, the complex character who wished to be a great man, but found he fell short of his intentions. In episode eleven we were offered greater insight into why he wanted to be a great man based on his father's story of triumphing over extreme adversity. At the start of episode eight, Jaison was resolute about turning around the Foa Foa bad luck that seemed to follow them.

> **Jaison**: [Talking to his tribe mates as they walked back from camp from tribal council] well guys, if "rah rah" is what we need, I can be "rah, rah."
> **Natalie** (*to Jaison*): All right, we need "rah, rah!"
> **Jaison** (*direct address*): As a tribe we're down to four people. We're in a horribly inferior position to the other tribe. We have to struggle to get to the merge and then try to divide and conquer.

Despite his promise to his tribe, Jaison did not embrace a positive attitude. This contradictory juxtaposition showed that Jaison said he would try to be more positive and

"rah rah", an obvious reference to being a perky, upbeat cheerleader. However, in a split second after his promise we hear his doom and gloom speech that is more reminiscent of the fabled Eeyore the donkey of *Winnie The Pooh* fame than an optimistic and spirited teammate. Here, the Producers used Jaison's words to show how his character was inherently down and frustrated. He betrayed his own performance and unapologetically so; his character was more concerned with being realistic than being optimistic. Therefore, this juxtaposition not only demonstrated Jaison's internal struggle within the game, but also emphasized his role on the show: the whiner.

Each example of contradictory juxtaposition demonstrates the Producers' ability to use the unscripted nature of the show to the narrative's best advantage. It exposed performance inconsistencies that gave the audience a deeper understanding of the characters. This narrative device also showed that without a script, and as in everyday life, individuals are constantly engaged in the act of contradicting themselves as those in the audience were constantly reshaping their impression of them. This type of juxtaposition revealed the authorial power the Producers have over an unscripted narrative.

Complimentary juxtaposition

Complimentary juxtaposition, in contrast, offered the character more narrative control by allowing him or her to narrate stories rather than have Probst narrate them. This was an essential aspect of juxtaposition unique to the narrative structure of *Survivor: Samoa* and reality shows like it; while most often in direct address to the camera (aka, the audience), characters in their own words told their story. This aspect of storytelling draws from *Survivor'*s documentary film roots where this type of juxtaposition is also common.

Other current programs like *How I Met Your Mother* and *The Office* also have character-narrators, but their scripted narration does not allow for *Survivor: Samoa*'s more genuine storytelling experience. We learn the story as it unfolded from the individuals living out the plot. This was a powerful device because it emphasized the character's position within the narrative as well as his or her awareness of the audience at home and their perception of the story.

Participants who signed up to be on *Survivor: Samoa* were fully aware of the fact they would be filmed 24 hours a day for 39 days. They were not under any false pretense that their experiences would be private; these character performances unfolded *because* of the presence of cameras and the promise of an unknown audience (Andrejevic, 2004). Most of the characters wanted their voice heard. As I mentioned in chapter 7, the voice is the most unique aspect of each character, so to be featured is of utmost importance (aside from the $1 million prize). Therefore, their control over the narrative hinges on their ability to be included in the final cut of each episode. To do so characters must act and speak boldly. Much of the time at camp was boring – cooking, sleeping, bathing, gathering wood – until someone made it interesting. The characters that get the most control over the narrative are the ones that use their voice to it's best potential. The colorful use of language, bold moves within the game, and other deviant acts would be regarded as interesting and therefore included on the final show.

A great example of complimentary juxtaposition came from Yasmin's memorable direct address in episode two where she claimed, "the hood is not the wood." Interspersed with her direct address was audio and images of Yasmin around camp being altogether uncomfortable and miserable about her new dwellings:

Yasmin (*direct address*): I don't know who invented loving the outdoors. [Cut to her in camp walking funny and proclaiming: "Look how I have to walk like with a sick up my butt!" cut back to her in D/A] **Yasmin** (*direct address*): I've been told: "if you can make it in Detroit, you can make it anywhere." The hood is not the wood! [Cut back to her in camp where she eats something unidentifiable and makes an audible "Eww" to go along with an equally disgusted face.] (Yasmin, episode 2).

This example of the complimentary juxtaposition introduced us to a character's feeling

about a person, topic, or aspect of the show given in direct address. She took a mundane

discomfort and described it with a clever rhyme to add interest. Then the Producer

provided evidence for the statements through the use of footage outside of the direct

address to support the character's claim. This case was especially appropriate because it

provided a zinger of a sound byte too, something the Producer needed to make for

noteworthy TV, and teaser advertising[34].

Another example of complimentary juxtaposition also occurred in episode two

when the Foa Foa tribe had difficulty sleeping because of Ben's antics. Instead of

involving one character's statements, it offered two characters who complained to the

camera via direct address about Ben's midnight wood chopping.

Betsey (*direct address*): I don't know why but Ben was up all night. Why would you hammer a machete in the middle of the night? I think he wants to go home. [As she speaks we cut to images of Ben chopping with the machete, then to Yasmin looking annoyed, followed by Jaison waking up and looking groggy.] **Jaison** (*to Mick*): I'm starting to get really annoyed with this guy. He's starting to drive me crazy.

The rest of that scene continued with the sound of the machete chopping throughout. Ben

was clearly starting to lose favor with his tribe mates. His annoying behavior caused

others to talk, both to us as an audience and to each other. We did not get Ben's side of

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[34] This snippet made it into the 30-second advertising spot on CBS during the week leading up to its airdate.

this story; instead the audience was positioned to side with Betsy and Jaison and relate to their frustration at being awoken needlessly. In this case, it wasn't the character's narrating that said much of interest; it was who they were talking about that was of most interest. This scene established Ben's adversarial role within the Foa Foa tribe.

In another, more subtle, moment of episode two, the juxtaposition of images legitimized what could have otherwise been perceived as paranoia on Betsy's part. In a voice-over emanating from a direct address, Betsy confided in the audience that she was very concerned about her status in the game: "Now that Mike is gone I know I'm on the chopping block. They're all looking at me and I don't want to go. I don't want to go at all!" As she said this we saw her in the scene and next came quick cuts to Ashley and then to Liz. Both women were in close up directing their attention off camera. The way it was edited suggested Liz and Ashley's eyes were, in fact, on Betsy. Therefore, the juxtaposition of images supported her theory that everyone was looking at her.

Complimentary juxtaposition provided a way for characters to make claims with the benefit of the Producer's all-seeing eye. Russell S.'s desire to get rid of Monica after her poor performance in an immunity challenge on episode four was a great representation of this juxtaposing effect. The audience had just seen Monica struggling across a tightrope in the challenge and knew that it was due to her lack of upper body strength that they lost the challenge to Foa Foa. Russell S. stated the following in his direct address: "Today we lost our first immunity challenge. I just got pissed off. We had the lead the whole time. Then I saw we had one person that kind of fell apart." Then, the camera cut to Russell S and Erik discussing how awfully Monica performed:

> **Erik**: Ok, boss, talk to me. [He says this as he sits next to Russell S.]
> **Russell S**.: In terms of the challenge, Monica screwed that up

> **Erik**: Horrible!
> **Russell S.**: Terrible! She's a young girl, hanging out and having a good time, like it's Club Med or something.
> [As he says, "She's a young girl" the camera leaves the two men talking with their audio over a scene of Monica walking down the beach in her tiny bikini. Then cut back to the two men.]
> **Erik**: I think you know my mindset's similar to yours.
> [Cut quickly to Monica walking in the water as the camera pans up her svelte and water-dripping frame].

Obviously the common mindset that Erik referred to was that they should vote off Monica. However, this scene could also be interpreted as a latent innuendo as well. Regardless, complimentary juxtaposition here alluded to Russell S.'s statements that Monica was simply in the game to "have a good time" and not to seriously compete. Her lackadaisical walk down the beach and her attractive figure marked the Producers' evidence for his statements. The Producers equated Monica's youth and beauty with not being a serious competitor. Had they let the statements stand-alone with the audience recalling her performance in the challenge, this reading might not be so problematic.

Finally, another way in which the Producers co-opted the character's language was during the "Next time on *Survivor*" segments when they previewed the upcoming episode. Russell H., the best at making sure his voice was included in the narrative through his witty metaphors and scathing sound bytes, was a constant in these brief epilogues. For example, at the end of episode seven Russell announced in a teaser for the merge that "all of a sudden all hell breaks loose!" His statement was verified with images and audio of the following:

> **John** (to others off-camera): Monica's going home tonight. [Talking to others who are off-camera, then cut to…]
> **Shambo** (to Russell): Laura is the only name we are writing down [Then cut to…]
> **Laura** (to Russell): It will be Shambo [Then cut to…]
> **Kelly** (to others off-camera): Erik 100% [Then cut to…]

> **Russell H.** (*direct address*): I got to do what I gotta [sic] do. Things are going to get crazy around here tomorrow!

The use of the jump cuts to different characters with different plots provided evidence for Russell's statement that all hell had in fact broken loose on the newly merged tribe. Also, the Producers only allowed us to see the others confiding in Russell H. We don't see whom John or Kelly are talking to, thereby positioning Russell H. as the authority about what will happen next. The use of his voice in framing what was about to happen placed him in the position of power within the narrative and the one who understood what was going on within the game. The Producers could have used a sound byte from Jeff Probst, one of their own, instead of Russell H.'s unscripted description of what was going to happen in the next episode. However, they didn't; instead, they allowed Russell H. and other dynamic voices to be heard so they could recount their story for the audience and support their perspectives using other footage to shape the narrative.

Associative Juxtaposition

Complimentary and contradictory juxtaposition are opposing sides of the co-opted authorship wherein the Producer used character's unscripted actions and words to either refute or support their claims or feelings. Associative juxtaposition, in contrast occurred when the Producers placed two things (images, audio or both) next to each other that they considered to be related. A great example of this was the use of B-roll footage in between scenes. Each season the camera operators captured the various unpleasant creatures that inhabited the foreign locales. In season 19 the ants, crabs, and snakes were favored images. Towards the beginning of *Survivor: Samoa* it was becoming clear that the Producers wanted us to associate Russell H. with the crab. There were several allusions to this when they would end a scene with Russell H. and then show an image of a crab

scurrying across the sand. As the season wore on the crab juxtaposition with Russell H. waned. However, it reoccurred in one of the final episodes when Natalie referred to Russell H. as the crab man, referencing his adeptness at catching crabs.

Another allusion to Russell H.'s smarmy and dangerous persona occurred in an extremely brief, but noteworthy example of associative juxtaposition. During episode seven, after a commercial break, the show returned with an underwater scene of a shark swimming. The camera then cut to a scene where Natalie and Liz were making fire, while Russell H. walked away along the beach by himself. The music under this scene was mysterious and ominous and implied that he was taking a walk to plot his next big move. Between the sharks, the solitary amble, and the music, the Producers gave us cues to imply that Russell H. had more tricks to contemplate. As we were to find out later, Liz would be his next victim. This subtle little associative juxtaposition placed Liz, tending and making a fire, between a circling shark and an ambling Russell H., plotting her demise. The sharks foretold the upcoming attack in a subtle but important way; Russell H.'s character performance as a powerful strategic player was highlighted by the Producers choice to associate him with such strong imagery in this scene.

In episode 14, the Producers provided another associative image of nature, but this time juxtaposed with Brett's recitation of Ephesians 3:16. The mise en scene was filled with a beautiful Samoan sunrise with the subtitle "AIGA – DAY 34." This shot underscored Brett's voice when we cut to him and Natalie lying next to each other in the shelter. The religious undertones of their relationship emerged in this episode. Natalie's religiosity had been part of her performance in other episodes, but not to the extent that it unfolded in this one. Later in the same episode Natalie declared the two of them "prayer

warriors" as they prayed to help their team win the reward challenge. The sunrise

juxtaposed with the biblical recitation alluded to the promise of a new day and a sense of

purity with a new start. This association foreshadowed Brett's ability to survive another

day in the hostile Foa Foa dominated Aiga camp.

Creating Characters

Combining character performances with the Producers' desire for a dramatic and

interesting story that viewers will want to watch is the pinnacle of co-opted authorship.

Within the *Survivor: Samoa* text, the prevalence of character performances indicated that

some were deemed more important to the narrative or potentially interesting to audiences

than others based on their time on screen. As chapters 6 and 7 have discussed at length,

both the Producers and characters maintained authorial power in varying amounts.

Season-to-season, program-to-program, characters are the breathing piece of reality

television and it is their formulation that is all-important when discussing narrative.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand what was involved when creating a dynamic

Survivor character.

Each character had at least one featured moment throughout the season; none of

the characters were under-developed and in time we got to know each one. Some were

featured more than others. Therefore, I chose the two that were featured the most to

explore more deeply. As I described in chapter 5, each episode was timed to understand

how much each character was featured. In order to be counted, the scene they appeared in

or spoke over had to last at least three seconds to create an impression on the audience.

Based on the results from this supplementary analysis, Shambo and Russell H. were the

most prominently featured throughout the season. As the graph below indicates, they

tended to have the most features episode by episode, which implied the Producers also

saw them as their principal characters[35].

Figure 2: Character screen time per episode

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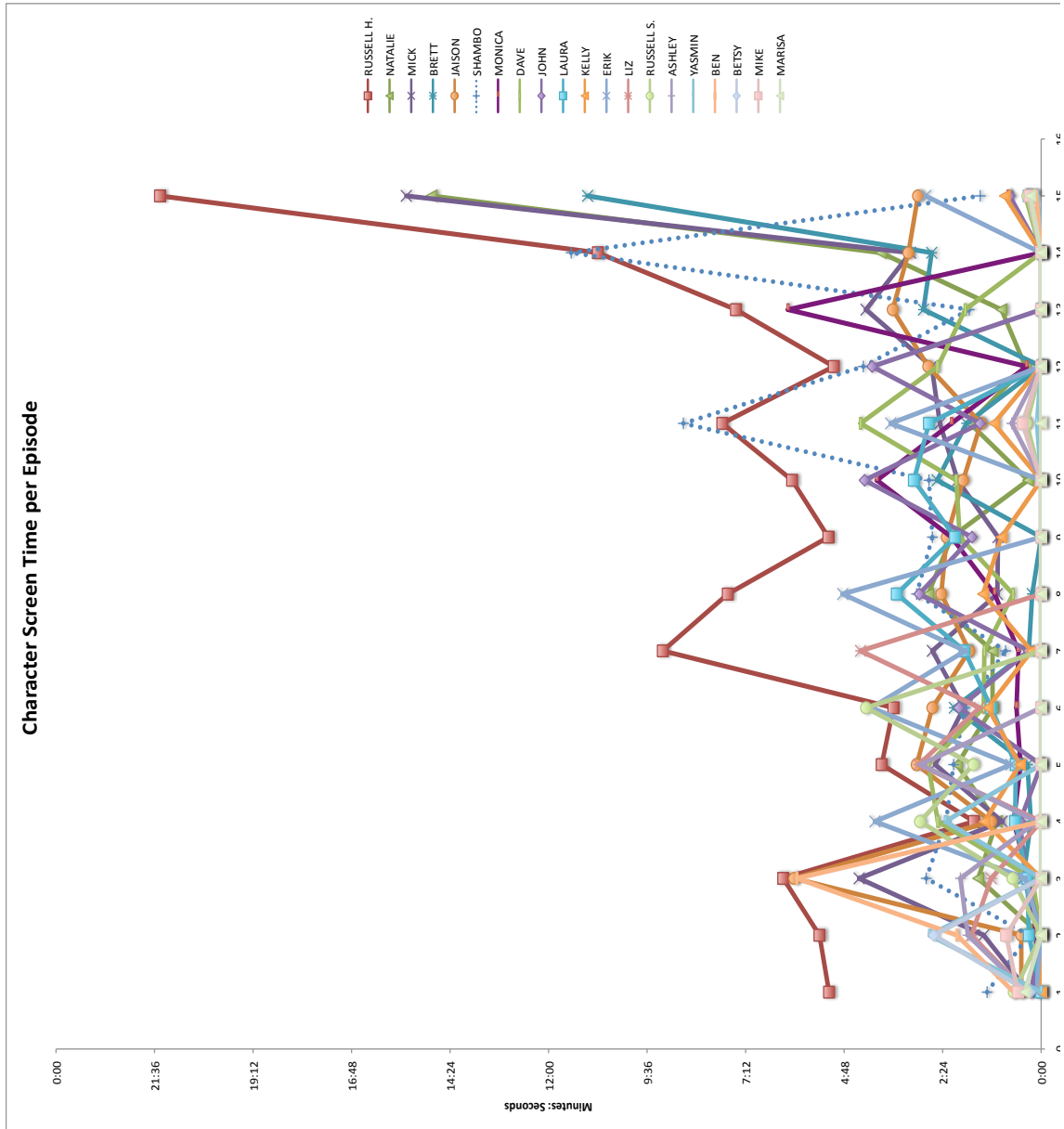
[35] In episode 1 of season 21, *Survivor: Redemption Island*, both Russell and Shambo were featured in featurettes that posed the question "what if one your favorite survivors from a past season could have returned to the game?" (Probst, episode 1, season 21). This is yet another indication that Shambo and Russell H. were considered the leading two characters of season 19.

In what follows I provide examples for how the co-opted authorship between characters and the Producers formulated *Survivor: Samoa*'s 2 most memorable characters, one of which was perhaps the most villainous of all time. From the outset Russell Hantz and Shannon "Shambo" Waters drew the audience's attention because the Producers featured them. We saw these characters develop throughout the season, starting with their strong foundations established in episode 1. In both cases it was clear Russell and Shambo were strong personalities. It would be impossible for the Producer to co-opt a character if there was no material to begin with.

Russell H. and Shambo were allies. Russell H. was the quintessential villain on *Survivor: Samoa* and Shambo was the loveable, naïve, underdog. Despite these brief, and generalizing, descriptions, each character, not just Russell H. and Shambo, came to Samoa with their baggage, their life experiences; their individuality. None of them had a script of what to say, or were put through styling that told them how to dress or wear their hair. Each of them brought their individual style to Samoa. These unique selves interacted with others and the result was edited and manipulated by the Producers to create the final program.

Russell Hantz

Season 19 was the season of Russell Hantz (hereafter referred to as just Russell). His character dominated the screen time and Jeff Probst's blog more than any other character. To achieve this level of notoriety Russell needed to provide a consistent character performance and be central to the plot; Russell delivered on both counts.

Despite not winning the $1 million prize, Russell won something much more long lasting

in the world of reality television; he was now officially a reality TV star. Put simply,

Russell's self-interest was matched by the Producer's franchise interest. Since his debut

on *Survivor: Samoa* in 2009, Russell has played in the all but one of the succeeding three

seasons. He was on the villain's tribe for season 20, *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains,* and

although he did not participate in season 21, he was cast season 22, *Survivor: Redemption*

Island. In co-opting the unscripted character that Russell performed, the Producers saw

an opportunity to create a new franchise favorite and to that end they needed to push his

exposure. That is why the "Last Time On *Survivor*" segment featured him on every single

episode.

In his blog, Probst, one of the Producers, went to great lengths to emphasize

Russell's role on the show. While seemingly redundant because of his primacy on the

show itself, Probst chose to use his blog's introduction for the entire season to set up

Russell's character.

> A new star has most definitely been born. He stands about 5 feet tall and when he
> slips that buff on top of his head, he transforms into a pirate, missing tooth and
> all. He was discovered on *Survivor*, the greatest reality show of all time, his name
> is Russell Hantz and in addition to being absolutely captivating on television, he
> writes and delivers some of the greatest material ever heard in 20 seasons of
> *Survivor*. As long as Russell is on the show you are going to be talking about him
> and I am going to be writing about him. Instead of protesting like you did last
> season about my infatuation with Coach, why not try "riding the horse in the
> direction it's going." 'Cause trust me, that is the direction this blog is going.
> (Probst, 2009).

From the outset, Russell was an obvious villain with very questionable morals.

Between his sinister sabotage around his own camp and his lie about being a victim from

hurricane Katrina, Russell established in episode one that he was *not* a player who cared

about integrity in the moral sense; he was there to play the game and to win. On one of

the first nights of the season, Russell stirred up some drama since everyone was too

happy around camp for his liking; he wanted more suffering and turmoil (precisely what

the Producers wanted!). That night he stole everyone's canteens and emptied the water

out of them. He also took Jaison's socks and burned them in the fire[36]. The result of his

unscripted shenanigans elicited a mild response and frankly did not stir as much trouble

as I think he had hoped.

Perhaps more abhorrent was Russell's next tactic to incite turmoil and win him

some sympathy. While they were all chatting and getting to know each other before

falling asleep, Russell drummed up a tall tale about his tragic experience during hurricane

Katrina. He said that his home was devastated and he had to wait out on the roof for help

and he almost lost his dog Rocky. The story elicited sympathy due to the national

understanding of the suffering during Katrina, and made all the more pitiful by the detail

of the dog. His irreprehensible exploitation of a serious national tragedy was morally

bankrupt and solidified him in one episode as being one of the worst villains to play the

game. Not since Johnny "Fairplay" in season 7, *Survivor: Pearl Islands*, when he faked

that his Grandma had passed away, was there a more elaborate lie. Russell had no shame

in lying and kept us as an audience (through direct address) in the loop about his musings

and abusings by telling us the truth.

What made the story even more loathsome was the callous way he admitted to the

audience that none of it was true. We saw him deviously pour out the canteens later that

night and then told the camera: "I'm really a multi-millionaire. I own an oil company in

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[36] During the reunion episode, Russell, in what seemed to start out as an apology to
Jaison, acted as though he was replacing his socks, but instead though better of it and
threw them into the fire that was part of the reunion show set.

Houston. I'm not here to win the money, I'm here to show everyone how easy it is to win this game" (Russell H., episode 1). So far in episode one the Producers established that: he's cruel; he's unsympathetic; he's manipulative; he's conniving; and he's rich. All of these qualities supported CBS pre-season teasers proclaiming Russell as the "greatest villain in *Survivor* history" (CBS promo, August 2009).

In episode one the juxtaposition of all these elements was extremely sophisticated. The Producers and Russell deftly worked together to create this thread of the narrative. It is perhaps why Probst called him one of the best players the show has ever had. He was the Producers' dream; Russell's ability to wittily conjure metaphors of subjugation was unmatched by any other in *Survivor: Samoa*. For example, his more memorable sound bytes involved puppets, zombies and babies.

> **Russell** (*direct address voice-over*): [His direct address is in voice-over as we see him talking with everyone on his tribe about voting out Marisa]: My tribe will believe anything I tell them at any point because they just… stupid! [Back into scene as he tells Ben to vote Marisa]
> **Ben:** Good, I hate that bitch.
> **Russell:** (*direct address voice-over*) Mick's the leader of the tribe, but I'm the one in charge of the camp. [Then we see him perched on a rock on top of a hill overlooking the ocean in his direct address] You can call me the puppet master. They gonna be my little puppets. They'll run when I tell them to run [Cut to images of Russell fist bumping various members of his tribe in montage as we hear this], they'll walk when I tell them to walk. And when I'm finished with them, I'll just throw them in the trash [sinister music leading to this climax in his monologue]. (Episode 1).

> **Russell** (*direct address*): This might be the worst tribe ever! I'll have them all walking around like zombies! (Episode 3)

> **Russell** (*direct address while eating a banana*): Worthless, no good, nothing. It's -- Where they all from? New York City? "I gotta [sic] stay dry, I can't get my hair wet." They're crazy. I don't know they might all start sucking each other's thumbs. A bunch of babies, that's why we lose the challenges, because they're weak! (episode 6).

Each of these examples demonstrated his hubris and manipulative personality. He even went so far as to say that each vote began with a "Russell seed" he planted in their brains. His confessed sense of control was evident throughout, as was the Producer's desire to paint him heavily with dark strokes; the sinister music, the uncomfortable lingering shots of him and his creepy toothless grin all provided visual affirmations of our understanding of Russell, the scoundrel.

Russell truly saw himself as the one who made all the decisions. Within the first 34 minutes of the season, he proclaimed himself to be the one "running the whole show!" (Russell, episode 1). It was not just Russell who told us about his dominance, but the Producers did as well through both obvious and subtle clues. After the merge, Russell was frequently filmed swinging in the hammock with his arms folded behind his head. He was not told to strike that pose or to take over that most comfortable spot, he went there on his own accord and his prostrate, relaxed position conveyed his own sense of power. In one such example, we saw Russell in his hammock (rarely did we see others in this coveted spot after the merge) while through a direct address voice-over we heard him congratulating himself on blindsiding Kelly after using his immunity idol.

> **Russell** (*direct address voice-over*): [He is swinging in the hammock with arms behind his head, smiling] My work is done. Like a painting; like a Picasso. You know, he's a great artist. This is my artwork. Might be one of my best pieces of work I've ever done. There's going to be a pretty expensive sale. They're going to write me a check for a million dollars for this work. Take that to the bank. (Russell, episode 10).

People came to him, sat below him as he reigned from his comfortable and relaxed pose. The sinister music that played when he walked down the beach or entered into a scene further cemented his rascal tactics.

Russell's confidence and ability to convince others to follow him made it hard to argue with his success as a formidable player in *Survivor: Samoa*. However, the language he used, his misogynistic tendencies, and his egotism made him a loathsome character. Throughout the season Russell felt the most threatened by the women who became wise to his game of manipulating, backstabbing, and creating multiple alliances. Of these women he felt Marisa, Betsy, Liz, Laura and eventually Monica (only after she managed to strong arm a flustered reaction out of Russell) were all threats because, in his mind, they were strong women. Natalie, at least to him, was not. Therefore, he felt he could trust Natalie if only because he thought she was a "dumb ass girl" (Russell, episode 1) and would not dare cross him or go against him. His lack of respect for women was especially apparent when he would consistently berate and belittle Natalie, his key alliance member.

In one example, Natalie convinced the Galu women to vote off Erik instead of going after Russell. Instead of being grateful to his ally and fortified in knowing he could trust her, he told her that she must be mistaken; there was no way that she could have possibly convinced anyone of anything. His demeanor was at once threatened (in terms of his own ability to play and manipulate others) but was also laced with genuine disbelief. After all, Natalie was not supposed to be smart; to Russell, she was the malleable bombshell and the direct opposite of him; how could she have pulled off something so smart? After several viewings, I can confirm that the Producers presented that sequence in such a way that Natalie was the one behind Erik's ousting. Russell's sharp and nasty comments to her made him look even more loathsome: "I don't think you talked them into it. I think *you think* you did" (Russell episode 8). His short, but deliberate comments

were abusive, highly manipulative, and demeaning. He was not comfortable with anyone stealing his limelight and certainly did not give credit to anyone else who might have an equally strategic idea. However, it was always difficult to tell if he acted quickly to snuff out anyone's feeling of confidence or if his actions were less conscious. It seemed that his calculated and controlling nature was more self-aware rather than visceral.

In the final day his confidence and egotism was at an all-time high. He was convinced he had won the game and was going to beat both Mick and Natalie, who were proven allies and friends in the game. He criticized both of them with his placating demeanor and over-the-top egocentric behavior. He pretended to be helping them prepare for their final tribal council, but in essence he was trying to deplete their confidence and dash their hopes of winning the grand prize. His tactic was off-putting for even the strongest of fans. His bombastic rants were typically saved for the direct addresses to the camera (or at least as the Producers had presented them up until this point). This time, he let loose on his fellow characters and left him looking like an over-confident bully. He verbally bullied Natalie into trying to come up with answers that potential jury members could ask her. In so doing he exposed his true feelings that she had ridden his coat tails and not been a strategic player. He truly believed and alluded to his feelings of grandeur that had typically been saved for his direct addresses to the camera.

> **Russell** (to Natalie): Don't make me make you look stupid in front of the jury. This game ain't [sic] over girl. I'll put you in the jury!
> **Natalie**: Ease up! Jeez! [Then, in *direct address*] I think there may be a little strategy involved in Russell's making us feel like we're not going to win. I just have to explain to the jury, I don't work the same way as Russell, and that will clearly not have worked for me. The girls that were aggressive, they got eliminated early. My strategy was to be myself and at the end of the day I wasn't out to get anybody and make anybody look bad.
> **Russell** (back in the scene): I'll tell you how I think the voting's gonna [sic] go – Shambo, Dave, Brett, John and Erik – that's five. I'm another millionaire.

Congratulations! [He starts chuckling to himself and receives no reaction from Natalie and Mick] (Episode 15).

The Producers were setting the stage for Russell's fall from superstardom to runner up since they knew he would get to the final round only to fail to win the votes he needed to win the $1 million prize. The collaborative authorship that created Russell's character as the ultimate scoundrel of *Survivor: Samoa* was key to constructing the narrative of the season. As far as Russell and the Producers were concerned, season 19 was the season of Russell. He was the center of most episodes and when he wasn't, his presence was still felt with various memorable metaphors the Producers used to highlight his control of the game. Sure, other plot points occurred along the way, but the emphasis on Russell was unparalleled. He provided all of the raw material necessary to fully develop and structure his character within the narrative. His sound bytes, antics, relationships, and game play all worked within the constraints of the Producers' gaze to offer up the quintessential *Survivor* villain.

Shannon "Shambo" Waters

Unlike Russell, Shambo was only on 1 season (so far). Also, unlike Russell, the Producers might have had a stronger hand in creating her character than Russell's. With Russell, we often found he was narrating his own story; complimentary juxtaposition was a device more often used with Russell than with Shambo. Instead, contradictory juxtaposition was a staple in Shambo's portrayals. Her strange behaviors were even juxtaposed with manipulated imagery, a rarity on *Survivor*. In chapter 8, I gave an example of this aspect of her character in describing her dream sequence when she tried to convince her new tribemates to vote out Dave.

Shambo's character performance, much like every other, first and foremost was defined by her style of dress and appearance. While not a conventionally attractive woman, her Marine Corps past was evident in her style and presentation. Her salt and pepper permed mullet tied back with a folded over bandana was a perfect 1980s fashion compliment to her jog bra and exercise shorts. She was not fashionable and did not seem to care about her appearance the way other women did; at one point she even groomed her knotted hair by using the machete. The men deemed her boyish and unattractive and the camera treated her as such.

> **John** (*direct address*): I've never spent a lot of time with someone like Shambo. The overt aggressiveness and other tom-boyish behavior I think turns a lot of people off. Especially when you have a bunch of pretty girls. Like the hot chicks we have here are not as likely to connect with someone like Shambo. [Then cut to each of the girls] It's just the truth, it's in your face 24/7. (Episode 11).

After John's direct address, the Producers offered some complimentary juxtaposition by cutting directly to the other girls laughing about Yasmin's blunder in calling Shambo "Shamu" (the famous killer whale).

Her fellow Galu tribemates did not hold Shambo in high regard. Her awkward, yet exuberant character was mocked constantly and detested by most everyone. As John mentioned, the men did not see her as a feminine woman, but she was not masculine enough or smart enough for them to consider her as one of them either. Her presence on the Galu tribe was mis-matched and provided great television. Her disconnect within her Galu tribe was as much a part of her character as her out-dated mullet and self-moniker, Shambo.

She claimed her friends started the nickname in the 1980s, around the time Rambo came out because she and that title character both had the same look: curly mullet with a bandana. Her friends combined her name, Shannon, with Rambo and got Shambo.

Other women might have been offended by the reference, but part of what made her character was the way she embraced her nickname and relished in its implication: she was a proud warrior. However as time wore on, we saw that she was not as tough and was perhaps the most sensitive of the women on *Survivor: Samoa*; no other female character had the same kind of emotional breakdown that Shambo did on the beach with Laura.

Besides her unusual look and style, Shambo, like Russell had a flair for words. This is why they were the two most featured characters within the narrative despite others that might have been more pivotal to the outcome of the show. In almost all of her direct addresses Shambo took some rather mundane situation and infused it with her consistently hyperbolic rationale. For example, when describing Laura in episode 10, she had this to say: "Laura is the head viper, she is the viper queen of Galu. She is the snake of the tribe, she is an evil demon, she is the beast. Laura is the first one to go in my mind since day 1." After her tribe won the chickens, Shambo was placed in charge of them and did not spare them any of her colorful commentary. Once she was officially placed in charge of the chickens she proceeded to cluck at them, fully believing that she was communicating with them. Her eccentricities and peculiar behaviors were highlighted by the camera and placed in juxtaposition with commentary by her tribemates about her bizarreness.

Shambo's role was, in her mind, stuck in high school. Her disdain for feeling out of sync with her fellow tribemates and the sense of not belonging brought back painful emotions of her high school days when she was not *in* with the cool crowd. Probst also echoed this theory in his blog regarding Shambo and admitted she would have been better

off in the Foa Foa tribe. However, had she been placed with a more pleasant situation, there would not have been as much drama on the Galu tribe. She definitely seemed to be the root cause. As Erik stated when Laura was fighting with Shambo about canteens, "to be honest, we know Shambo is crazy. So if you get in a fight with Shambo, guess who looks bad? You look bad. Fight with Shambo, that just means you're crazy, but not really crazy, that just means you're a bitch" (Erik, episode 8).

The constant angst between Laura and Shambo came to a head in episode 11 when we got a deeper insight into Shambo's hurt feelings regarding the "viper queen." As I described in chapter 7, Shambo confided in Laura about her sister who died of cancer many years ago and her overall sadness in never being able to say goodbye to her. This was a truly emotional moment, of which and Laura replied in a non sequitur, "Well, they're better off." Laura's cruel treatment of this situation invited the audience to side with Shambo in her disdain for her. Then just after this scene, we are presented with Shambo's direct address in which she retells how she perceived that scene:

> **Shambo** (*direct address*): Laura and I did not have a heart to heart conversation. She invaded a private moment that I was having on the beach. I was missing my family and thinking about my sister. I was broken down and sad and she wanted to play buddy-buddy with me (episode 11).

Of greatest interest here was that Laura was actually the opposite of congenial, she was downright rude. This direct address offered insight and the juxtaposition demonstrated that Shambo's perceptions were warped and not always sound.

Shambo was consistently portrayed as someone who was not like everyone else, however, that was not a bad thing for *Survivor* Producers. Typically, normal means uninteresting, which is a cardinal sin especially within reality television. Shambo was polarizing on her tribe, and uniting from an audience's perspective. She was an oddball

for sure, but she did not quite understand her own character, so it was up to the Producers to fully develop it for the audience.

Later on in episode 11, Shambo delivered one of the best speeches of the season when trying to convince Monica that Galu alliances no longer existed. In this speech she aptly pled her case, while invoking her perception of the *Survivor* franchise and its claims to reality. Her speech was insightful and ended with one of the best lines delivered in reality television regarding the mega-genre itself.

> **Shambo**: Has there been a Galu since Erik was voted out?
> **Monica**: I just don't know if I can trust anyone on Foa Foa. [The camera was situated over Monica's shoulder with Shambo in the shot. As Monica began to speak again she put her hand up in a gesture, covering up Shambo. Shambo pushed her arm down ensuring she is still in the shot]
> **Shambo: D**rop the bull Galu loyalty thing –it's a fantasy.
> **Monica**: Why, why does it have to be that way?
> **Shambo**: Because you guys chose to vote for Galu before Foa Foa. It doesn't matter – purple is broken.
> **Monica**: Erik was fake purple.
> **Shambo**: Then Kelly's fake purple for having a knife in my back and why were there conversations led by Laura to get rid of Shambo. That's fake purple. ***There is no fake, there is no real, it's SURVIVOR*"** (Episode 11).

Just when the audience might have thought Shambo was clueless, she delivered these brilliant lines that demonstrated her clear sense of what the game is about: no loyalty, just individual game play. She also evidenced her savvy by moving Monica's hand so the camera had a clear shot as she delivered her pivotal line.

Shambo's unscripted performance offered the Producers enough raw footage to create a very compelling character. Under the crafty skill of the Producers her presence, her voice, her choices in alliances, as well as her bizarre behavior, all together created a character that audiences enjoyed watching (Probst, 2009), and her tribe mates could not stand. If not for her social awkwardness she would not have been the outcast of Galu and

would not have presented the Foa Foa four with a possible opportunity to overturn the Galu power.

Conclusion

The collaborative authorship present in *Survivor: Samoa* was absolutely essential to creating characters and producing the narrative. The plot could not proceed without this dynamic relationship and the characters it produced. As the two primary agents of *Survivor: Samoa* come together, so do new ways to use old storytelling devices. The use of various forms of juxtaposition accentuated the co-opted nature of the collaboration between characters and Producers. While both agents manipulate the other for their benefit, the balance of the power exists within the Producers capacity to create the end product: the television show. Most notably, however, complimentary juxtaposition gives some of the best evidence for the character's voice within the program.

Russell Hantz and Shannon "Shambo" Waters made the most of their voice within the narrative. Their wordsmith-like skills allowed for countless sound bytes and skillfully demonstrated how, in shows like *Survivor: Samoa,* sometimes the things people say are better than what anyone could write for them. As a result both Shambo and Russell they were the most prominently portrayed characters of the season. Probst's blog accentuated Russell and Shambo's central roles within the narrative, as the editors expertly portrayed them within in the show in all their metaphorical glory. The cooperation between characters and Producers is pivotal to the narrative and manifest most clearly through established storytelling devices like character development and juxtaposition.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Unlike most popular television narratives, the unscripted characters of *Survivor: Samoa* have the opportunity to tell their own story. This doctoral project was an in-depth analysis at how that authorial power was shared between the Producers of the show and the individual characters. The result is a new perspective within the academic literature on *Survivor* and reality television shows like it. The *self*-performing characters are the product of our societal fascination with fame, self-promotion and hyperbolic impression management. This cultural context is what makes the Producers' co-optation of the characters possible because individuals are willing to put themselves in front an unforgiving camera in the hopes to attain even a modicum of fame (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007). The implications of these findings demonstrate how important it is to find (the Producers) and perform (the participants) unique and compelling characters season after season. Therefore, this project uncovered how the individualized selves of each character was performed and then co-opted by the Producers.

I chose textual analysis as the method for examining *Survivor* because I wanted to treat the program as a cultural text. The context the program existed in was just as important as the show. Characters' and audiences' knowledge of past seasons, the cultural emphasis on the self and fame, as well as the dominant biases imparted within American society were all contextual aspects of *Survivor: Samoa*. I chose this particular season because it was the most current at the start of this project and it offered an excellent cast of characters. My previous studies on *Survivor* led me to hold the program in high esteem as one of the original shows of the latest wave of reality television. Also, its continued ratings success and popularity make it extremely relevant to the conversation on reality programming in general.

Based on my findings I created a visual representation of the co-opted-authorship paradigm, as it existed within *Survivor: Samoa*. This new structure allowed the characters to act outside of the Producers'' power and provide unscripted behaviors that contributed greatly to the overall narrative. In a society where identity creation and the presentation of self are paramount (Goffman, 1959; Lasch, 1979) *Survivor: Samoa,* and other reality programs like it, are signs of the times. Characters participate in a co-opted process in which the Producers have ultimate control. Within the confines of a textual analysis there was ample evidence to answer my research questions and going forward leads to a clear trajectory for future inquiry.

After reviewing the scholarship on reality television and the role of characters in traditional narrative structures, I posed three research questions in order to examine the text of *Survivor: Samoa*. They were useful in that they offered a focus to the project, however, my navigation through the data yielded greater information than simply answering each question. The first one explored the concept of character agency.

RQ1: What evidence exists within Survivor: Samoa *demonstrating that characters have some agency in creating the narrative of the show?*

This was a loaded question. I already had discerned from my prior knowledge of the show's format and the history of the mega-genre, that reality television emphasized the "real" characters. However, I could not have known, without deeper analytical exploration, to what extent these characters controlled their performance as well as the narrative. In fact, I discovered the answer to RQ1 was inextricably linked to RQ3:

RQ3: How do characters contribute to their identity, the identity of others on Survivor: Samoa *and does this ability imply agency?*

The simple answer is this: through their performance, characters contributed to their own identity and the identity of others. How each character presented himself or herself

through the way they spoke, looked and strategized were the ingredients that created each

individualized performance. Similarly, their reactions and opinions of others helped to

cultivate the identities of those around them as well. The result of these character

performances was a significant, unscripted contribution to the narrative.

In chapter 7 I detailed the specific evidence for my answers to RQ1 and RQ2 as

they pertained to the characters' performances. Each individual cast was presented to us

on-screen through the lens of the Producers. However, their presentation was much like

the role that identity plays in real life; it was constructed for the sole purpose of

presentation (Goffman, 1959). How the characters looked, how they talked, and how they

played the game were all aspects of their identity that *they* created. The Producers did not

offer a script or impose a perception of their tribemates to skew the way they spoke about

themselves and others. Nor was there any rulebook offered by the Producers to force

them into one decision or another strategically. Instead, each character entered the game

with their prior understanding of the *Survivor* franchise, their baggage of bias and

experience, as well as their own perceptions of self.

As I mentioned in chapter 6, the Producers were not a singular entity (hence the

pluralization), but rather an entire crew of individuals who aided in the process of

crafting each episode. This collective group worked together in making and executing a

unified perspective. The effect was a singular gaze emanating from the embodiment of

the Producers, Jeff Probst. His presence both inside and outside of the action made him

omniscient and trustworthy. His *EntertainmentWeekly.com* blog offered us his

perspective, confirming his authorship of the program week-to-week. In his blogs he

mentioned a disembodied "we" that referred to the collective *Producers*, further emphasizing the multiple member production team.

The foundational elements of the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa* fell under the jurisdiction of the Producers. They controlled the vital narrative elements such as format, casting and cinematic devices. The Producers' choices within each of these facets of the narrative contributed greatly to the story of *Survivor: Samoa*. While I did not post any formal research questions about this group alone, they were the masterminds behind the production of the show and their relevance to the narrative cannot be overstated.

As evidenced in chapter 8, the co-optation of the characters unscripted voice demonstrated the Producers' power despite having created a format in they were more limited than in other fictional narrative structures. The second research question refers to this joint venture between characters and Producers.

> *RQ2: How does the combination of authors – characters and content producers – contribute to the narrative of* Survivor: Samoa?

The answer to this question is that a co-opted-authorship created meaningful narrative elements that are absent in other types of television genres. Specifically, I outlined three types of juxtaposition that occurred when co-opted-authorship took place. First and most importantly was complimentary juxtaposition, which allowed the characters to narrate their story and offer varying perspectives on the action. Contradictory juxtaposition presented an opposing view wherein the Producers used a character's actions against them to express their perspective. Associative juxtaposition unlike the other two placed the majority of agency in the Producer's powerful hands by placing images and sounds next to each other that were meant to be representative of one another. Therefore, while

all three types of juxtaposition relied on co-opted-authorship, the balance of power

between Producers and characters still favored the former.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was the role of co-opted-authorship within

character creation. While the individual performed their *self*, the Producers used that raw

material to create the character that we saw on the screen; creating a character within the

plot of the program required both Producers and characters.

Implications

The diverse implications of my results offer unique contributions to perspectives

within contemporary culture, the mass communications and television studies literature

as well as to the industry of reality television itself. Within a cultural context, this study

offers further evidence of our *self-obsessed* culture. Following the structural changes that

I outlined in chapters 6 through 8, there is also evidence of a unique narrative paradigm

that I illustrate below. Finally, the implications this research has on the reality television

industry can be helpful in providing cues and insights into the means of production itself:

the casting, the successful character and the importance of the unique, unscripted voice.

Cultural context

In a society obsessed with the self, impression management is of the utmost

importance (Goffman, 1959). The self, and how it fits into our social surroundings are

aspects of our everyday life that are turned into an art form through character

performances on *Survivor: Samoa*. Throughout this project I referred to Goffman's

impression management paradigm because it captured the essence of what I have called

the character performance based on his dramaturgical metaphor. It was not the true self

that we saw on *Survivor: Samoa*, but rather a performed and sincere version of the self

that the individual wished to cultivate within the context of the show. In this setting what

was once a metaphorical construction of the dramaturgical now has literal context as

these characters existed together to perform their roles within a fictive-like world,

unscripted.

I also argue that the implications of this project demonstrate that not only are we

self-obsessed, but this obsession with impressions leads to a fascination with what is

sincere and what is authentic. The lines between sincerity and authenticity (Trilling,

1971) seem more defined when we relate these concepts to the character performances on

reality programs like *Survivor: Samoa*. The desire for the sincere performance is

achieved when a character can convince those around him or her that they are

trustworthy, whereas the other characters are on alert for that authentic moment that will

either betray or support that claim.

Trust and loyalty are constantly sought after on a show in which the format

discourages any semblance of altruism and allegiance when all is said and done. For

example, perhaps the "dumbest *Survivor* ever" (Ross, 5/8/08) was Erik in *Survivor:*

China. He had lied to two different groups and when he was discovered he was

remorseful and wanted to make things right with those he betrayed. To repent he agreed

to give away his immunity idol at tribal council. This was all part of a ploy since the very

woman he gave it to was plotting to vote him out. As it happened, no sooner had he given

his immunity idol away at tribal council, Erik was voted out of the game.

The fact that Russell, the villain lost and became the tragic hero is evidence of our

desire for deviance (Shoemaker, Chang & Bren linger, 1987). Based on news media,

which also features *actual* events with *actual* people, Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger

(1987) explain that we are most drawn to stories that deviate from the norm. While *Survivor: Samoa* is not considered news media, the theory applies and it's implication within popular television is that the more deviant the content the better potential for higher ratings. Russell was a great example of the co-authored exercise between the individual, Russell Hantz, and the Producers of *Survivor: Samoa*. In short, "Russell made great TV" (Denhart, 2009); he was cruel, manipulative, a keen strategist and most importantly delivered great monologues that turned into pitch perfect sound bytes. In a forum where there is no script, speaking in clever quips guaranteed some valuable screen time.

Also of cultural interest is the obvious way in which our identities have literally taken center stage. "Generation Me" (Twenge, 2006) and the cultural focus on the self (Goffman, 1959) makes reality television programs like *Survivor: Samoa* the perfect venue for creating character; volunteers are monitored non-stop in the hopes that something authentic and/or scandalous will occur so that we can enjoy it. According to Goffman (1959), this could be referred to as the backstage self. In this way, Goffman's impression management is disrupted when people can see what happens when we think no one is looking. However, unlike in Goffman's time, the contemporary self as it is performed on reality television, is fully aware of the camera's gaze. In fact, there have been reality show participants that have claimed once the show ended the performance continued, but without a camera to capture it – a realization that contributed to feelings of depression (Annie H., personal communication, 10/6/09).

Mass communications and popular television studies

Throughout my analysis, I noticed a pattern of moving away from the traditional narrative form towards a paradigm in which characters have authorial power. In the original model, the author is the ultimate agent of the narrative (Barthes & Duisit, 1975). The author then decides all aspects of the character's role within the story. The action and plot, while sometimes exercised through the use of a character, are also part of the author's absolute control. The diagram below places these three foundational elements of narrative in relation to each other. Each circle of the diagram enacts agency over the one layered on top of it. Therefore, the base, the author, controls the characters as well as the action. At different points the characters can influence the action and vice versa, but always under the direction of the author.

Figure 3: Diagram of Traditional narrative agency inferred from Barthes & Duisit (1975)
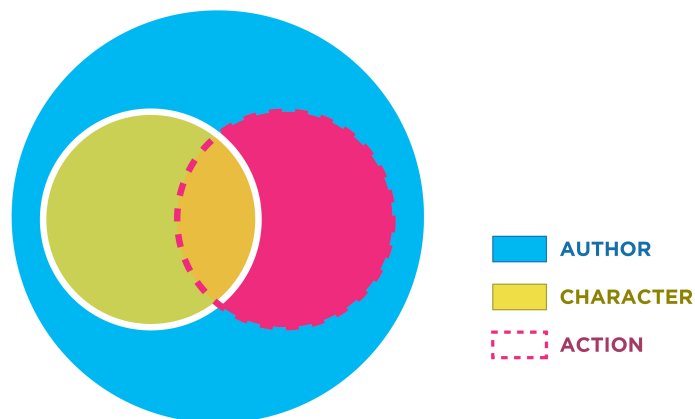
As I have described in chapters 6, 7, and 8 the narrative structure of *Survivor: Samoa*, is quite different from the above diagram. Instead the characters of *Survivor: Samoa* can move outside of the Producers' authority and exert their own agency while

still contributing significantly to the narrative. This shift outside of the Producers' sphere

of influence is illustrated below:

Figure 4: Diagram of narrative agency within *Survivor: Samoa*
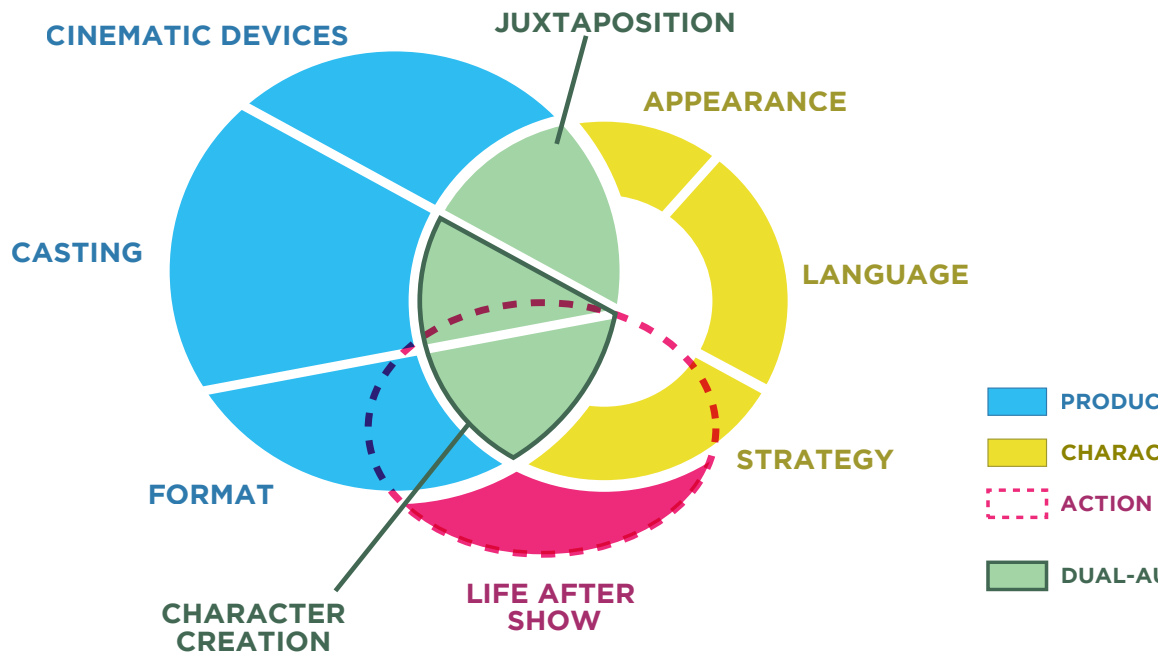
Each component of the diagram was explained at length in chapters 6, 7 and 8,

but can best be understood in relation to each other. There are three circles that, like the

traditional model, each represent narrative agents. The diagram's intersection points and

overlaps distinguish aspects of the narrative when Producers were the primary agent,

when the character was, and when the two worked together in creating narrative. For

example, the action was almost always considered a result of the character and the

Producers except when it occurred outside the realm of the show. At that point, the pink

portion outside the other circles represents the plot that happened after the show had

aired. This was beyond the scope of this project but will be of interest in future research.

The blue circle, which is also the largest, represents the Producer's agency within the narrative. As I described in chapter 6, the Producers' agency extended over all the content for each episode. The scope of their control ranged from the location chosen for each season to the minutiae of edited b-roll to highlight that locale. The Producers were the formal gatekeeper of our view into the world of *Survivor: Samoa*. Specifically, in chapter 6, I pointed out 3 dominant areas of control that helped to understand the importance of the Producer's decision-making: format, casting and cinematic devices.

The yellow, medium sized circle represents the character's agency. As detailed extensively in chapter 7, there are three primary components of the character's ability to shape their own identity within *Survivor: Samoa*. First was appearance. How the individual looked and their style (from hair to clothing) was something that reflected their personality, whether consciously or not.   Next, what the characters said and how they said it was all part of their unscripted voice. This aspect of their performance operated outside the Producers' authorial turf and allowed for personalities to emerge through accent, choice of words and other unscripted nuances. The final segment of yellow, labeled *strategy* was the result of personal perceptions of the game, life experiences, and relationships formed with tribemates. Each character's strategy was unscripted; when a character voted, he or she did so based on alliances or other influences that did not include the Producers' interference.

The final narrative level of my diagram is the action, or the plot of *Survivor: Samoa*. The pink circle marks the importance of action on character creation and format, but is not part of the cinematic devices, unscripted voice or appearance. Action was the result of a character's strategic game play, and the way in which the characters were

created throughout the show (through the combination of casting and format). However, a small piece of strategy is left outside the action sphere because there were some instances in which strategy did not relate to plot. For example, several random attempts were made to divert the audience from an obvious elimination by suggesting a character would vote for one and not the other.

The action that occurs after the show ends was not referenced in the results because it would require another doctoral project to cover the implications of each character's life outside the confines of *Survivor: Samoa*. However, it is important to acknowledge this aspect of the plot that extends the life of each season. When a character is referenced in entertainment or hard news media it reminds the audience of their character and adds a new point of information to their identity (Turner, 2006). For example, Russell Hantz recently found himself in the middle of a spoiler scandal in which he allegedly exposed secrets of the show to a third party. That third party then reported these immunity outcomes and tribal council verdicts to a website: survivorsucks.com (Denhart, 2011). While no formal action has been taken, Russell's notoriety has followed him outside the game.

The green portions in the diagram, where the spheres of character and Producers agency meet, mark the co-opted-authorship inherent in the narrative structure of *Survivor: Samoa*. Starting from the top of the green space is juxtaposition. This is the point where the character's appearance intersects with the cinematic devices utilized by the Producers. As defined previously, there are three types of juxtaposition that offer varying levels of agency for both groups: the character and the Producers. Complimentary, contradictory and associative juxtaposition all occur at the point where

character agency, in the form of appearance and language intersect with the Producers'

control over cinematic devices.

The other sections within the model point to the character creation aspects of co-

opted-authorship. This entire model can be seen as a way in which *Survivor: Samoa*

creates characters within the narrative. However, as discussed in chapter 9, the creation of

characters such as Russell Hantz and Shannon "Shambo" Waters are best described as the

intersection of the Producers' casting choices and program format with the character's

agency over their strategic game play. Character creation was essential to the show and

its pivotal role within the concept of co-opted-authorship cannot be overstated. Without

the substantive individual who was cast in the first place, a compelling character would

be hard to create; the raw material would not be there.

In summary, the diagram depicts the authorial shift from the traditional paradigm

within *Survivor: Samoa's* narrative. This sharing of narrative agency between the

Producers and the characters has meaningful ramifications with regard to modeling

behaviors and media effects research. Modeling effects, as discussed in social cognition

theory (Bandura, 2001), explains how social behaviors are learned through mediated

models after a series of rewards and/or punishments. Using this theory we can see how

future participants on *Survivor* and reality shows like it might model and imitate

behaviors that won them the prize or the all-important screen time. We see evidence of

this taking place within the show to a great extent as characters like Russell Hantz brag

about being the best player *Survivor* has ever seen. Influences from past seasons informed

his performance. Therefore, the character's ability to perform the self can have a

modeling affect on viewers, who in turn could be future contestants on the show, thereby influencing the series as a whole.

Parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956) also can affect the future of the series and other reality programs because of the unscripted character performances evidenced in this project. Throughout each season of *Survivor* we are positioned to root for or against different characters. It was clear that on *Survivor: Samoa* that Russell Hantz was the one favored to win. People either loved him or hated him, but regardless the feelings for him were strong. Horton and Wohl (1956) defined parasocial interaction as the way in which viewers develop relationships with television characters. As Robinson and Agne (2009) summarize, based on past research in this area, there are four factors that increase the likelihood of developing a parasocial relationship with a character on television: presenting a character in a realistic, face-to-face setting; character uses conversational style speaking and offers an opportunity for viewers to respond; high level of viewer involvement with the show; and frequent appearances of the character on television (p. 304).

On *Survivor: Samoa* and reality programs like it, three of the four criteria outlined above are met. Characters on the show spoke in their own voice, and often times face-to-face with the audience through direct address, online forums and "Sprint player of the game[37]" style voting allowed for audience interaction. Mediated effects of reality programming can affect audiences' behavior and interaction with content in the way they

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[37] Throughout each episode, during commercial breaks, audiences would be reminded to vote for who they thought was playing the best in that particular episode. Mobile phone company, Sprint, sponsored this voting and offered viewers an opportunity to extend their viewing experience by voting. At the end of the season, audience members chose who was the "fan favorite" and that character won $100,000.

develop relationships and identify with on-screen characters. Therefore, we already have evidence of the potential effects on character performances since *Survivor: Samoa*'s cast was pulled from the population and part of the same culture in which the show existed.

Reality television industry

Within the reality television world, perhaps the most important contribution my analysis can offer is a deeper understanding of the co-optation of reality stardom. My results support the concept long understood in popular media, but rarely examined in mass communications literature: characters and their performances are what *make* the reality television show. The individual personalities of the cast from *Survivor: Samoa* extend beyond the confines of the show because they also existed within the non-televised real life. Dyer (1979) uncovered a similar explanation of how the publicity and public lives of Hollywood stars influenced audiences' perceptions of their performances. The same process occurs with reality television participants, but since they were *not* scripted actors (unlike Dyer's Hollywood stars who were scripted), their extra-textual lives truly are an extension of their performed characters.

Clearly, it takes more than a conventionally attractive visage to be considered famous within the context of *Survivor: Samoa* and reality television in general. Russell Hantz was a prime example since he is not considered good-looking in the traditional sense, especially when compared with others on his tribe that do fit that definition: tall, dark and handsome. As of the typing of these sentences, Russell has appeared on 3 seasons of *Survivor*, and has recently been offered his own television show on A&E network called *Flipped*. This show has nothing to do with his talents exhibited on *Survivor*, but will undoubtedly incorporate the character performance he perfected across

three seasons in two years. The show is based on his recent foray into construction and

real estate in which cameras follow him as he "flips" houses in the Houston metropolitan

in an attempt to stimulate the local economy (Hibberd, 2011). This is an excellent

example of what Turner (2006) deemed a type of home grown celebrity. He explains,

> [R]eality TV programming enables television to 'grow their own' celebrity, to control how they are marketed before, during and after production – all of this while subordinating the celebrity of each individual to the needs of the particular programme or format (Turner, 2006, p. 156).

His loss of the title of sole Survivor was the climatic end we needed because

depending on your view, it either knocked him down a peg or made him the victim. The

justice (or injustice depending on your allegiances) made his appearance in the following

seasons all the more compelling to watch. After all, *Survivor: Samoa* was produced for

popular entertainment, and it is part of a franchise to be sustained for many seasons to

come. Russell's villainy made him a franchise star and it was in the Producer's best

interest to play up to the audience's disapproval of his actions while simultaneously

applauding them[38].

Limitations and future research

As with any research design, this project is not without its faults. Limited scope

was an issue as was my own role within the project. Due to the constraints of this

project's format, I could not study every single season of *Survivor* nor every item posted

online or in the popular media about even one season. There seems almost an infinite

supply of commentary on shows like *Survivor*. Also, I did not have access to any of the

characters or Producers to understand their perspectives. In the future I hope to enhance

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[38] In his blog after the finale, Jeff Probst wrote about why Russell should have won. He was careful not to fault Natalie's game play, but Probst made no secret of his disappointment in Russell's loss (Probst, 2009).

this work with the inclusion of interviews with past characters, more analyses of past seasons and additional cultural commentary from reputable sources.

My bias and experience as an avid fan of the *Survivor* series had to work in concert with my role as the researcher. For example, when examining the morally bankrupt Russell in the first pass, I loved his antics and found him to be a great Survivor character. However, upon deeper consideration and analysis I understood that his deplorable schemes were met with disdain. Therefore, he was not the best player because his social understanding of whom he saw to be malleable minds was not so naïve. In fact, their universal disdain for behavior and bravado cost him the $1 million prize. However this interest in his character was matched with the Producers interest (since he was the most featured character) so therefore this seeming limitation allowed me to understand how the rest of the audience was being positioned since I too was part of the viewership.

Also, I have studied *Survivor* for many years. My expertise could be a limitation because I might have taken certain aspects of the show for granted. In addition, I have my own perceptions of the various characters and how they fit within the greater scheme of the series as a whole. However, that knowledge of past seasons and characters is what allowed me to understand the importance of the characters and their potential impact within a cultural context and the history of reality television as a mega-genre.

I would like to use this study to propel me into a seemingly limitless research trajectory. Principally there are four areas that would offer great contributions to the mass communications and television studies literature. First would be to test the components of the diagram outlined above as it might pertain to other seasons of *Survivor* or other shows like it. Additionally, it would be interesting to see how this new narrative pattern might

be applied to fictional programming such as *The Office* or *Parks and Recreation* that attempt the mockumentary style for that reality television effect. Also, I would like to explore co-opted authorship concept as it pertains to media effects such as modeling and parasocial relationships. Finally, I would like to test the sound byte hypothesis in which the utterances of clever quips affords more airtime for those characters than those with less interesting things to say. While it might seem a foregone conclusion, I believe a proper quantitative analysis would be able to measure the varying levels of success characters have at being able to control the narrative through their clever use of their unscripted words.

New casts of characters make *Survivor* compelling season after season. The Producers want the best ratings; so they must cast the best individuals who they can rely on to concoct the best character performance. The resulting narrative is suspenseful and complex. The way the characters present themselves, talk to each other and to the viewing audience through direct address is just as much a part of the story as the challenges and tribal councils. The purpose of this study was to explore the way in which this unrelated cast of characters went about the act of storytelling, unscripted and co-opted by the Producers. My analysis yielded a new way to understand the narrative of *Survivor: Samoa* and reality shows like it. In allowing the character this much control over a narrative implies a promise of fame for just performing one's own sense of self. This contribution to the reality television literature, and mass communications in general, highlights the importance of reality television as a cultural artifact of our society of selves.

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CAROLYN D. HEDGES

EDUCATION

Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse, NY

A.B.D. in Mass Communications, S.I. Newhouse Fellow   *Expected August 2011*

Dissertation Adviser: Dr. Robert Thompson, Ph.D.

Dissertation Title: *"Performing the self: Character agency and impression management within the narrative of Survivor: Samoa "*

Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse, NY

M.A. in Media Studies   *May 2007*

Thesis Adviser: Dr. Dennis Kinsey, Ph.D.

Thesis Title: *"Survivor: The reality of gender in action"*

Duke University, Trinity College, Durham, NC

A.B. in Literature, Spanish Minor, Film and Video Certificate   *May 2001*

Spring 2000 semester at University of Southern California's School of Cinema-Television in Los Angeles, CA through a Duke University sponsored program

Summer 1999 summer abroad studying Spanish language and art history with the Duke in Spain program in Malaga and Madrid, Spain

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Instructor, TRF 696 "Television Research"   *Fall 2009*

Modified existing syllabus, rejuvenated assigned projects, and prepared original lectures to demonstrate various qualitative and quantitative methods of television research

Course involves various methods to add an academic element to the professional master's program in Television/Radio/Film. The main objective is for students to turn in a final paper using one of the methods studied in class

Class comprised of 24 graduate students in a professional master's program

Instructor, TRF 530 "Popular Culture Studies: Reality Television"   *Fall 2009*

Created syllabus, compiled readings, created exams and prepared original lectures on reality television for this elective upper-level course

Focused the class on four main areas of interest in order to provide a holistic approach to the scholarship on reality television: History, Production elements and techniques, representation, and the future of reality programming

Class was comprised of 60 students ranging from juniors to graduate students

Guest Speaker, Future Professoriate Program, "Teaching Tips"   *September 2009*

Offered advice and teaching strategies to new faculty and teaching doctoral students in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

Guest Speaker, International Teaching Assistant's Orientation,
"The American Classroom"   *Summer 2009*

Used my expertise in popular culture and learned teaching skills to facilitate an effective program during the Syracuse University wide TA orientation for international students centered in what to expect and anticipate in an American classroom

Guest Lecturer, TRF Ethics course   *Spring 2009*

Guest lectured in the Television/Radio/Film department's media ethics course regarding the moral motivations and ethical elements of reality programming based on my expertise in the field

Guest Lecturer, COM 400 "Women in Communications"   *Spring 2008*

Presented a lecture on the representation of women on reality television entitled: "The reality of gender"

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant for Dr. Robert J. Thompson, TRF 435 "History of Primetime TV"   *Spring 2007*

Instructed undergraduate and graduate students in two weekly recitation sections upon readings and class lectures to ensure a deeper understanding of the material required by the course

Created and executed midterm and final exams for 160 students

Graded all exams, compiled course attendance and grades for each student

Teaching Assistant for Dr. Robert J. Thompson, TRF 345/600 "Critical methodology in Film and TV"   *Fall 2006*

Instructed undergraduate and graduate students in two weekly recitation sections upon readings and class lectures to ensure a deeper understanding of the material by the course

Created and executed midterm and final exams for 120 students

Graded all exams, compiled course attendance and grades for each student

Teaching Assistant for Professor Doug Brode, TRF 530 "Film Classics"   *Fall 2006*

Conducted review sessions for undergraduate and graduate students before each of the three exams

Aided students on the development of their term papers

Assisted professor with audio/visual equipment for each class

Revised and administered all exams

Guest Lecturer, COM 107 "Communications and Society"   *Fall 2006*

Presented a guest lecture on publicity and the film business

Provided my expertise and knowledge of the field in a question and answer session

Course is required for undergraduate students in all majors

Teaching Assistant for Dr. Robert J. Thompson, TRF 634 "Critical and Historical Perspectives in TV"   *Summer 2006*

Conducted review sessions for graduate students before each exam

Graded all exams, compiled course attendance and grades for each student

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Facilitator, Say Yes to Education program, Syracuse, NY   *January 2009*

Moderated focus groups for the "Say Yes to Education" program for Syracuse City trict as part of a program wide initiative to cater to their particular needs

Research Assistant, Robert Thompson   *Summer 2008*

Conducted archival and exploratory research on the Internet in order to assess the landscape of video online

Produced a blog that charted various discoveries and commentary on found inform

Researcher, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications   *2007 – Present*

Due to my interest and knowledge of several research methods I have helped in co for several dissertation and master's theses

Methods used: surveys (including recruitment and input on question selection), C gy, content analysis (served as a coder), in-depth interviews, textual analyses and

CONFERENCE PAPERS

C. J. Davis & J. M. Wolf, *In or out: Stereotypes and entertainment on* Project Runway

Presented at the National Communication Association's annual Conference on No 13th, 2009 in Chicago, IL

C. J. Davis, *Women watching women: Negotiating female representation on* Survivor

Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communicati Cultural and Critical Studies division on August 7, 2009 in Boston, MA

CONFERENCE PAPERS

C. J. Davis, *Moral philosophy and reality television: A closer look at* Survivor

Presented at the Popular Culture Association Conference in the Philosophy division on April 9, 2009

C. J. Davis, *The gender factor of* Survivor: *A Q method approach*

Presented at the International Communications Association Conference: Scholar-to-Scholar: Popular Communication Interactive Paper Poster Session on May 25, 2008

C. J. Davis, & A. R. Faillace, *The black and white of* Grey's Anatomy: *Perceptions of race and interracial relationships*

Presented at the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication: Midwinte Conference - Minorities and Communication Division on March 1, 2008

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Nielsen Company, New York, NY   *April 2010 – Present*
Analyst, Continuous Analytics

Work on-site with our client Nestle Waters North America helping them solve their most pertinent business issues integrating Nielsen's diversified consumer and retail sales data

Introduce client to various new media products as opportunities to enhance understanding of their marketing campaigns

Chosen to participate as one of two representatives for the Nestle client to learn about Nielsen's new online campaign ratings system

Manage our off-shore associates in Bangalore, India teaching them new models for analysis and demonstrating through examples how to think more analytically with business-issue related projects

Hired to provide a higher level of analytic thinking and repair Nielsen's relationship with our client

IFC Center, New York, NY   *May 2005 – July 2005*
Freelance Publicist and Programmer

Assisted with opening of the new IFC Center: oversaw calendar of events and programming, slated the midnight movie series, updated web site copy, handled print traffic

United Artists, New York, NY   *March 2003 – May 2005*
Junior Publicist

Researched, organized and executed word of mouth screening events for relevant charities an non-profit organizations

Worked directly with filmmakers, talent and supervised PR agencies on junkets, press days an events for the publicity campaigns of *Together, City of Ghosts, Pieces of April, Osama, Coffee anc Cigarettes, Code 46, The Yes Men, Undertow,* and *Hotel Rwanda*

Coordinated publicity and events at the Sundance, Toronto, Tribeca and Woodstock Film Festivals

Implemented and supervised the internship program

Fox Searchlight Pictures, New York, NY   *February 2002 – March 2003*
Publicity Assistant/Assistant to the VP of National Publicity

Assisted in national publicity campaigns for *The Good Girl, One Hour Photo, The Banger Sisters, Brown Sugar, Antwone Fisher, Bend It Like Beckham* and *The Good Thief*

Structured, organized and directed press days in New York

Developed, implemented, and supervised internship program

Talk Magazine, New York, NY   *September 2001 – January 2002*
Creative Services Assistant/Assistant to the Associate Publisher

Composed merchandising proposals, created and managed monthly in-book promotions page *Shop Talk* and *Websitings*

Assisted marketing department in various projects including event coordination, special publ cation research

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Kimberly Peirce, New York, NY   *May – August 2000*
Intern
> Internship consisted of research and various office tasks for Kimberly Peirce, Director
> *Boys Don't Cry*

Miramax, New York, NY   *May – August 2000*
Intern
> Internship consisted of writing script coverage, assistant work and office tasks for Peter Schw
> erin, VP Production, Dimension Films, Executive Producer *Scary Movie*

Miramax, Los Angeles, CA   *January – May 2000*
Intern
> Internship consisted of writing script coverage, assistant work and location scouting for Ken
> Park and Steve Squillante, Managers of Development and Production

Late Late Show with Craig Kilborn, Los Angeles, CA   *January – May 2000*
Intern
> Internship provided on-set experience as a runner, talent handler and researcher for Zoe
> Freidman, Talent Coordinator and Rabih Ghoulam, Director of Research

AWARDS & ASSISTANTSHIPS

Syracuse University
Certificate in University Teaching   *2010*
> Appointed by the Newhouse School to participate in the Syracuse University "Future Profess
> riate Program" (FPP) that prepares graduate students for a career in higher education teachi
> Participated in the FPP program for 2 years which included: a mentored teaching experience
> participating in monthly teaching workshops and roundtable discussions
> Selected to attend the FPP conference, which is for a select few students from the university
> collaborate with University professors on new and effective teaching ideas and techniques

Syracuse University
Teaching Fellow   *2009–2010*
> Selected from a highly competitive pool of applicants to serve as a university-wide teaching
> fellow. The responsibilities include mentoring new teaching and instructor assistants as well
> coordinating the yearly training program

University Fellowship   *2007–2008, 2009–2010*
> Nominated by the Newhouse Ph. D. selection committee, this merit-based award provides
> funding and tuition to a doctoral student with no work requirement. The stipulations of this
> fellowship are that it not be awarded two years in a row

Research Assistantship with Robert Thompson, Ph. D.   *Summer 2008*
> Based on a submitted proposal and academic excellence, this assistantship is awarded to
> doctoral students whose research interests will facilitate the research interests of a
> senior faculty member

Teaching Assistantship   *2008–2009*
> Appointed by the Newhouse Ph. D. program director, this selective award provides funding
> and tuition to a doctoral student based on meeting a teaching requirement set forth in
> the contract

Syracuse University, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications
Dean's Scholarship   *2005–2006*
> Awarded to an incoming graduate student based on prior academic achievement

Teaching Assistantship   *2006–2007*
> Television/Radio/Film department

SERVICE & AFFILIATIONS

2009-2010   *PCA/ACA Member*
2009-2010   *NCA Member*

SERVICE &	*2007-2010*	*AEJMC Member*
AFFILIATIONS	*2008-2010*	*ICA Member*
	2010	Advertising Department Professor of Practice SEARCH COMMITTEE
	2008–2010	Future Professoriate Program, Syracuse University (attended May 2008 Minnowbrook FPP conference upon invitation of the FPP director)
	2008–2010	Newhouse faculty tenure committee
	2008–2009	Newhouse Endowed chair SEARCH COMMITTEE
	2008–2009	Newhouse Doctoral Student Organization – President
	2008–2009	Newhouse Student Representatives
	2008–2009	COM 100 program: Big Sister
	2007–2010	AEJMC Member
	2005–2006	Newhouse Master's Association – Program Representative

SKILLS Proficiency in Spanish and computer programs: SPSS, Adobe Illustrator, Microsoft Word, Excel, FileMaker Pro, Mac OS, Outlook, PowerPoint, Quicken, and HTML

RELEVANT COURSEWORK

Mass Communications Research and Theory

Communication Theory, Dr. Makana Chock

Media and Public Opinion, Dr. George Comstock

Media Effects, Dr. George Comstock

Media Effects Seminar, Dr. Brad Gorham

Q Methodology, Dr. Dennis Kinsey

Media and Diversity, Dr. Carol Liebler

Qualitative Methods, Dr. Carol Liebler

Media Sociology: Theories of Media Content, Dr. Pamela Shoemaker

Research Methods, Dr. Pamela Shoemaker

Content Analysis, Dr. Pamela Shoemaker

Research Practicum: Reality TV research, Dr. Brenda Wrigley

Statistical Methods (2 courses), Dr. Steven Maisto & Dr. Alecia Santuzzi

Cognitive Psychology, Dr. Amy Criss

Popular Culture and Television

Children and Television, Dr. George Comstock

American TV Drama 1980-Now, Dr. Robert Thompson

Critical Methods in Film and Television, Dr. Robert Thompson

Reality Television: Independent Study, Dr. Robert Thompson

American Cultural History

Foundations of American Political Thought, Dr. Ralph Ketcham

Public Intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: Independent Study, Dr. Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

History of the Ameircan Public Philosophy, Dr. Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

Seminar in American Cultural History, Dr. Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

Historiography, Dr. Craige Champion

Culture and Sexual Behavior, Dr. John Townsend