Surviving Reality TV: The Evolution of Competition and Camaraderie in a Surveillant World

Chloe Chaple

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Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences

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Abstract

This thesis examines the behavioral evolution within the reality TV competition *Survivor*, which, in its forty-seventh season, has been on air since 2000. Focusing on the general attitudes and strategies of players, this research uses surveillance theory and the concept of learned behaviors as a framework for analysis. A Critical Content Analysis of three key seasons—the first, thirty-third, and forty-sixth—highlights shifts in dialogue, camaraderie, individuality, generational work ethic expectations, and the criteria for victory. The findings reveal that while the show has become outwardly emotional and vulnerable compared to its aggressive origins, player strategies have grown increasingly complex and covert. Under the guise of kindness and influenced by heightened surveillance, subliminal betrayals now outmaneuver overt confrontation. These dynamics manipulate audiences to perceive the gameplay as less competitive, when in reality, modern *Survivor* demands a more critical understanding of layered social strategies and the show's evolving competitive landscape.

Keywords: *Survivor*, Reality TV, Surveillance, Capitalism, Competition, Generations, Tribe, Authenticity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Outwit, Outplay, Outlast." These three words define *Survivor*, a long-running competition-based reality TV show in which contestants fight for the title of "sole survivor" and a $1,000,000 prize. Debuting in 2000[1], the hit American program is now in its forty-seventh-season. The show has changed and adapted to viewer desires and production capabilities through its time on air, maintaining a focus on physical and mental strength to endure the hardships of competition. While many intricacies have been born and changed in this period, many of the basic foundations of the show's organization remain the same. This thesis will examine some of the show's key changes related to strategization and self-representation amongst players over *Survivor*'s first forty-six seasons.

Beginning on predetermined teams called "tribes," contestants are dropped in a remote location and told to build shelter. Each tribe is equipped with little instruction, no materials, and a small portion of rice to share for the entirety of their stay. This uncomfortable setting of hunger and lack of refuge from harsh conditions immediately places participants into a 'survival' setting of intensity. Within these tribes, viewers must survive, as the name suggests, with a group of strangers against the elements and one another. Each episode features at least one[2] challenge where players must compete for safety ("immunity"). The losing tribe is sent off to the tribal council, where they must anonymously vote out a tribe-mate via parchment paper. These tribals are held at the end of each episode, and the individual with the most votes against them is sent home immediately. With the knowledge

[1] While often cited as the first of its kind due to being a long-standing cultural phenomena, *Survivor* took inspiration from the 1997 Swedish program *Expedition: Robinson* created by Charlie Parsons. (Hanson, 1).

[2] Sometimes, episodes will feature two challenges, with the first challenge granting winners a reward in the form of food/survival equipment opposed to immunity from tribal council.

of this event's potential to send home, or be sent home, by peers, players must also form close relationships with the other players in order to be saved another day.

As the tribes begin to get smaller over the course of eliminations, the game soon changes. About halfway through the season, contestants undergo the "merge," in which all players move to one beach and begin the individual competition. After the merge, challenges, and tribal councils continue, but each player is fighting for individual immunity. Rather than a losing tribe sent to vote, one player wins immunity and attends tribal with all other players left vulnerable for that episode's tribal council. This eventual split from group competition to every man for himself creates a combination of camaraderie and competition for the players and viewers. Tribals are directly connected to the "outlast" theme, as players must outlast all other players through these eliminations.

Challenges are a large part of the show, and they are demanding in many ways. Each challenge incorporates physical and mental components, often consisting of several stages and typically having a puzzle or strategically demanding portion towards the end. This promotes high intensity as tribes with perceived strength stand just as strong of a chance as a less strong team with wittier-appearing players. This factor lends itself to "outplay" and "outwit" from the show's key themes, though the latter can also be tied even more closely to the implicit social game players must enact to remain. The need for a strong social game is a prevalent theme that remains all season, becoming even more prevalent post-merge as the last 8-10 players voted out are kept on a nearby island rather than being sent home. They return to each ensuing tribal council and observe but don't speak, forming the eventual "jury" responsible for voting for the winner. The vote of peers is an undeniable force in shaping the

program's tone, with their votes often pointed towards ideas of meritocracy, closely tied back to capitalist theory[3].

The value of the jury further complicates the game as finalists must ultimately convince their peers that they have played the strongest game. Through the balance of firm relationships and fierce competitive moves, players who stand out as the strongest for outwitting, outlasting, and outlasting all other competitors are often rewarded with a victory from their peers on the jury. While no player wants to be the majority vote for tribal council eliminations, the final tribal is the opposite. As majority votes determine the show's outcome, players must continuously try to appeal to a preponderance of players at each stage, a key concept closely tied to the formation of "alliances" amongst players throughout the show. The voting values have evolved to account for more nuanced values and adaptations within the show, as this thesis will analyze. On top of adaptations in mindsets among players, the games organization has seen several significant changes.

Season eleven was an incredibly pivotal moment for the game as producers sought a new way to enhance the game after its five-year success: enter advantages. Beginning with the "hidden immunity idol," introduced in Season 11, advantages slowly began to enter gameplay. The hidden immunity idol, an advantage that can protect a loser at tribal if played correctly, deepens the game's intrigue by requiring strategic social skills as another trait necessary for survival. Hidden somewhere in the game, the idol is discreetly placed out of sight, and the player who finds it traditionally[4] can play it at any tribal before the votes are read if they suspect they are being voted out. Traditionally, this comes as a surprise to

[3] Societal organization in which its members advance with rewards and acclaim based on the amount of work they put in, i.e. a performance-based system that values the most capable and hardworking individuals regardless of equity concerns.

[4] Some idols, particularly those introduced in the new-era (pre-merge) may have a shorter life span or stipulations for usage that complicate its flexibility.

players, though more recently, players have begun sharing information about its existence/possession to deepen social connections. The adaptation of using advantages, informed by successes and failures in previous seasons, informs the actions contemporary players try to make. Many other advantages have been introduced into the game, especially in recent years, as producers aim to keep the game unpredictable and exciting continuously. These new aspects of the game have provided extremely interesting and shocking tribal councils, helping propel the show forward.

As mentioned above, the game has undergone significant changes over the past nearly twenty-five years, one of the most notable being the change in competition length. The first forty seasons of the show consisted of thirty-nine days of gameplay. The forty-first season, however, was the first to debut the twenty-six-day model. While many fans, ex-players, and even some producers were quick to express their distaste for this change, it was prompted in the age of COVID-19 when production needed to quarantine (Bloom, Par. 3). Two main arguments against this change were that (1) the fans didn't like change and felt that this experience of *Survivor* would be different, and (2) "26 days simply can't be punishing enough because it's 13 fewer days" (Bloom, Par. 6). This change marked what *Survivor* superfans call the "new era." Despite a general aversion to this modification, the show has kept this length of competition[5]. While this change has been highly criticized, it follows a trend of discourse surrounding the show's shift to being less cut-throat.

A final change in the show for consideration revolves around criticism regarding filming location and tribe setup. With the first thirty-two seasons landing in different places, therefore providing new and unpredictable terrain, fans were shocked when the show took up

[5] Leaving the discussion open for fans, who believe that this length is kept to save money since the COVID-19 pandemic is no-longer as restrictive.

a permanent residency in Fiji season from thirty-three forward. Despite previously providing entertainment from the contestant's lack of familiarity with their surroundings, the change to Fiji was necessary as the show's host, Jeff Probst, cited diminishing global access for filming. Due to economic, political, weather, and population-based concerns, “it’s a different world” than when the show began, and Fiji provides a consistent home for the show to ensure it can continue running (Park, par. 6). Along with changes to tribe formation and the number of starting players, fans have chosen to criticize aspects of the game they deem to be diversions from its original, unpredictable form. While these changes seem minor, fan responses highlight the contribution they have to the show’s evolving tone being examined in this study.

The primary takeaway from these changes is that the “new era” is much more influenced by previous play, featuring players' sporadic attempts to align with what players perceive to be the winning formula. On the other hand, the “old school” early seasons were more about the shock factor of the unfamiliar themes from new locations, gruelling spans of competition, and early attitudes players displayed towards one another. As viewers were yet to get accustomed to the show’s premise, themes, and patterns, the early seasons allowed players and viewers at home to figure out the ropes for the first time together. In the new era, where many long-time viewers (“super-fans”) are now being cast and trying to prove their expertise in the show, producers are tasked with a new challenge of keeping players on their toes despite the experience differing so strongly from their everyday lives. This involves many of the changes mentioned above, and more. While this may seem complex, many minor intricacies have been altered in the name of maintaining entertainment value.

Organizational changes to the show's foundation, however, are not the primary issue with its development, but rather player strategization and viewer response. Many viewers have watched the show change since the turn of the century, with the widely shared conclusion being that the show has "gone soft." Many fans took to Reddit, X, Instagram, and other forums to discuss the show's decline to dullness. Whether the argument is that the players don't lose enough weight, are too nice to each other, or are too nerdy to be as good as the original seasons, the show's critiques primarily arose from the drastic change in season forty-one that resulted in a shorter game with a higher production level. Google searches of "*Survivor* new era Reddit" reveal threads beginning with "'new era' is so stale," "Just me or [did] *Survivor* get soft AF," and ensuing chat threads of viewers agreeing and debating the cause ([deleted account], [Riley5cents]). Not only has perceived toughness declined in participants, but the camaraderie has dramatically increased, leaving fans unsettled. While recent changes opened the floor for far more critical discourse regarding the show's changes, these concerns were beginning to develop slowly before.

After twenty-four years, there are undeniable forces of change with time that must affect the style, engagement, and gameplay of the show. Whether real or perceived, the immense amount of fan commentary on the changing tone and nature of the game shows that it must be observed more closely. Many aspects of communication can presumably be affected, and a large pool of factors can impact these changes over time, especially when social bonds dictate each player's games. Every human experience is different, but explicitly observing an environment like *Survivor,* where subjects are stripped of real-world luxuries, can more deeply expose the communication approaches of players, particularly relating to generational differences. Not only does Reality TV reflect what's assumed to be "real," but it

also influences world views and behaviors, so the messaging of this highly popular show and its development to changing audiences and conditions. As a long-time fan of *Survivor*, I chose this topic based on my own experience of discourse within the community, having noticed increased critiquing of the show's current messaging and player narratives. With a strong background in the show, and its many unmentioned intricacies, I chase to examine the cause and implications of these real-time evolutions.

With these varying observations in mind, this paper will examine and breakdown unique social developments displayed by players to assess the broader societal messaging from a show set to depict "reality." Using surveillance theory, a long-standing ideology regarding the influence of watching and being watched, particularly figureheads, the factors that contribute to behavioral changes as well as their impact on society can be directly examined. Beginning with a synthesis of existing literature on reality TV, its development of "authenticity," competition and capitalism, this paper will provide a well-rounded background on the motives of this research as well as explanations that can tie back to surveillance theory. Further, it will conduct an analysis of self-representation in a competitive, surveillant environment through the observation of individualized/group affiliation, motives for choosing winner criteria, and even expectations versus presentation of generational competitive approaches. Through examining these factors of the program, this thesis will relate Reality TV (RTV) and surveillance to comment on the shift in capitalism and neoliberalism. Specifically, this paper will argue that individuals learn to modify their behaviors to be perceived as kind and unthreatening on the outside while maintaining what's thought to be the lost sense of cut-throat competition within this game.

I hypothesize that while viewers criticize the show for shifting its focus from competition to camaraderie, in reality players are just as competitive and have learned to mask the hard exterior expected from a competitor with fabricated authenticity. As the game has gained more compounding considerations for how to succeed while remaining well-liked, the understanding of likeability and what behaviors are most deserving of such a large cash prize reflects dangerous implications for reality. While the world may evolve to appear more accepting and kind, the learned behaviors being regurgitated on national televisions is showing individuals that falsifying genuine interactions for success may carry into the real world. Further, the fact that these learned behaviors are becoming skills in competition reflects an evolving landscape of how individuals are getting ahead through falsifying relationships. Overall, I will argue that *Survivor* has evolved to present less-authentic players who have constructed their image in accordance with social norms in order to maximize the benefits of public perception; therefore, arguing that the consumption of "reality" TV needs a far more critical lens.

Chapter 2: Context and Existing Literature

Context and Description of the Topic of Study:

Reality TV, specifically Competition-style reality TV, has become a cultural phenomenon since the turn of the century. With popular, long-lasting shows like *Survivor, Big Brother, and The Amazing Race*, this style of television has proved to bring in a large fanbase. *Survivor*, the show hosted by Jeff Probst since 2000, follows cast-aways stranded in a foreign location fighting for one million dollars with limited resources and frequent challenges of strength and wit. Separating itself from other shows, viewers noted that "its adventure elements represented a welcome diversion next to the drawn-out soap opera elements and inane soliloquies," making it more appealing than other competing reality programs and proving its longevity (Lowry, par. 8). Now in its forty-sixth season, *Survivor* has proved to stand the test of time. With this being said, a tremendous amount of literature involving reality TV, surveillance, competition, and capitalism can be explored and applied to the phenomenon of the show and its impact.

This literature review will begin by broadly examining historical analyses of reality TV, and its implications, eventually narrowing to academic discourse focused directly on *Survivor.* This background will not only further reveal complex issues that require attention within this program and one's like it, but it will also highlight some aspects of the show and its implications that will not be addressed in this paper. The examination will then narrow into more niche topics under the umbrella of consideration for RTV, beginning with the recent trend of constructing self-image through fabricated authenticity, and then turning

towards the competitive aspects of a capitalism-driven game. These will serve to explain how and why people behave under competition, now with the presence of an audience. The literature will conclude with a brief examination of generational differences in competitive work environments. This is relevant, despite its apparent disconnect from the program, as it informs an analysis of these behavioral shifts by considering whether these changes align or transcend expectations of generational differences. These varying focuses will provide a well-rounded background on the compounding aspects that have contributed to the evolution and tone-shifts that define *Survivor*. Further, these focus areas will all tie together to help explain contemporary implications of increased surveillance in a technologically developed society.

Reality TV and *Survivor*

A significant amount of research has been done on the show *Survivor*; in fact, a large majority of data has been collected and calculated by fans and circulated through forums like YouTube, Reddit, and amateur podcasts. Within these communities, there's access to data spreadsheets on statistics relating to ranking players by physical strength, social strength, and individual and tribe victories per season, along with analyzing screen time and demographic diversity. Additionally, these interests regarding the particularities of *Survivor* and its cultural impacts have been brought to more scholarly environments for further examination. In fact, many communication researchers have examined a range of topics surrounding related themes of hyperreality, the effects of elimination competition, the roles of gender, race, and viewer expectations; however, my longitudinal study will draw a more robust and contemporary addition to existing research.

There are some in-depth examinations on the show itself already existing in the sphere of academia, like Christopher Wright's 2006 book "Tribal Warfare: *Survivor* and the Political Unconscious of Reality Television," which was the first complete text to analyze the program. Notably, however, the text was published in 2006, only twelve seasons into the show, failing to account for the longevity and adaptation of the show's structure, messaging, and themes. For example, a substantial takeaway focuses on "how *Survivor* frames its 'characters' as 'haves' and 'have-nots,'' a finding based on the social themes in early seasons that would separate players by demographics like wealth, race, career, etc. (Wright, 749). The show has not had themes since 2019[6], a significant change to the show that hasn't been accounted for. Studies like the 2009 CBQ Review Essay for the Communication Booknotes Quarterly occasionally provide comprehensive reviews of *Survivor* and related scholarship; however, with decades of content now available, it's essential to revisit the artifact of *Survivor* in the rapidly developing world, one of many focuses within the field.

Beginning with the more broad research focused on reality TV, many theorists have commented on its unique nature and "hyper-reality," a factor that contributes to the indistinguishable nature of manufactured RTV programs and reality. Under this topic alone, many communications researchers have acknowledged and studied how modern consumerism affects how real the television actually appears on screen, and its subsequent effects. One collaborative review essay by Mark Andrejevic, a researcher with significant

[6] Traditionally, seasons were centered around a defining "theme". These themes were often based around the unique filming location of that season, and included the sorting of tribes into demographic groups, which more explicitly showed the shows' contribution to social commentary. For example, Season *32: Kaoh Rong* was themed "Brains, Brawns, Beauty," where contestants were divided into tribes of 6 based on their alignment with physical strength, beauty, or intellect. Other examples include: *Survivor 13: Cook Islands*, where contestants were initially divided into four tribes by ethnicity; *Survivor 30: Worlds Apart* (*Blue Collar, White Collar, No Collar)*, where contestants were divided into three tribes by occupation-type; *Survivor 35: Heroes vs Healers vs Hustlers*, where division was based on the perceived dominant traits among contestants, "'Heroes' (courage), 'Healers' (compassion), and 'Hustlers' (tenacity)" (Ross, Par. 1)

contributions to this area, and Matthew J. Smith examines this concept and, most importantly, considers how Reality TV is an experiment through a variety of lenses. The authors note the most interesting discovery to be focused on the phenomenon of reality TV as a symptom. Smith describes how when applying to be on a reality TV show, we must sign away our information, and 'all of us increasingly find ourselves engaged in everyday transactions that result in the appropriation (and resale) of our personal information," suggesting we are losing our sense of individuality (Andrejevic, & Smith, 140). Another article on hyperreality by Neal Saye provides commentary on the effects of *Survivor* on viewers' and players' perceptions of reality. Saye explains that this early acceptance of reality TV allowed for corporate capitalization on its success and eventually turned to abuse the spectatorship of audiences. He describes how modern generations cling to the controllability of TV as a relaxant from the real world, and as a consequence, the concept of "the real" is lost entirely. He claims that "thus the boundary between the image, or simulation, and reality implodes or breaks down" (Saye, 13).

Looking more closely at the effects on groups of different identities, a significant amount of research has been done connecting reality TV, like *Survivor,* to race and gender roles, overall considering its attitude towards and effects on different demographics. One article examining the construction of race in RTV programs by Katrina E. Bell-Jordan examines three reality TV shows using a three-point analysis. Bell-Jordan argues that "the shows promote a politics of difference, emphasize conflict and division by positioning race as a point of contention among the cast members and dramatize scenarios that reinforce cultural codes and stereotypes" (Bell-Jordan, 353). Looking more into racial identity, a notable Ethnic Studies Review was written by Sarah Hentges from the University of Maine at

Augusta. This article focuses on how *Survivor* reinstates the legacy of imperialism, the "authentic other," and how the themes of *Survivor* perpetuate outdated ideologies and, in effect, discriminatory thinking. Hentges explains that "since popular culture is such a powerful transmitter of these values and can sustain them across time and circumstance, shows like *Survivor* that replay these values and sustains them" for capitalistic gain require intervention (Hentges, 119). In each season's range of inequalities, topics beyond race involve varying power structures between male and female-identifying players as well as small local tribes against imperialists. Both of these topics were studied by Lindstrom in 2007, who reported that *Survivor* upholds neocolonialist ideas, endorses primitivism, and depicts "social Darwinism [which] implicitly valorizes the inequities of cultural imperialism," as well as how it preyed on America's "gender nervousness" at the time (Lindstrom, 162, 167).

Articles surrounding the specific effects of competition TV are more numerous and involve the strategizing and surveillance aspects, as well as going as far as to compare *Survivor* to *The Hunger Game*s. One Chapter by Mia Kavka from her book "*Reality TV"* focuses on the direct impacts of competition as she suggests we must mediate and modify the extreme levels portrayed on-screen. Her main argument is that because of the motives of reality TV "to collapse the perceived boundaries between reality and fiction, authenticity and performance, private and public life, reality games have real-world implications" in relation to their competitiveness (Kavka, 107). A more logic-based paper examining competition by Mark B. Salter examines how *Survivor* can replicate and teach game theory - a concept often taught in college classrooms with the prisoner's dilemma. The article approaches *Survivor* as a real-life scenario in which classroom tactics can be utilized to advance in the game and

ultimately concludes that within *Survivor,* "decisions are made by new and seasoned players alike with emotional weight as much as rational calculation" (Salter, 370). This suggests that despite the competition of the game, there are still emotional factors that affect social decision-making. While dramatic, an article by Mark Thomas raises a fair point about the physical difficulty and emotional stresses of a game like *Survivor* in comparison to the corruption of law and government in the *Hunger Games*. The article highlights the viewpoint that citizens merely wait around for new victims to be exploited for entertainment, and this shared similarity is referred to as "*Survivor*-on-steroids" (Thomas, 344). This article provides a new critical approach to understanding the effects of survivalist entertainment.

The most specific research related to the focus of this study examines the intersection of the necessity for social elimination and the effects of rejection. Bryan E. Denham and Richelle N. Jones examine this social challenge and gendered narratives that result from RTV programs. One notable finding shared that "the *Survivor* programs appear to have perpetuated the age-old patterns of Hollywood, namely that men grow more distinguished with age, thus continuing to star in movies in their seventies and eighties, while women simply grow" (Denham and Jones, 94). They also found that "reality television reproduces cultural stereotypes and societal expectations,", especially with consideration to race (Denham and Jones, 94). These findings could impact the biases of viewers and players alike in how the game operates and is perceived. Another article by Juliet A. Williams examines the voting process and takes a more political approach. Her article considers how "voting TV" reflects individuals' sense of democracy and "offers a critical consideration of some of the hidden aspects of the cultural and social significance of political voting" (Williams, 637). Williams shows the blurring of lines between television and real life, arguing that reality TV

reflects and perpetuates our complacency, which calls for intervention (Williams, 641). This research connects to the article of Denham and Jones by highlighting the promotion of outdated biases that turn on minorities in group-voting situations.

Lastly, Rob Cesternino, a former *Survivor* player and current podcaster, released a video analyzing the history of the fake idol in *Survivor,* where he found that once-effective deception tactics cannot be as successful over time due to the combination of increased viewership, lack of originality, and heightened uncertainty players experience. He notably has contributed a lot to the show's historical analysis and understanding, and many fans have worked alongside this less academic model of *Survivor* studying. Before diving too deeply into more negative implications, this fan research has given significant statistical insight that enables more theoretical analyses and should not be overlooked. One fan, a statistician known on Instagram as *@SurvivorFactChecker*, often provides many valuable breakdowns of the show, two of which can be seen below. Figure 1 (left) shows screen time from confessionals of each winner in the first forty-four seasons, and Figure 2 (right) shows the number of people voted out with an idol in their possession from the start of the show through the ninth episode of season 46. These both reveal racial and gendered trends that can later be analyzed using more theoretical frameworks. Fan studies like these provide valuable empirical data on the foundation and production of the show that's not always tangible when viewers are immersed in the mayhem of the show's concept.

SURVIVOR WINNER CONFESSIONAL STATS

EDIT RANK	SEASON	CONTESTANT	GENDER	RACE	OVER/UNDEREDITED	CONFESSIONALS	PER EPISODE
1	22	ROB MARIANO	M	WHITE	206%	97	6.9
2	40	TONY VLACHOS	M	WHITE	158%	74	4.9
3	28	TONY VLACHOS	M	WHITE	88%	97	6.9
4	26	JOHN COCHRAN	M	WHITE	82%	67	4.8
5	30	MIKE HOLLOWAY	M	WHITE	71%	73	5.2
6	35	BEN DRIEBERGEN	M	WHITE	64%	70	5.0
7	44	YAM YAM AROCHO	M	LATINX	57%	81	6.2
8	14	EARL COLE	M	BLACK	52%	59	4.2
9	9	CHRIS DAUGHERTY	M	WHITE	51%	71	5.1
10	18	JT THOMAS	M	WHITE	51%	71	5.5
11	33	ADAM KLEIN	M	WHITE	47%	53	3.8
12	27	TYSON APOSTOL	M	WHITE	46%	48	3.4
13	24	KIM SPRADLIN	W	WHITE	43%	53	3.8
14	15	TODD HERZOG	M	WHITE	42%	60	4.6
15	39	TOMMY SHEEHAN	M	WHITE	40%	52	3.7
16	37	NICK WILSON	M	WHITE	34%	53	3.8
17	34	SARAH LACINA	W	WHITE	33%	45	3.2
18	10	TOM WESTMAN	M	WHITE	33%	59	4.2
19	13	YUL KWON	M	ASIAN	30%	45	3.2
20	1	RICHARD HATCH	M	WHITE	24%	92	7.1
21	31	JEREMY COLLINS	M	BLACK	17%	44	3.1
22	36	WENDELL HOLLAND	M	BLACK	16%	39	2.8
23	3	ETHAN ZOHN	M	WHITE	14%	68	5.0
24	6	JENNA MORASCA	W	WHITE	13%	57	4.4
25	42	MARYANNE OKETCH	W	BLACK	7%	48	3.7
26	21	FABIO BIRZA	M	WHITE	7%	40	2.9
27	5	BRIAN HEIDIK	M	WHITE	6%	53	4.1
28	29	NATALIE ANDERSON	W	ASIAN	6%	46	3.3
29	7	SANDRA DIAZ-TWINE	W	LATINX	5%	54	3.9
30	32	MICHELE FITZGERALD	W	WHITE	1%	57	4.1
31	2	TINA WESSON	W	WHITE	-3%	69	4.9
32	12	ARAS BASKAUSKAS	M	WHITE	-5%	48	3.4
33	8	AMBER BRKICH	W	WHITE	-7%	43	2.9
34	43	MIKE GABLER	M	WHITE	-9%	46	3.5
35	38	CHRIS UNDERWOOD	M	LATINX	-9%	23	1.6
36	11	DANNI BOATWRIGHT	W	WHITE	-12%	41	2.9
37	41	ERIKA CASUPANAN	W	ASIAN	-13%	39	3.0
38	16	PARVATI SHALLOW	W	WHITE	-16%	32	2.3
39	25	DENISE STAPLEY	W	WHITE	-19%	37	2.6
40	23	SOPHIE CLARKE	W	WHITE	-21%	25	1.8
41	20	SANDRA DIAZ-TWINE	W	LATINX	-22%	27	1.9
42	4	VECEPIA TOWERY	W	BLACK	-24%	38	2.9
43	17	BOB CROWLEY	M	WHITE	-25%	31	2.4
44	19	NATALIE WHITE	W	WHITE	-57%	15	1.1

[7]

SURVIVOR PLAYERS VOTED OUT WHILE HOLDING PLAYABLE IDOLS

SEASON	IDOL HOLDER	GENDER	PLACE	DAY
46	TIFFANY NICOLE ERVIN	W	8	19
46	HUNTER MCKNIGHT	M	9	17
46	JEM HUSSAIN-ADAMS	W	14	11
45	BRUCE PERREAULT	M	8	19
45	SABIYAH BRODERICK	W	16	7
41	SHAN SMITH	W	8	19
41	NASEER MUTTALIF	M	10	17
40	SOPHIE CLARKE	W	10	28
39	KELLEE KIM (2X)	W	13	22
39	CHELSEA WALKER	W	17	11
39	VINCE MOUA	M	18	8
38	KELLEY WENTWORTH	W	10	27
38	AUBRY BRACCO	W	16	13
36	CHRIS NOBLE	M	13	22
34	JT THOMAS	M	16	13
32	SCOT POLLARD	M	8	27
29	JON MISCH	M	6	35
29	JOHN ROCKER	M	16	8
28	GARRETT ADELSTEIN	M	17	6
26	ANDREA BOEHLKE	W	7	33
19	ERIK CARDONA	M	12	21
18	BRENDAN SYNNOTT	M	9	24
16	JASON SISKA	M	8	30
16	OZZY LUSTH	M	9	27
15	JAMES CLEMENT (2X)	M	7	30

[8]

When looking forward to the more profound negative implications of reality TV, several studies reveal much more significant problems. Similarly to Andrejevic's description of hyperreality[9], Chung Chin-Yi analyzes the question of agency in the reality TV atmosphere. She describes threats from reality TV's subjectivity and attention-steering strategies "by imploding the 'real' and the 'reel,'" and adds that "hyperreality threatens to dissolve subjectivity and to control minds; we are subjects of domination by the image and the politics that are encoded within it" (Chin-Yi, 43). She also considers viewer motivation by adding that it "serves to satisfy our thirst for voyeurism and invasion of privacy, for as Baudrillard states, it increases our fascination with the obscene (Baudrillard, 33)". The influence of media can further motivate viewers to replicate the behaviors they see on screen. In her exploration of Reality TV programs, Karyn Riddle Builds on the 1980 "Theory of Reasoned Action," which states that "behavioral intentions are affected by subjective norms" (Fishbein, 1980). From this theory of influenced behaviors, Riddle adds, "Thus, if young

[7] FIGURE 1: Kosta the *Survivor* Fact Checker, 2023
[8] FIGURE 2: Kosta the *Survivor* Fact Checker, 2024. *Note: This image was compiled and published before the completion of season forty-six, so not all idol flushes are represented.*
[9] Further detailed in Theory Section

adult viewers of reality TV believe that promiscuity is normative in the real world, it might affect their behavioral intentions (and thus behaviors) in the context of a romantic relationship" (Riddle, 245). This is one example of how media informs decision-making; however, this power can easily be abused and must be considered when consuming and analyzing media of a highly competitive and capitalistic nature like *Survivor*. These sources reveal more significant threats that can arise from the production, dispersion, and consumption of reality TV. The intersection of capitalistic and surveillant dangers, which will be separately analyzed in the following sections, threaten individual autonomy by invisibly steering preferences and informing behaviors.

Fabricating Authenticity

While Surveillance, a centuries-old phenomenon that highly contributes to behavioral monitoring, will further be discussed in the ensuing Theory section, behavioral implications of media availability have also been closely examined. Author and Researcher Emily Hund elaborates on the effects of increased media reliance by discussing the harmful nature of learning and depicting learned behaviors. Having researched the influencer industry and the actual manipulation of images through social media, Hund provides valuable insight into not only the current messaging of "reality" programs but also suggests further harmful outcomes that may arise moving forward. She described this as "industrializing authenticity," a strategy many influential figures use on social media to manipulate audiences into supporting their platform (Hund, 33). Since audiences assess the validity of a social-media-user's message and then respond with their feelings, many "genuinfluencers" have learned how to present their experiences as relatable and authentic so that people can easily digest and subscribe to their postings (Hund, 137). Under these illusory posters, users are learning to bury tendencies

that might threaten the likeability of their "shared self." When the patterns of authenticity become recognizable, people can master the language of truthfulness to exploit industries and build large fanbases. This raises concerns about boundarylessness and the rising tendencies of everyone to "be an influencer."

Michael Serazio furthered these ideas in his text, examining what he calls the "Authenticity Industries." He builds on the development of authenticity behind the scenes. He analyzes the implications of calculated authenticity as "it infects and informs our ideals of celebrity, aesthetics, privacy, nostalgia, and populism" (Serazio, Abstract). Society has incentivized "influencer skills" in workplaces, encouraging many young media users to model and reproduce influencer behaviors. These behaviors, as Hund suggests, align with expectations of social norms and overall acceptable behaviors. This is highly relevant in the case of *Survivor,* as this inability to honestly assess trust in virtual relationships opens the door to various dangers that threaten autonomy. By understanding the increasing awareness and subsequent actions regarding ubiquitous surveillance, the depiction of "reality" and "competition" within the public eye can be more deeply understood.

He points out further evidence of fabricated authenticity directly to the premise of RTV casting, mentioning that early seasons of *Survivor* "featured contestants much less savvy to producer preferences or the tricks to grab screen-time" (Serazio, 52). As the show has developed, the engineering of authenticity has adapted to accelerate beyond what producers can try to prevent by highly vetting their backgrounds[10]. In an environment where producers must prove to viewers that what's on screen is real, Serazio claims that "authenticity has become that much more evasive in the self-consciousness of those selected

[10] Though, many contestants have still been known to fake their stories to get on TV. As RTV took off, day-time TV contestants wised up, with a significant portion of participants assumed to have fabricated some or all of their backstory. (Serazio, 55).

for its stage" (Serazio, 55). In this way, the more that authenticity is sought, the more it is faked for viewer satisfaction. This leads to highly intentional observation of self-disclosure as participants, even before getting on screen, must present what they believe are adequate personality traits to make it on the show. While the industries themselves are very real, their product isn't nearly as transparent as viewers are led to believe. Regardless of the conscious motives of participants for fame, there is an increasingly popular trend of desire to be in the public eye, behaving in a manner that will grant the individual acclaim.

In the next section, I'll discuss generational behavioral differences in professional and competitive environments, but notably, Brian J. Bowe (2015) applied Sharmas' examination of digital behavior to the context of older generations. Building off the idea that reality is socially constructed (Berger), Bowe considered how differing preferences associated with age groups may dictate media consumption. He found that users over 32 were more likely to get information through news sites/blogs, while younger cohorts were more likely to spend more time on social media, affirming the findings of Duarte (Bowe, 4). An examination of the relationship between Facebook, a social site often used by older generations, and reality TV reinforces these ideas by noting that "aligning reality TV (RTV) with social networking sites (SNSs) enables the development of a genealogy in the use of surveillance for displays of the self," overall suggesting that awareness and monitoring of self-presentation[11] discussed by theorists like Hund is an essential and continuously developing phenomenon (Dubrofsky, 111). With the historical immersion of surveillance into society and the subsequent adaptation that individuals make in order to maintain a sense of individuality and success, the

[11] defined as the process of selecting and packaging information about one's self in order to create intended impressions upon audiences (Goffman, 1956)

greater messages being conveyed through this trending media can be harmful to all generations.

Generational Differences in Competitive Environments

With a foundational understanding of reality TV, surveillance, and the potential harm they can cause together, revealing the underlying capitalistic messages and generational differences in responsiveness adds an extra level of depth to analyzing the text. The following two sections will further examine the impact of learned behaviors under a capitalistic society by examining differing behavioral expectations and desires that drive the narratives of shows like *Survivor*. While the millennials and Gen-Zers of today have proven to have heightened awareness of surveillance and its social implications, older generations have many different approaches to competitive environments and the social skills necessary to succeed. A 2007 study by Amy Glass, a specialist in industrial training, analyzes the generational social differences that impact competition in the workforce. Between the three existing generations in the workforce (Boomers, Generation X, Millennials), she found several significant behavioral differences between generations in the workforce that have posed new problems for HR departments. Glass reported firstly that workers among Gen X are more concerned with the outcome of their work rather than the process, in turn leading Boomers to believe that they are not working as hard. Additionally, Gen Xers and millennials often view Boomers as resistant to change, while Boomers, who identify with Steve Jobs, view themselves "as being open to change and new technologies – as long as they perceive real value in it" (Glass, 100). A final finding reported that millennials like and expect constant feedback, unlike Boomers, and this can cause conflict when members of different generations are placed in positions of power, ultimately leading to "an atmosphere of

hostility" (101). These differences reveal the extreme level of tension between generations and their response to societal development that may arise in high-stakes environments.

Another study of generational preference in the workforce focuses on job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and willingness to quit in Boomers vs. Gen X. Similar preferential differences were revealed, especially when regarding their exterior independence but internal need for feedback. Benson and Brown showed that "GenXers valued 'freedom from supervision,' yet our results indicated that for the satisfaction and commitment of GenXers, supervisor support was important" (Benson, 1858). GenXers, often seen as more independent than Boomers (Jorgensen 2003), displayed the critical role of co-worker support "for this group's commitment and willingness to quit," while Boomers proved to be significantly more satisfied and less likely to quit their jobs (Benson, 1859). These findings suggest that public opinion plays a more prominent role in decision-making for younger generations, illuminating the shift in preferences and behaviors portrayed in the media.

When connecting these stark contrasts in generational social and digital preferences, there is an evident connection to the growth in media and the ability to target content to specific audiences. In *Chapter 7: Digital Alienation* of Robert Hassan's *The Condition of Digitality,* he focuses on bringing together the theorizations of several communication theories into contemporary society to highlight digital alienation and the perpetuation of enforced docility. Beginning with the idea of the Nuclear Family, a nostalgia trap for consumerism in America, Hassan references Jameson and points out that "when 'nostalgia' films began to go mainstream: films 'about the past and about specific generational moments of that past,'" can be impactful primarily to older generations, especially when considering the capitalistic themes of those times (Hassan, 170). Jameson additionally wrote that "the

most unique [artistic forms] have been thought of already,'" suggesting that the impact of nostalgic messages can be the most powerful (Jameson, 115). The spread of information and its influence, examined in the next section, is increasingly losing diversity and creativity due to the transition to digital culture. In referencing famous communication theorist Raymond Williams' *Culture is Ordinary*, Hassan stresses that these cultural practices "are increasingly marginal and even face extinction, like languages, as new generations of digital natives see less meaning in them or are literally no longer exposed to them" (Williams, 96).

When transitioning into understanding the capitalistic ideas related to these findings, Hassan says that we need a form of Marxism that considers the postmodern state of the 21st century (Hassan, 185). He references Fisher's idea that our inevitable incapability to keep up with technology serves as "one of the motors of capitalism's worker-consumer passivity, the docile pursuit of what will always be elusive, a world free of fissures and discontinuities" (Fisher, 130). Regardless of generational norms, these findings reflect a dangerously disguised pursuit of contemporary capitalistic success that can be examined in relation to learned behaviors of authenticity and relatability. The following section will examine these ideas further to discuss how generational adoptions of surveillance developments and Reality TV serve greater capitalist institutions through subliminal messaging.

Competition in a Capitalistic Society

These broadly influential messages portrayed through the media will typically benefit the surveillant institutions of power. Several theorists have developed research surrounding the presence and effects of underlying capitalistic motivations. Christian Fuchs, a critical communication theorist, acknowledges the integral role of capitalistic ideals dispersed

through media by building on Marxist theory[12]. He explains the interdisciplinary complications of these theories in communication studies. He describes the impactful role the capitalistic economy plays in greater agenda setting through (1) the process of capital accumulation, (2) the role of labor in capitalism, (3) how time plays a key role in capitalism, (4) the relation of the capitalist economy and communication, and (5) roles of communication in the capitalist economy as a totality (Fuchs, 12). Michael A. Stefanone argues that this applies strongly to Reality TV, where players often compete for a financial prize even if that prize isn't always the explicit focus of gameplay. Fuchs' point about time is crucial when considering the previously mentioned contrasts in generational behaviors and attitudes, and Hassan delves deeper into the application of postmodernity to a capitalistic society. Building on Marxist ideals, Hassan brought in a unique background of geographical studies to analyze how accumulation and consumption are dictated by space, ultimately arguing that social spaces are the primary force behind producing and reproducing behaviors, in this case, capitalistically.

He more deeply explores the regime of accumulation and critiques the often-expressed idea associated with Marxism that technological determinism[13] is the prime mover of capitalism. Hassan refutes this idea by arguing that "capitalism co-opts the freedom potential of technology for its own ends," meaning, "it's about who controls technology, capitalists or a wider democratic and socialist society, and not about the determining effects of technology" (Hassan, 24). This idea, built off of David Harvey's work, suggests that the internalized behaviors taught and replicated throughout society are deeply rooted in

[12] A theory that debases capitalism, focusing on social welfare: "analyses communication in the context of the dialectic of class and domination and of capitalism as a societal totality that is grounded in the logic of accumulation and creates inequalities" (Fuchs, 12).
[13] The idea that technological developments shape how individuals think, feel, act.

capitalistic domination, what Harvey describes as the "regime of accumulation" (Harvey (1989), 21). Harvey, who also looked at Marxism through a broader lens of cultural changes, is noted for saying, "When money functions as a measure of value, it must truly represent the values it helps to circulate." (Harvey (1982), 293). Both of these theorists show that capitalism plays a very powerful role in assigning value and motivating society.

Capitalism can be seen as a motive behind significant behavioral findings in a competitive context like *Survivor*, which involves both team and individual challenges for a significant financial reward. A 1967 study of inter- and intra-group competition observed that "both individual and group competition produce higher motivation and quantity of performance," while "the quality of performance was also higher for the competitive conditions" (Julian, 79). A later study from 1984 built on these findings with a social psychological approach, particularly regarding attraction in competition. It reported that respondents "tend to like and respect these competitors more than non-competitors, even when status on the team is controlled," suggesting that lateral surveillance immediately begins to take place. He adds that teams perceived to have a more inequitable dispersion of attractiveness lead to "the assignment of higher status to competitors, such competitors receive lower attraction ratings than equitably assigned higher-status competitors" (Rees, 328). Additionally, players are more highly attracted to potential and perceived competitors, which aligns with the first point; however, "perceived dangerous competitors (named as most likely to interfere with one's goals) are given higher attraction ratings than noncompetitors" (Rees, 333). These findings suggest that highly competitive environments are highly dictated by perceptions of those around oneself and specifically foster significant levels of respect for those who align with the nature and motivations of the environment.

Beyond the program's impact on participants, “heavy viewers tended to base their self-worth on competitive behavior” (Stefanone). A study of the impacts of RTV on real-life aggression by Bryan Gibson revealed that this isn’t just “harmless entertainment.” By analyzing the acts of aggression in these programs, Gibson showed that exposure to surveillance RTV programs “ increased physical aggression not only in comparison with a nonviolent, family-themed surveillance program but also compared with a violent crime drama” (Gibson, 71). Further, the types of programs like *Jersey Shore*, characterized by drama, as opposed to shows like *Little Couple*, have different levels of impact. Gibson adds directly to my research by noting that “the subversive relational aggression in *Survivor* may lead to similar outcomes,” reiterating the need for critical consumption of this media form concerning the effects off-screen (Ibid., 71).

When applying this to competition Reality TV, an undeniable promotion of capitalistic tendencies is found. Aiden Kosciesza argues that this distinct media genre “reproduces capitalist hegemony by naturalizing neoliberal values, the myth of meritocracy, and the precarity of cultural labor” (Kosciesza, 1685). Another piece by Mark Andrejevic from 2002 builds on this idea of capitalistic messaging by examining cast members of MTV’s popular reality show ‘Road Rules’[14]. With a focus on the “information revolution” of the twenty-first century, Andrejevic cites surveillance as a “form of economic exploitation” (Andrejevic, 253, 251). Drawing on theories from Harvey and Jameson, he says that reality TV programs train viewers and consumers to play a role in this interactive economy; consequently, the “democratic” presentation of surveillance as opposed to oppressive/invasive contributes greatly to viewer reception of not only the show but the depiction of normality. A very applicable example from his engagement with the cast and

[14] Reality program where contestants team up to compete in challenges for money

crew of 'Road Rules' revealed that players nicknamed their camera crew "Big Brother" one season, referencing George Orwell's *1984*. The phenomenon of Big Brother[15], the "infallible and all-powerful" totalitarian leader, was highly controversial and criticized for its oppressive nature(Orwell, 262). While the contestants on 'Road Rules' were likely joking about this reference, Andrejevic stresses that this shift in perception indicates a greater problem. He contends that this negative figure was "replaced by the increasingly routine, annoying but necessary intrusions of commerce in the form of the entertainment industry," adding that the new, "commercial, capitalist version of Big Brother" has a much more positive image (Andrejevic, 252). Despite the "natural" appeal of Reality TV, the invasive reproduction of competition for financial gain is a harmful norm in modern society.

Another way that these surveillant elements can be connected to Reality TV can be seen in Michael A. Stefanone's social cognitive analysis of social media use and 'selfie-related behavior' as a new competitive strategy. He reported that "when individuals engage in discussion with others about television content, behaviors modeled on RTV are reinforced" in a model where "self-worth based on competition mediates the relationship between RTV viewing and selfie-related behavior" (Stefanone). When tying these findings back to the discussion of social media user behavior among younger generations, the influence of the selfie and digital media interconnects with the hyperreality of these competition programs. Even beyond the financial motivations of many competition TV shows, this also reveals that value/worth can be afforded for other attractive traits that uphold dominant ideologies, especially as they are reinforced by consumers.

With the interconnection of surveillance, technological development, media consumption, and capitalistic messages, the consumption of Reality TV can act to produce

[15] Notably, predating the creation of the television program named in reference to this idea.

societal norms while adapting to generational social changes. Despite the sense of agency experienced today Dubrofsky stresses that Reality TV programs are "symptomatic texts, texts that tell us about the larger culture in which they exist" and urges critical usage of social technologies "that bracket practices for synthesizing and contextualizing, as synthesizing and contextualizing are at the heart of critical engagements with the world" (Dubrofsky, 125). The issue of rapidly available information, more specifically the quantity of information, can be a blessing and a curse when it comes to meaning-making and assigning value. When assessing the value of achievements, Evan Brier claims that "the 'prestige' competition of the late twentieth century was undone by the digital economy" (Brier, 187). While that language can be picked apart by theorists, his primary takeaway was the demise of "mattering," essentially a sense of novelty (Ibid, 192). He argues that due to the overwhelming amount of information in the digital age, "when distribution costs are negligible, and shelf space is no longer a concern, worries about the novel's death become no less dated than older assertions of the novel's civilization-saving potential" (Ibid., 192). While the availability of content online can provide the illusion of free will and independence, the consumption of any media, Reality TV specifically, must be approached with a critical lens.

While capitalistic movies remain mostly unchanged, the learned behaviors individuals have developed from watching *Survivor* while existing in a technologically ubiquitous world have stripped many individuals of their behavioral autonomy. Through generational shifts in work ethic and media consumption, as well as a steady career in RTV programs, *Survivor* as an artifact for examination connects to many of these ideas. The following section will present surveillance theory as the lens through which these concepts will be examined.

Chapter 3: Description of Theory

The Surveillant World

Surveillance, the act of watching, is an extremely relevant area of focus when examining a reality TV artifact. Surveillance Theory, which examines this concept, "develops accounts of surveillant assemblages and networked surveillance that control consumers and their data doubles, to finally branch out to theorizing current modes," in this case, *Survivor* (Timan, 2). Regarding understanding surveillance, theorist J. Macgregor Wise presents a valuable introductory foundation for the concept. In his text "Introduction: Mapping the Surveillant Imaginary," Wise lays out the early theories of surveillance as mediums of television were beginning to normalize and infiltrate everyday society. In his example of Disney's 1975 film *Escape to Witch Mountain*, Wise describes that voyeurism is an act of power and has, in turn, formed our "culture of peeping," which highly promotes the Reality TV industry. While this film may appear out of place, in a scene in which the main characters stand "in front of a bank of video monitors," examining children who survived an alien attack, Surveillance was being introduced as a completely normal yet valuable asset to society (Wise, 5). This section will lay out the history and relevance of surveillance theory to this study, as well as its implications on behaviors in real and digital existence.

Before the age of technology, surveillance played a powerful role in societal institutions. One of the earliest theorists to describe surveillance was Michael Foucault in his book "Discipline and Punish," which lays out the foundation for understanding the dangers of surveillance as a form of domination. In this book, Foucault describes the global shift from the use of public executions to the creation of the prison system. This transition from the

ruler or monarch exerting power over the human body to the state disciplining the souls of citizens acted not only as a punishment to the perpetrator but also as a form of future intimidation against acts that defy those in power. While policing was previously measurable, this transition enabled power figures to expand their reign intangibly as the implications of what was considered "punishable" are now much more robust; consequently, citizens are now cognizant of how their behavior may be criticized under the watching eye that takes hold in many aspects of society.

One of Foucault's primary theories that contribute to this is the concept of the panopticon and the state's replication of it in everyday life[16]. This idea was described as a democratization of the exercise of power, as its influence was later used beyond prisoners to monitor supervisors and beyond (Foucault). Most notably, this power is maintained with a watchful eye by being strategically choreographed never to exceed the point of brutality; thereby, those who desired power could more easily achieve a body of unquestioning citizens. One key example of this calculated exposure comes from Wise's previously mentioned article, in which he examines the integration of surveillance technology in the media. He notes that "by 1975, audiences had been trained to expect to be on surveillance cameras for almost three decades, ever since hapless adults were caught on candid cameras for popular entertainment" (Wise, 3). Considering the lasting effects of this surveillant strategy explains the history of self-monitoring and submission to power. When applying this theory to the overt surveillance necessary to produce reality TV, the behavioral presentation of characters can be more deeply understood. While Foucault's analysis is easy to write off

[16] suggests that in a hypothetical prison environment where a guard tower sits at the center, prisoners behave well anticipating constant surveillance, even if it's not always present (Foucault). In this concept, while there is no way to tell whether the surveillant structure is in use, people must act with its presence in mind i.e. prisoners act on their best behavior with the constant possibility of being observed.

as outdated or designated for early eras of societal development, the reality is that this surveillance and its implementation reveals the precariousness of our assumed autonomy in the digital age.

Another important theorist, Gilles Deleuze, developed a more in-depth analysis of power distribution from Foucault's initial theories, where he describes the term "Society of Control" as the interpretation that social power no longer directly 'disciplines.' He combines Foucault's internalization of social expectations with newly defined limits that maintain the docility of citizens under a state due to compounding environmental influences. Deleuze describes a state of "perpetual training" in which individuals experience reinforcement of social expectations from those around them in spaces like the family, the education system, and beyond. He elaborates that "the disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy, but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network." (Deleuze, 6). In this world, individuals can move freely within established limits, like legal and social frameworks of norms, allowing them an illusion of freedom and autonomy, but not beyond them. These systems work to uphold society's preset expectations of diligent work ethics and acceptance of surveillance. Deleuze stresses the illusive sense of autonomy felt by unsuspecting individuals as the government has infiltrated and normalized the presence of surveillance into everyday life, creating a ubiquitous panoptic model. Today, individuals are increasingly stimulated by digital media, and the illusion of free will enables them to trust the figureheads who disperse their values, making these theories vital to effectively analyze widely dispersed contemporary depictions of "reality."

Surveillance in the Digital Age: Relevance to Study

In a world that proves entirely unpredictable and overwhelming, theorist Ulrich Beck analyzes what he calls the "World Risk Society" and describes risk assessment concerning issues of surveillance involving self-monitoring in a technological age. Beck argues that the theory of risk is ironic as risks are socially constructed, yet individuals spend their entire lives trying to predict and prepare for the incalculable. Technologies of surveillance provide a sense of immediate relief to many as they feel protected from risks like robbery, abduction, and assault; however, their invasive abilities have the potential to infringe on a sense of privacy, which appears essentially obsolete in modern times. To make matters worse, Frances Stoner Saunders stresses that we have set up a society that we must rely on and submit to for basic survival: we are "'a fanatically voluntaristic society', obsessed with public self-exposure and suspicious of 'reticence or obliquity'" (Saunders, par.12). Beck states that "the principle of deliberately exploiting the vulnerability of modern civil society replaces the principle of chance and accident," in turn putting those under the surveillant gaze, like Reality TV stars, at greater risk (Beck, 1).

Building off of Deleuze and Foucault, Mark Andrejevic coined the term "lateral surveillance" to describe peer monitoring. He argues that in a climate of perceived risk and continuous skepticism, individuals are increasing their usage of surveillance technologies to monitor the behaviors of those around them. Most importantly, Andrejevic argues that "the adoption of such technologies corresponds with an ideology of 'responsibilization' associated with the risk society" and that consumers utilize soft skills to ensure societal adherence to pre-existing expectations (Andrejevic, 1). Rather than the usage of technology in a top-down fashion, everyday citizens have ironically begun to attempt to assess every potential risk to

themselves and society in one another, thereby emulating and amplifying the motives of controlling groups. Even further, the term "sousveillance," coined by Ben Brucato, explains how civilians engage in "'watching from below'" by surveilling " the activities of structurally empowered actors," thereby turning the gaze back to those monitoring them (Brucato, 456). He argues that visibility is supposed to induce transparency, though there is always a power imbalance in surveillant situations. In a world where individuals are opting to be so closely monitored, internalized self- and sous-monitoring play an undeniable role in a competitive atmosphere like *Survivor*. With Andrejevic's "responsibilization" in mind, this enforces the idea that citizens may be viewed more highly for watching and reporting on one another. The emergence of watching one another has transitioned from a place of self-protection to a now offensive move to punish others. Not only is watching now entirely accepted and integrated into the everyday lives of humans, but it's very present in the "reality" programs Americans consume daily.

In understanding the developed behaviors pre-determined by the universal adoption of surveillance, it's vital to understand theorist Molly Roy's concept of social choreography laid out in her piece "Systems of Choreography: Performing Normal in Public." Roy analyzes how the movement and behaviors of individuals are observed and treated in public spaces. She expresses that certain groups of people can be targeted by certain movements while other groups may be afforded more freedom to move and act without judgment. Because of this, minority groups have to be especially cognizant of their public behavior. Regardless of demographic differences, behaviors are also examined for "normalcy" and obedience within society. While race/appearance impacts the extent of punishment or assumptions toward one's behavior, certain behaviors themselves deemed irregular can also

be frowned upon. As individuals adopt lateral surveillance, it has been internalized and applied to everyday actions, thereby limiting the true autonomy of individuals portrayed on screen. Dubrofsky perfectly articulates this idea when she states that “the use of surveillance for expressing the self emphasizes the subject as a producer of data, and data as a product that increases in value the more others consume it. ” (Dubrofsky, 125).

The technological reliance among younger generations is critical when considering their hyperconsumption of social media. Having been raised in a diligently surveillant society, reconnecting it to the advent of technology reliance puts into perspective the severity of the unaddressed situation at hand. As expert researcher Stacy Jo Dixon shares, The Gen Z demographic (born in 1997-2012) is a highly targeted group for marketers in the media. She adds that “as individuals of this age group have little to no knowledge of what life was like before readily available smartphones, Wi-Fi, or online networks,” this immersion in a world of widespread usage has become second nature to Gen Z’ers (Dixon, par.1). It was found in a recent 2023 study that According to the latest available data, “teenagers spend 7 hours and 22 minutes per day in front of screens. That equates to 43% of a teen’s waking hours,” and the issue is ever growing as it was revealed American teens’ screen time has increased by around two hours since 2015 (Duarte, Top 5 Stats). As an ever-growing techno-world surrounds upcoming generations, interference is necessary to prevent the continuation of generational submissive uniformity.

Roy’s description of codified bodies applies directly to Generation Z’s adoption of self-monitoring both online and offline due to their intrinsic internalization of omnipresent surveillance. In her research on surveillance in social media, Duffy examined “Kylee,” who “explained how she presented different types of content based upon perceived intimacy with

her audiences," and has to be cognizant of which platforms certain political/social judgments are more present (Duffy, 129). Kylee, like many of her peers, showcased the increasing awareness that younger users of digital media are feeling, prompting behavioral modifications in order to align with what they expect to be well-received. Kylee's case study shows the intensity of the fairly new practice of behavioral monitoring in a technologically surveillant world, specifically one that removes privacy with ease and little to no resistance. With the increasing need that individuals feel to monitor and morph their behavioral patterns for the surveillant audience, the implications of these changes are revealing themselves in real-time.

As discussed in the literature review, the rise of digital media communications and access has played a large role in life experiences for viewers. The specific impact of surveillance and societies' unquestioning adoption of it is extremely significant. As Reality TV serves to produce an "authentic" version of reality despite being reliant on extreme forms of surveillance, the motives and messages behind it should not go unquestioned. Thus, surveillance as a theoretical framework reflects both what individuals think is socially normal, as well as what society has already taught individuals is behavior worthy of positive recognition. This theory will allow for a deeper and more comprehensive sense of media literacy on the effects of reality TV and autonomy.

Considering the implications of a calculated historical implementation of surveillance as a form of control, its direct role in constructing "reality" on national television raises many questions. In contemporary society, in conjunction with rapid technological advancements and acceptance, surveillance is a norm that should not go unquestioned. Not only are everyday people learning to modify their behaviors according to what they think is

acceptable in society, but surveillance has further infiltrated society by creating programs set to reflect “reality,” reinforcing behaviors that align with the ultimate desires of figureheads in a capitalist society. While the literature is continually developing, my longitudinal update to RTV research uses the application of surveillance, media hyperreality, and institutional messaging. *Survivors* can reflect on society's rapid evolution and acceptance of behavioral monitoring for others' perceptions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This project will conduct a longitudinal, qualitative critical content analysis examining the media artifact *Survivor* and its effects on societal meaning-making as influenced by its surveillant construction of reality. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a "qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities" (Mullet, abstract). Using this analytical method, the discursive tone of each season and its ties to the strength of surveillance will be closely examined to extract further societal implications that extend beyond the screen. As the show has developed, the producers have adapted to the ever-changing needs of modern viewers. In a decade dictated by technology, digital media, and rapidly available information, awareness of parasocial relationships and self-representation has become a priority. By connecting this idea in the context of surveillance to the revitalized popularity of *Survivor*, there is a significant amount of content to be examined among social interactions.

As a longitudinal study, it will examine three seasons spanning from the show's conception. Specifically, this research will focus on Seasons one, thirty-three (Millennials vs. Gen X), and forty-six (the most recently completed season to date)[17]. It will highlight and examine key differences among each season and closely examine the dialogic tones among players, alliance formation strategies, motivations for winner selections, and differences in perception of work value across generations in a surveillant context. Specifically, it will apply theories of surveillance to capitalist-based competition with a focus on modern presentations of reality TV since its initial introduction to the global stage.

[17] *As of November, 2024.

For this study, analysis will focus on group and individual behaviors in a competition setting. While there are many unique aspects of the show that can be studied (i.e., the tribal themes, game theory applications, gender roles, etc.), this content presented by the show makers allows for a close examination of how the reality of competition has changed with the rise of comfortability surrounding surveillance in young Americans. The analysis will look for changes in the dialogue of players surrounding loyalty, blindsides, and overall bluntness. These periodic dialogic extractions will be compared and contrasted in terms of their relationship to surveillance-motivated behavioral changes. Notably, season 33 has been selected as it directly highlights generational differences, enabling a clearer analysis for a deeper understanding of the generational divide in gameplay.

Using theories of surveillance and extracted ideas from Hund and Foucault, traditional and contemporary thinkers will be brought together to form a present understanding of this program and others like it. I will reference Emily Hund's Influencer Industry to describe the role fabricated authenticity plays in the new era of *Survivor* and the associated new approach to competition. I will also reference Michael Foucault's *Societies of Control* to provide a foundation for the impact that surveillant technology plays today in a system reliant on domination. I will also reference Christian Fuchs' critical theory on capitalism and communication. These will allow me to more deeply understand the motives behind both the game players and the showmaker's ultimate presentation of *Survivor*; consequently, this will allow me to analyze greater trends of societal desires surrounding media consumption, influenced actions, and capitalistic desires.

The recent game has been represented by many long-time fans for being very emotional and soft, rather than the cutthroat game they were initially introduced to. While

this can certainly be seen from a quick glance, the dialogic changes actually reflect quite the opposite. While initially perceived as a show transitioning from competition to camaraderie, I intend to show that the show has actually gone from civility to cutthroat. Because of this, I will specifically be focusing on the dialogue between players, with a specific focus on moves made at tribal council[18]. As I am already familiar with all three seasons, watching back these segments with an understanding of each season's themes and outcomes will allow me to reanalyze these specific moments of tension.

I chose to analyze this period because it illuminates the fight-or-flight response period that players are forced into when their chance at winning one million dollars is on the line. With this knowledge, I will hopefully be able to extract moments where players are seemingly self-aware and, therefore, performative for the camera in order to illuminate their character favorably. The time between immunity and tribal is vital because of the one-on-one scramble players do to try to organize a vote that will protect themselves for another day. So, I will examine the number of potential alliance swaps in discussions leading into tribals, tribal discourse, and spoken versus unspoken tensions, and the ultimate outcome of each tribal accounting for the level of predictability and strategy of those who orchestrated it.

I will analyze this among several categories. Beginning with the presentation of group discourse as well as the level of individuality displayed, the initial social tones of each season will be compared and contrasted. The following section will analyze how winners were chosen each season and how that reflects their behavioral presentation at the time. Lastly, this will examine the presentation of generational differences by showmakers in order to connect those shifts to the potential shifts in relationship strength across forty-six seasons. Having

[18] Focusing on Final Tribals (Where the winner is announced), as well as confessionals and tribe/alliance-based conversations.

gathered all of my data, I will look specifically at how players may be potentially "authentically" performative in more recent seasons as related to surveillance developments. I will continue to further my analysis by applying existing literature on capitalism and generational competition as well as recent other critical analyses of reality TV using surveillance theory. The goal of this research is to provide a new example of how media is impacting individual behavior on and off-screen. Several researchers have examined *Survivor*, and even more, have studied the genre of reality TV; however, I intend to reveal another approach to understanding how reality TV is constantly evolving and shaping the social demands of viewers.

Several ethical and scope-based implications cannot be overlooked when considering the outcomes of this study. As the topic was chosen from my own experience as a long-term *Survivor* fan, having watched nearly every season, I have my own subjective experience that may impact perceptions of each season as well as certain character dynamics. This poses a primary ethical concern while entering my research. My role as a researcher is to not only maintain an unbiased stance but also to keep in mind the agency of the individuals on screen, so opinion-aside, this study is still designed to focus on easily extractable discursive moments with less room for subjective interpretation.

Other factors of the show beyond my control are the many intricate changes the show has seen through its evolution. While many of the most basic and key changes were discussed in the Introduction section, there are undeniable factors that won't be able to fit into this study. As the show has adapted and reorganized itself over time, the presentation of narratives and players and overall structure has changed. This is vital to note as only a small amount of reality actually makes it to screen, leaving the directors great creative liberty to

push narratives and change the discourse. Even among the seasons chosen for this research, they all have slightly different organizational patterns. Lastly, the cast members of each season are a small sample of widely varying people, creating unique interactions that cannot be exactly replicated. While individuality is great to showcase in RTV, this makes the identification of behavioral trends observed in the game difficult since each player is undeniably unique in their background and approach to life. Overall, there are many factors to take into account when considering the ethics of producing and studying reality TV; however, by focusing on the players themselves, I hope to illuminate these social adaptations.

A final consideration in this study involves the nature of the CDA methodology. As this study will follow a qualitative approach to analysis, there is always a margin of error for subjectivity when entering interpretations. Despite this paper's close ties to direct theories for a well-structured examination, these studies are still "no less likely than other forms of scholarly research to reproduce ideological assumptions; qualitative rigor and trustworthiness are discussed" (Mullet, abstract). With this in mind, the study will still operate as close to the CDA guidelines related to surveillance as possible.

These aspects will allow for analysis to reach more deeply into understanding the motives behind both the game players and the show-maker's ultimate presentation of *Survivor*; consequently, this will allow me to analyze greater trends of societal desires surrounding the construction of behavioral norms and capitalistic desires. Through a multifaceted examination of the artifact *Survivor*, the following thesis will extract concepts of surveillance to explain both the cause and implications of the show's development and success.

Chapter 5: Analysis/Interpretation

Defining Features of Each Season

Each season in this study brings unique insight into the development of the show's trajectory while showcasing distinct features impacted by the time, theme, and casting that will guide this analysis. Before diving into the deeper analysis of changes seen within these seasons, the unique factors that make them relevant to this study should be noted. From shifts in dialogic tone, winner valuations, and overall attitudes towards teamwork, surveillance has informed critical aspects of the show and the way players approach its gameplay with the knowledge of a large audience.

Season One, airing in 2000, was the first game of *Survivor* to be played, making it the basis for all subsequent seasons. Featuring sixteen castaways placed on a Malaysian island in two tribes of eight, castaways and producers were about to make history. Without influence from previous games, this season is arguably the most authentic due to the uninformed navigation of gameplay that each player struggles with. Known for its historically influential players, this season was not only widely consumed but also widely criticized. The winner, thirty-nine-year-old Richard Hatch, was an openly gay and unabashed man freely expressing himself on a national stage in a period where homophobia was still fairly normalized. His sexuality, a taboo for network television, was brought up in each of the fourteen episodes of the season. Aside from the domination of this theme, as well as other potentially offensive topics, the program featured the first formation of an alliance and its nearly perfect execution from start to finish. As will be further discussed, this season, highlighted by harshness,

profanity, and discrimination, still held a level of camaraderie and respect amongst most players despite these more difficult topics.

Season Thirty-Three, airing in 2016, came to screens with the theme "Millennials vs Gen X," constructing a clear generational split in the initial tribe divisions. Consisting of twenty castaways split into two tribes of ten by generations, Millennials and Generation Xers, respectively[19], the season was the first to kick off the show's residency in Fiji. Defined by its emphasis on generational differences, the season featured its youngest player, Will Wahl, an eighteen-year-old who skipped his last month of high school to play. The first episode quickly defined the traits of each generation, with the Xers positioned as stubborn and hardworking and the Millennials as disorganized and lazy. Within the confines of these expectations, participants did appear to be more scripted/performative to fit the expectations of the audience and narrative development compared to seasons past. Aside from this, unlikely alliances were formed and morphed as the game played out. Despite focusing on rifts among tribemates in each age group, the show notably ended in a unanimous vote for twenty-five-year-old Adam Klein, a player- and fan-favorite known for his big heart. While this season emphasized cooperative tensions, it concluded with a very satisfying and heart-warming ending that moved fans.

Season forty-six, a strong representation of the "new era" in full swing, focused on eighteen castaways in Fiji, initially divided into three tribes of six. As "new era" seasons go, *Survivor: 46* saw far more inconsistencies and switch-ups in alliances rather than a set group consistently dominating. Known for its record-number idol flushes[20] and highly emotional

[19] Gen X born between 1963 and 1982, Millennials born between 1981-1996. At the time of the show, Millennials represented ages 18-31, and Xers at 33-52.

[20] An "Idol Flush" refers to when a player gets voted out with an immunity idol in their position, therefore flushing their idol from gameplay and allowing a new one to be hidden for circulation among remaining players.

play, this season was criticized for its outcome as fans believed the winner was chosen for their backstory as opposed to her gameplay. Kenzie Petty, the twenty-nine-year-old hairdresser known for her inviting energy, won enough jury votes from close connections to afford herself a close victory against runner-up Charlie Davis. This season's emotional pulls extended beyond the screen as the popularity of TikTok encouraged further discourse on the development of the season and the players, with feedback readily available to all players as the show is filmed months in advance. Known for its display of emotional vulnerability while maintaining a fierce level of competition, this season was undeniably different from early seasons, but regardless, continued the show's popularity. These evolutions will be further explored to extract the impacts of surveillance on constructing reality and the implications of the themes being portrayed.

The Evolution of Alliances

Introduced four episodes into the show's career, alliances are no stranger to this game. Within a setting that demands majority votes every episode, there is an undeniable need for belonging to remain in the game. While these relationships define the game, they have not always looked the same. As seasons pass, audiences and players alike have more and more content available to see what "works" and what "doesn't" to remain successful in this competition. While each winner has unique strengths that differentiate them from winners, and the players in each season decide the outcome, there are certain patterns that have stood the test of time. Some are deeply ingrained in the show, like forming alliances, while others have been left long behind, like the outward mean-spiritedness seen early on in the show. Between individual and group perceptions of strengths, both physical and social, these shifts all come down to the anticipation of being perceived by a large audience, as well as

awareness and representation of learned behaviors that have only proved to grow with the show's legacy. The following two sections will analyze how social strategies have developed and transformed in tandem with the game by analyzing both the overall tone of discussions as well as the focus on individual versus group moves. The outcomes will be tied to the impact of spreading surveillance practices and the messaging they disperse to viewers.

Dialogue: Sociability vs Political Correctness?

While the common complaint of the show's increasing "softness" poses a big point of contention for fans, this section will lay out how the dialogic shifts have primarily eliminated offensive commentary without removing the harsh competition due to increased surveillance. With a strong start of mean-spirited language and open degradation of one another, the show's representation of camaraderie has greatly shifted. While players are sure to butt heads no matter the season, these shifts greatly contribute to the show's misperception of diminished aggression as players adopt fabricated kindness to ensure they are well-received. Particularly, through the fostering of unlikely friendships and confrontation avoidance, the overall tone of the show has become defined by language used to make one another comfortable, as opposed to the unfiltered offensive remarks that defined the show's beginning.

As early as episode one, there was a slew of directly offensive comments made to and about players throughout everyday interactions. Before even considering the blatant homophobia towards Richard Hatch, there were countless instances of players being directly degrading to one another. A key example comes from episode six with a shocking comment from thirty-one-year-old Gervase, in which he said, "Girls are the stupidest thing on the planet next to cows," and the nearby women in his tribe were visibly uncomfortable

(*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 6). At that evening's tribal council when confronted with his words he claimed to have no memory, and remained on the island until episode ten. Further, the fact that these words had little to no impact on his role in the game, players suggested to audiences that these sorts of comments don't require accountability or punitive measures.

The lack of impact this moment had on his time in the game was certainly not a unique moment of the season. Just an episode before, in a challenge focused on rafting, an occupation of runner-up Kelly Wigglesworth revealed another example. After losing to Gervase, a man who had made it clear he did not know how to swim and he was extremely nervous, Kelly exclaimed, "I got beat by a guy who can't even f***ing swim" (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 5). This comment was made loudly, and through tears, with little concern for those around her seeing her meltdown, let alone the cameras. Without the experience and understanding of the surveillant world, early players like Kelly could be seen processing their emotions in real-time, unmasked, and without regard for others. These tensions and frequent emotional confrontations continued as a theme throughout the season. Similar occurrences arose when players would make fun of one player's strong religious beliefs, or refer to another as a Nazi prisoner for getting skinny, a highly offensive comment that wouldn't be made today (*Survivor: Borneo,* Eps. 4, 5). These tensions began early in the first episode in fact, and only grew through the final tribal council. With this hurtful language shaping the first-ever iteration of *Survivor*, fans assumed that this tone defined this competitive game; however, without a history of surveillant backlash, these players didn't know the impact of their statements at the time. Whether tied to a lack of "PC" development, or just personality traits, these moments set an expectation of outward disrespect as a norm.

The final tribal of Season One, in which each member of the jury is allowed to speak, highlighted the ruthlessness of mean-spirited representation on a national, even global, scale. While the complex alliance shifts will be later dissected, the third-place contestant made her distaste for both opponents extremely clear despite being directly aligned with them both for almost the entire game. In her famous "rat and snake" speech, in which she nastily implies that Richard is a snake and Kelly is a rat, Sue pleads to her fellow jury members to "let it be, in the end, the way mother nature intended it to be, the snake eat the rat" (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 13). While her insults to Richard of being arrogant, pompous, and stubborn, may appear harsh, she saves her most hurtful words for twenty-three-year-old Kelly. Feeling betrayed by the significantly younger contestant, Sue goes against her statement that she would never *ever* burn Kelly due to their closeness (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 10). In the heat of the final tribal, Sue takes the opportunity to mercilessly let out her frustration when she turned to Kelly and said: "if I ever pass you along and you're laying there dying of thirst I would not give you water, I would give you to the vultures [...] with no ill regrets" (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 13). These words, while driven by emotions of hurt, are intentionally harsh and unapologetically displayed. Without concern of surveillant backlash due to the early age of RTV, Sue doesn't even consider the negative backlash she could face for these words. The level of pain that Sue intended to inflict upon her competition was free of consideration of how she may be perceived, a moment that would be frowned upon in the contemporary game.

Sue wasn't the only one to share her unfiltered feelings at the final tribal, with other contestants making comments like "I don't think either of you truly deserve it," a sentiment shared by most if not all jury members (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 13). In a game that had created

such animosity, it's evident that players were more driven by their emotions, specifically distaste for one another, and made it clear without concern for the cameras that would be showing the world their cruelty. These examples show that interpersonal communication was not yet self-monitored under the guise of surveillance, enabling an outdated tone of mean-spirited judgment.

The most striking aspect of this season was its theme of homophobia and the contestant's frequent jokes about Richard's sexuality, a tone that would be highly condemned in contemporary television. While comments regarding his sexuality were quick to start, they continued with frequency throughout the season with one member of his tribe laughing at his early attempts to fish, describing him as a "big gay man with a spear comin' right at ya" (*Survivor: Borneo,* Eps. 1; 3). While Rich's stature was also often joked about, a key characteristic of his unique character was his unabashed affinity for spending time in the nude. This alone is strange and does reflect a certain amount of healthy confusion/discomfort by his tribemates as they were all strangers not long ago. This, combined with his sexuality and build, led him to receive the name "Fat Naked F*g,"[21] something he also found humorous. In fact, he earned a vote to win at the tribal council because one player, Sean, said, "I think that his FNF idea is fantastic and FNF with a million dollars is just hilarious" (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 13). While Richard was able to make light of his sexuality with tribemates, the overt judgment towards his orientation once again reflected the players lack of behavioral modification for large audiences, shamelessly expressing their distaste and making jokes at his expense.

The person who expressed the most explicit homophobia and general judgment throughout the show was seventy-two-year-old Rudy; however, he was also notably one of

[21] From now on, will be referred to as "FNF" due to the offensive language used.

Rich's closest alliance members. He would frequently comment on Rich's "lifestyle" choices, once saying, " I don't agree with his lifestyle, and I told him that, and he probably won't agree with mine, but anyway, we gotta work together" (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 6). Additionally, even after the show concluded, Rudy made a point to say that his time on the island did not change any of his preset expectations of gay individuals, despite voting with Rich every episode and even voting for him to win the cash prize (*Survivor: Borneo,* Ep. 14). The duality between partnership and strongly judgemental beliefs shows a sense of authenticity that wouldn't pass today. It's easy for contemporary viewers to watch season 1 now and find this discourse jarring and harsh, especially compared to more recent seasons; however, in reality, there was still a great amount of loyalty and cooperation between individuals with completely different experiences and outlooks. While their behaviors reflect those that are viewed as unfavorable today, their focus on the gameplay, as opposed to the perception of their morals in a surveillant world, drove this apparently harsh yet human game to pioneer the show's success. In all, the discursive tone throughout season one showed the lack of "PC" influenced language that has more recently become an aspect of influenced behaviors, particularly exacerbated by recent cancel culture. With no pre-set example for how to behave under direct surveillance in *Survivor*, players can be seen behaving without regard for others and explicitly practicing bullying behaviors that would be condemned today.

As *Survivor* has progressed, each new season is increasingly influenced by existing game outcomes and strategies, with season thirty-three as a prime example of a more emotionally-involved game that leads to close, loving bonds for many players. With a rise in more accepting and vulnerable conversations, players could be seen appealing far more to audiences. Characterized by its generational social separation, each initial tribe faced some

arguments among players, as many do in the initial transition onto the island; however, the language used displayed a far stronger sense of self-monitoring to avoid appearing negatively to audiences and players.

Specifically for the Millennial tribe, the younger group of contestants, the tribe took off with a very strong high school feel, covertly dividing into social castes: the pretty popular contestants and the odd ones out. Described by finalist and social outcast, Hannah, as "Kappa Kappa *Survivor*," on day one, it was apparent physical attractiveness and fitness set the standard for who was on top in the Millennial tribe (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 1). While these values have been traditionally valued highly, the immature arguments from the conception of this season soon fizzled out as players recognized the actions that needed to be taken and enacted to succeed. Controversially, Figgy and Taylor, two of the more problematic "popular" players openly flirted from the season's start, and Taylor even went on to later steal food for himself, unconcerned about the hunger of the other players (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 9). Figgy was ultimately one player the most involved in conflict throughout this season, though far more minimally compared to the first season of the show. While frustrating to watch, and for the other players in the game, these unattractive behaviors were far less explicit than open homophobic comments and poor sportsmanship as the implications of surveillance can be seen taking place.

Michaela, one of the "outcasts" with a strong personality, immediately expressed her distaste for Figgy, though primarily in her one-on-one interviews with the camera where she wouldn't enact a fight. After overhearing Figgy kissing Taylor early on in the game, she was fed up and outed their romance to the rest of their tribe. In private, she commented on this, telling the audience, "This girl is dumb," though any direct interaction between the two

featured far more passive aggression in their conflict rather than blunt confrontations (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 2). Hannah, unlike other outcasts however, was a much quieter, non confrontational and people-pleaser-type of an individual only tried to see the good in the popular group, saying "we all cuddle, some more than others but it's ok they're pretty," while visibly making efforts early on to try to feel included with them (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 2). Through tongue-biting and people-pleasing, even this dysfunctional group of individuals who clearly didn't mesh was able to self-monitor and preserve their individual images with awareness of the cameras.

The most confrontational moment in this conversation comes when Michaela confronts Figgy for playing dumb about her "show-mance", saying "You got some good amnesia, girl, it's only been six days," to which Figgy asks why she's being phony and the conversation is shortly dropped, with nonverbal tensions evident throughout the tribe (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 2). While the contention between these two young players appears intense, they strikingly kept their harsh thoughts mostly to themselves, as their words impact not only the perception of them for other players but also the show's audience. This conflict being one of the strongest of the season shows a drastic decline in the presentation of unappealing traits like anger and confrontation, which can be attributed to the desire to present oneself well to an audience informed by surveillance.

A notable moment, born from this season but taking place in the following season, involves the evident progression of LGBTQ+ representation and celebration within the show. Many *Survivor* seasons have featured queer cast members, with their sexuality and identity becoming a decreasingly prevalent (and judged) part of their character and gameplay. This season specifically featured Zeke Smith, a twenty-eight-year-old gay man and the oldest

among the Millennial tribe. While initially falling into the "outcast" category for not fitting the traditional mold of popularity, his progressive strategizing and friendly demeanor allowed him to succeed in the game.

Despite being voted out and placing ninth out of twenty contestants on *Millenials v Gen X*, his role as a fan-favorite ensured his return the following season, *Survivor 34: Game Changers*, which featured a cast of returning players. Despite not being a season of focus within this paper, there was a significant moment of demonstrated homophobia met with immediate complaints that greatly contrasted Richard's experience and shed light on the level of progressiveness that *Survivor* had uptaken. In the final tribal before the merge, one older player was scrambling and desperate to survive the night after his only alliance member was sent home the night before. In a moment of panic, his strategy was to "out" Zeke on national television by turning and asking, "Why haven't you told anyone you're transgender?" (*Survivor 34: Game Changers*, Ep. 6). After being met with a painful silence, he continued to defend that statement by saying, "what I'm showing is a deception!" (*Survivor 34: Game Changers*, Ep. 6). This comment, while of a similar nature to comments made in season 1, faced immediate backlash from other contestants, in which they asserted that Zeke's sexual identity had nothing to do with gameplay, and Varner was soon met with a unanimous vote to be sent home that evening. Unlike the homophobia that was passable from players early on in the show's career, this moment showed intolerance for such offensive language and reflected that this sort of hate was not welcome within the game. The immediate repercussive response to this instance contradicts the lack of accountability for repeatedly offensive dialogic tones in season one, as the social norms of acceptance evolved and immersed themselves into surveillant expectations. While this is great for the show's overall tone of acceptance, it may

suggest a level of over-exaggerated acceptance amongst players to really sell themselves as kind-hearted and unbiased individuals. Regardless, the presentation of shared acceptance in contrast to the season's start, shows its adoption of societal norms in conjunction with its surveillant production style.

Despite intense personality clashes and a nuanced-yet-evolving *Survivor* experience for players in the LGBTQIA+ community, this season also featured several heart-warming relationships, particularly among two unlikely alliance pairs through vulnerable conversations. Beginning with Ken, the rugged, handsome outdoorsman, and David, the highly anxious, paranoid, and introverted TV Writer, an improbable companionship develops. Beginning with Ken's kindhearted approach to David in episode two, where he was visibly anxious and feeling alienated, the two found common ground in having social anxiety and quickly forged an alliance (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 2). David, who had just found the idol, solidified their honest bond by showing Ken the idol, and they remained an unbreakable alliance until the finale. At the final tribal council, where winners are chosen, David said, "I came in under this dictatorship of fear and anxiety, and I'm going to leave it ready for a revolution," a sense of confidence and excitement that was undeniably fueled by his easy and strong bond to Ken (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 13). Not only did this relationship appear deeply authentic and caring, but it also added an element of camaraderie and humanity among the contestants to be portrayed to homes around the world. This example showcases the deeper shift in values towards the humanization of characters and their stories under the surveillant gaze.

A similarly unlikely yet powerful friendship began in the Millennial tribe between Jay, the strong, handsome Real Estate Agent, and Adam, the nerdy, sweet Homeless Shelter

Manager. Adam and Jay, for most of the game, were positioned as enemies from different alliances, and this feud only intensified as the competition progressed. Despite this, the two had a very moving and emotional moment that bonded them into a love like "brother[s]" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 13). In a high-stakes conversation in which Adam tells Jay to play his idol, a suggestion that Jay views as Adam forcing his hand, they both get emotional about the deeper personal meanings that this game holds. Adam, in tears, asks Jay if he can share something he's been keeping to himself that makes this game so important, sharing that his mom was diagnosed with Stage IV Lung Cancer, and no treatments are working[22], so "[he's] doing this for her. She wants to watch [him] get to the end, and that's why he cannot waste this opportunity (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 12). As Adam is speaking, Jay, who is a challenging and strong contestant, pulls his buff over his face to hide himself crying, perhaps in an attempt to preserve his masculinity on camera, but also perhaps as a coping mechanism to the genuine shock and sadness of Adam's struggles. He responds in tears, "I've been scared the past 9 years that my moms gonna die, bro," about his mom who suffers from brain aneurysms, and later in his confessional to the camera shares that Adam's " not a weasel in my book anymore. He's a good freakin' dude, he's a warrior" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 12). Despite being enemies in a competition for one million dollars, a potentially life-altering reward, this extremely human moment showed the shift towards outwards compassion and respect for the humanity of others.

Whether motivated by the cameras or the human bond of this difficult experience, walls were broken down to allow for unlikely and powerful friendships between perceivably

[22] In earlier seasons of the show, one episode would feature a reward in which one or more contestants gets to see their family member in person. Adam was rewarded with the opportunity to see his brother, where he found out that the third attempt at treating his mothers cancer, and likely their last chance, was not working. (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 11).

opposite individuals that likely would not have been able to flourish in the first season. These two cases of unlikely friendships, each between two men with perceivably different strengths, showcased deeper suggestions from surveillance regarding the value of emotionality. Additionally, Adam's deeper passion to win the game, and the knowledge of his backstory, build up his character as deserving of the prize. In a game of competition, expressing vulnerability amongst contestants is not expected, but when considering there is an audience watching this for the narrative and forming their own opinions, humanizing oneself is beneficial in a surveillant world. Through sympathy and increased favor towards those who show their experiences and struggles, surveillance has brought a deeply emotional layer to this game, greatly differing from the tough exteriors players put on in the show's beginning.

The theme of displaying fragility and forming loving relationships continues to strengthen, especially in the "new era" of *Survivor*, in which sad stories are increasingly shared and valued as not only a point for bonding but also a positive factor in strengthening one's case for deserving the cash prize. That is not to say, however, that initial personality clashing and friendship breakups didn't promote some conflict forty-six. With two key conflicts amongst players, one resembling that of Figgy and Michaela in season thirty-three and one resembling the epic breakup of Sue and Kelly from season one, there was definitely enough drama to keep fans entertained and nostalgic about early conflicts despite the overwhelming positivity brought to the screen.

Beginning with the initial character conflicts that remain more surface level; there was a clear, under-discussed, tension between two initial tribe mates, Soda and Venus, that played out very similarly to that of Michaela and Figgy in season thirty-three. Similarly to

Figgy's popularity-oriented alliances, Soda appeared to view Venus as irrelevant to the tribe, making friends with everyone but her. Further, not once, but twice, in a row, took the tribe's immunity idol from Venus immediately after Jeff handed it to her (*Survivor: 46*, Eps. 1; 2). As it's tradition for Jeff to hand it to whoever is front and center standing in the tribe's formation, that being Venus as she was the smallest, Soda's grabby hands were quickly detected by shocked fans across X[23] for being obnoxious and greedy. Notably, one fan compiled each consecutive tribe victory and revealed that as Venus became accustomed to Soda's greed, she began subconsciously turning to Soda to just give her the idol as she expected it to be taken (@jordanwoodson). Similarly to season thirty-three, there were little to no confrontational moments shared between the two contestants despite an evident clashing of personalities. Their conflict was defined by tension displayed through intentionally passive-aggressive actions that went unspoken, as viewers took to their confessionals to share their viewpoints and build up their own image. Their lack of verbal communication of these powerful emotions shows a level of self-constraint that prioritizes the language they use to portray themselves on camera. In an age where every word can be recorded and shared, it's safer to bite one's tongue in the heat of the moment when responses are being displayed to a significantly large audience. Because of this, surveillance has made the forging and understanding of complex relationships even more cryptic, as individuals attempt to maintain a positive image even in moments of frustration.

A more raw and deceptively nuanced fallout came at the very end of the season between two long-term allies: Maria, forty-eight, and Charlie, twenty-five. Having been placed on the same starting tribe, the two quickly bonded and began working closely together, voting together almost every episode and quickly confiding new information with

[23] Formerly Twitter.

each other. In the final episode of the season, aptly entitled "Friends Going to War," the two realized that their chances of winning significantly decrease if they remain together in the game until the final vote. In a deceptive scramble at the final five, Maria was unanimously sent to the jury where her bitterness got the better of her. While the rise and fall of their relationship closely mirrored that of Sue and Kelly in season one, the ultimate fallout was much more influenced by surveillance. While Maria was evidently bitter, her display of these emotions was very minimal in order to protect her image.

While the final outcome will be further dissected, Maria ultimately voted against Charlie to win the million dollars, a decision that allegedly changed the entire outcome, and therefore appeared far more spiteful. Maria's turn to disdain towards Charlie was concealed as she was aware of the surveillant gaze; therefore, the majority of the fallout has been alleged through combinations of each player's story after the fact. Many believe Maria voted against Charlie out of spite; however, she claims to have chosen according to her "criteria: not friendship," but rather who she deemed deserving (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 13). While that's a fair answer aligning with historical jury sentiments, many felt this was a cop-out answer to excuse her betrayal. In a post-game interview, Charlie even shared that her attitude was "very stark," at tribal despite having told him he had her vote in the final three, suggesting that she changed her vote out of emotions (Ross, Pars. 5; 7). While this extremely emotional fallout closely resembled that of Kelly and Sue, with the older alliance member being burned so close to the end, their responses directly highlight the development of learned behaviors through surveillance. Unlike Sue's blatant show of hurt and disrespect toward her wayward companion, Maria appeared to double down on her moves but reframe them as unbiased and strictly business. By removing her emotions from this decision that has been widely

perceived and discussed as hostile, Maria preserved her composure for the national audience in order to maintain her ideal self-image of a strong, and smart player unmoved by emotional challenges.

These moments of agitation are true to the human moments that defined the early seasons, one where hunger and money were the priority on players' minds, but in contemporary iterations players present an additionally strong tone of overly positive group talk, one that responds to the desire for being liked by the surveillant audience. Notably, in the new era, there is a newly developed pattern of players validating one another and walking in circles around insults in order to make one another comfortable. In the very first tribal of the season, where players were unanimously prepared to send home Jelinsky, they still made sure to make sure his ego was comforted by their kind words, with one tribemate, Bhanu, expressing, “I love this kid. Like this kid is really awesome, but I don’t know how the tribe is feeling. Is it too little too late?” (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 1). Rather than expressing his own opinion and sharing his intentions for the night, Bhanu and other tribe mates worked to keep any difficult topics overly generalized while laying on the kindness. This behavior, while initially declined in the early days of *Survivor*, where contestants only cared about surviving and beating one another, shows that players are increasingly cognizant of how others, both in the game and at home, perceive them.

Bhanu, an extremely paranoid and emotionally driven player, also faced a similarly compassionate send-off at his final tribal after being essentially babied by his tribemates. While hitting a breaking point where he felt isolated and admitted to sharing tribe secrets with other contestants, another tribemate hears his own game has been threatened and still comments, “I want you to understand, brother, you’ve done a great job with the man you are

today. (...) Man, we could count on you for a lot of things!" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 4). These bizarrely vague and affirming conversations consist of language that resembles walking on eggshells around difficult conversations that could potentially negatively impact players' appearance. While sentiments of caring for one another can be found more covertly in the earlier seasons, the continuous outward expression of compassion affords contemporary players a leg-up to meet the expectations of a surveillant audience. These become a common trend at tribal councils, especially for voting plans that are almost guaranteed to succeed; however, this kindness extends to everyday play that the producers make a point of highlighting as well.

Kenzie, the winner noted for her strong social game and deep connections, comforted her tribe-mate and competition, Ben, on several occasions as he suffered through night terrors and panic attacks throughout the evening. While exhaustion in competitors would have previously been viewed as advantageous to a player in the early 2000s, Kenzie made sure to sacrifice her own quality of rest in order to care for the human inside her competitor. Kenzie later shared in a confessional, following a long night making fire and sitting with Ben, her thoughts; "I don't care if it's a game for one million dollars. Like, at the end of the day, Ben's a person," and even more consciously: "Is he my competition? Yes. But he's my friend, and sometimes you just gotta be there for somebody. And just sit with them through it. Just be with them through the storm, you know, sometimes that's all someone needs" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 7). Ben's hard nights and mental health struggles became a strong theme throughout the season, as he was visibly weak once he made it to sit in the final three players eligible for the prize. The pattern of displaying empathy, once again, cannot be understated as even in the last episode when Ben was resharing his experience and the toll it had on him, one jury

member quickly chimed in to validate him saying "We can all appreciate that. (...) so I'll give you the benefit of the doubt" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 13). The tribal council and deeply human conversations that follow this trend of positivity reflect a definite behavioral change since the show's inception. Through focusing on praise, affirmations, and the well-being of one another, the show's approach to discursive tones and relationship formation has undeniably adopted traits of likeability that the surveillant world demands. With the knowledge of judgment from their competitors as well as viewers at home, modern players display learned behaviors that are most digestible and favorable to universal audiences.

As the seasons have begun to play out, each is more and more influenced by historical games both in physical and social strategy, but most especially through the dialogue in which players use to and about each other. Through the observation of reactions to each season, players have learned that players who are more outwardly likable are more well-received by fans. While this can be attributed to developments like the progressiveness of the 21st century or even cancel culture, the rise of surveillance can be applied to all arguments since individuals learn what kind of language is best received and prevent conflict/dislike. As previously discussed, Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that subjective norms, i.e., the norms developed through the show's progression, influence behavioral motives.

This evidence illustrates how contemporary players have seen and benefitted from replicating kind, seemingly authentic moments of uplifting one another. From a shift in how players speak to one another as well as a shift from concealing vulnerability to concealing anger or aggression, players are responding and regurgitating norms that are determined and shaped by surveillance. This tone shift, as it is applied to the direct capturing and reproduction of interpersonal discussions under a setting of duress, certainly leads to

questions about the implications of the goals and messaging within RTV. From the success that increased compassion and relatability of modern players shown on screen, *Survivor* is suggesting to viewers that the way to succeed in a competitive environment is to outwardly please others and maintain an accepting/open-minded attitude toward all individuals. In a game for one million dollars, where anything is possible, the conscious and consistent self-representation of more emotional complexity and morality has undeniably influenced viewers and players alike to reimagine what a "winner" looks like.

Constructing Individuality: The Rise of the "Flashy Player"

While the show has displayed increasingly friendly and humble gameplay, this does not mean that alliance bonds have gotten stronger over the show's history; in fact, alliances have gotten increasingly sporadic and unreliable. Despite the illusive growth of camaraderie, teamwork has seen an intense decline as modern players attempt to distinguish themselves as unique players to the surveillant audience. While the show built its foundations on the success of a unified alliance, modern seasons have strayed from this value as it detracts from their construction of a positive self-representation. This section will lay out and analyze how the rise in outward kindness has a negative relationship with group trust, pushing players to flaunt their individuality to the audience in order to gain attention and credit for their accomplishments. In the new era, players have been observed attempting to perform large, game-changing moves for all to see, though as this goal has been prioritized, it has begun to negatively affect the success of the overly ambitious players seeking to differentiate themselves. Most specifically, it will analyze the egotistical flaws that have progressively plagued the seemingly humble and gracious players of the new era.

Season one was defined by a single alliance that got together pre-merge, and dominated the game through the finale, a close four that was able to systematically eliminate all opponents thanks to strong loyalty that ensured planned outcomes came to fruition. Beginning in the fourth episode, after losing only two of their original tribemates, Richard Hatch gathered his three most tolerable and strong tribemates to unite until the end: Sue, Kelly, and Rudy. Despite their widely differing characteristics in age, gender, background, lifestyle, and even sexual preferences, this odd bunch maintained a loyalty that created the most successful alliance run in *Survivor* history. From the day that the merge brought the two starting tribes together, this alliance was single-handedly responsible for the decisions made each night. While they sometimes disagreed about who the ultimate target would be, they successfully voted each of the five remaining contestants from the other starting tribe, eliminating targets so swiftly that they were left with nothing to do but turn on each other [24]. While they had clear power over viewers at home, they also made sure to be discreet yet totally loyal in order to continue their domination without any previous season influencing their formation. In fact, Sue and Rich, the most verbal, continuously denied its existence and managed to convince many naive competitors if asked, with Rich even once saying that "outright lying is absolutely essential!" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 9). The ability to lie to competitors and keep their connections so discreet enabled their success thanks to the level of trust in one another's loyalty. This highlights the players' concern for the opinions of their competitors over considerations of audience reception, framing themselves as mean, and liars, but also strategically loyal. The contrast between blatant insults thrown at each other alongside their unfaltering loyalty showed that before surveillance influenced behaviors,

[24] Leading to the severe fallout of Sue and Kelly, in tandem with the development of Kelly's moral dilemmas.

players would still remain loyal to people for the sake of the game's premise. This alliance illustrates the complex interpersonal relationships of the program before behavioral modifications, highlighting the intrinsic value of an alliance in a game that demands majority decisions.

Since the alliance was so tight-knit yet under-discussed, members spoke in confessionals about the importance and necessity of its existence to their success, as an especially simple solution to the game. While this felt like a dirty secret at times to members, especially Kelly, Sue was quick to point out at its conception that, "Hey, there's money involved," and therefore, this is what it took to get closer to the prize (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 4). Near the end of the season, she commented that while this is a game, it does often reflect real life; therefore, implying that the power of a unified front is representative of how America runs on alliances (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 10). Political, religious, financial industries all succeed thanks to their connections, and these players showed how the strength and longevity of this alliance in its ruthless pursuit of the million dollar prize spoke to the importance of collaboration in a capitalistic society. While the idea of power-in-numbers is a theme that will always prevail in a game that requires majority consensus for every vote, the perspective on the dominant and withstanding group of four, as well as its motives, has certainly evolved. Specifically, while the alliance displayed success from start to finish, contemporary players' attempts to remodel a strong alliance in subsequent seasons have not only failed but completely abandoned this strategy for its predictability and reliance on others.

As early as season one, one alliance member, Kelly, started to have doubts about the moral implications of participating as a vote in this group. Specifically when considering

Richard's orchestration of mass destruction reliant on her helping him herd unknowing "lambs to the slaughter," ultimately forcing her to question her morality and its existence within the game (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 9). Beginning around episode eight, Kelly's moral dilemma began to grow as she realized that she didn't like the version of her that was playing as cold-hearted and systematic like Rich, deciding that she would be much happier playing according to her morals and winning the prize on her own. She famously said, "It's not about surviving the elements, it's about surviving yourself," a shockingly human and difficult idea to consider when a life-changing prize is so close (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 10). Kelly honorably confronted herself and decided that money and fame were not worth it if she was going against her own values, even going as far to say that "makin' a deal with rich is kinda like makin' a deal with the devil" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 10). While a very powerful moment that was impressively mature for the young-competitor, this also forced her to ostracize herself as her refusal to continue conforming to a system of domination didn't feel right, putting her on the outs. While her internal battle made her the first *Survivor* player to question their role in an alliance, her motives differ from motives to abandon alliances in future seasons, where players chose to individualize their game. In turn, this evidence reflects that in a pre-surveillant world, players solely valued loyalty as the basis for a strong player, essentially disapproving of individuality in the game.

After going against the system set in place by players of power, Kelly was essentially only able to rely on herself, a realization she expressed to Jeff in episode twelve, aptly entitled "Death of an Alliance"[25] (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 12). While this season promoted a strong alliance as the path to success, Kelly was forced into a very individual-based setting,

[25] In reference to the tumultuous moment Sue was sent home, solidifying the irreparable nature of her friendship with Kelly.

where she won five consecutive immunity challenges to keep her in the game despite being a social pariah. With her distinctive nobility in a game where contestants are stripped to their most animalistic selves, Kelly was a brave example of the difficulty that arises from choosing the moral path over the socially constructed path to what is defined as "success," i.e., the cash prize. Unlike the mentally "individualistic" player that will be observed in later sections, her self-awareness lends itself to a potential awareness of her image being captured; however, she notably seemed most concerned with how she'd judge herself as opposed to how others would perceive her. This suggests that while individuals were aware of being perceived in early scenes of *Survivor*, they were considering personal perception, without thinking as far as considering the national audience and the implications of their actions.

While this season's overall strategy focused on alliance power, there were several players with large personalities that are important to note before considering the rise of the contemporary individualist. While Rich certainly had a large personality on screen, between his flamboyant personality and frequent nudity, his primary motivation was to command an alliance and lead them as a group to victory. On the other hand, an infamous character of the season was twenty-four-year-old Greg Buis, a goofy Ivy League graduate from Chicago who was high-energy and unserious. While his attention-grabbing aura prompted some members of his original tribe to refer to him as the "group leader," his game was far less defined by strict domination and more by having real fun (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 4). He showed his goofy, eclectic self through talking on a "nature phone," a dead coconut, for hours, receiving a goofy video from his sister about how quiet the house is without him, and even fake crying when voted off (*Survivor: Borneo*, Eps. 4&5; 8; 8). His character stayed true til the end, where he was happy to be out of a fear-motivated game that forces people to band up for

survival, and he even chose his winner vote based on a game where each finalist picked a number between one and ten (*Survivor: Borneo*, Eps. 8; 13). His big character and genuine sense of goofiness certainly brought a feeling of authenticity to screens; however, unlike contemporary characters seen on screen acting rambunctious for attention, Greg never performed for the cameras and even hated TV alone with everything it stood for. Greg's sincere commitment to being himself despite it not always being received well showed players in later seasons that, while alliances are a strong part of the show, individuality can prompt specialized attention from audiences. This evidences the minimally influenced behaviors in early seasons that have more intentionally been acted out in the contemporary game to attract attention.

The level of trust maintained within the alliance of the first season quickly became a near impossibility with the show's development. Attempts to replicate this model began to fail in practice as the concept of alliance strength became well-known within the *Survivor* community. While season thirty-three featured many alliance shifts[26] and last-minute vote swaps[27] that prevented the formation of a single allied supergroup, the sharing of information and advantages became a new social strategy to overcome the obstacle of diminished trust in forging partnerships. Through the selfless use of idols and advantages acting as credible, tangible signs of trust, players were able to find similar levels of partner-based commitments to the trust fostered within Rich's alliance in season one. With this being said, these smaller connections signify the trending shift towards intentionally performing for the audience under the increasing awareness of surveillance.

[26] Alliance discussions began on the Millenials tribe before they had even gone to a single immunity challenge. The excitement and nerves of newer seasons has increasingly left new players prematurely flustered to successfully replicate the formation of a strong, trustworthy alliance (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1).

[27] As early as episode two when Hannah did a last-minute swap to vote amongst the 'popular kids' to find a sense of belonging despite not being valued by them (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 2).

Season thirty-three was taken over by the shy and considerate David, as he effortlessly navigated the complex terrain of alliances in more recent games of *Survivor*. David, the previously mentioned introverted and erratic player who closely aligned with Ken, defied all odds of his perceived all-around weakness through several strategic uses of idols that not only built up his individual game but also defined his social game. Beginning with the idol he found and showed Ken in episode two to solidify their partnership, David brilliantly played it in episode four on behalf of a player on the outs: Jessica. As a player who was going home[28] without the appearance of some miracle lifeline, David appeared as Jessica's guardian angel, securing her place in the game while securing himself a loyal ally to last for a significant duration of the game. In his true, people-pleasing nature, David's aggressive move was cushioned when he so kindly told the contestants, "I want you all to know, it's been a pleasure meeting you, I enjoy all of your company. And now, for maybe the bit that's gonna upset some people, um I'm going to play this for Jessica" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 4). While a huge move for both his jury resume and his relationships, David's generosity furthered his threat level while appearing just as gracious and unproblematic as he is throughout the entire season, which aids in his presentation to both players and audiences alike under the guise of surveillance. His authentic timidity shone through; however, this example illustrates how David was able to use his understanding of personability as a strength to overpower his array of weaknesses thanks to impressions of surveillant values.

As if that move wasn't impressive and powerful, David's idol was circulated back into the game, and he found it again in the next episode, allowing him another make-or-break

[28] Five of Eight total tribal votes, the majority, were against her. David's idol cancelled any votes against her, sending Lucy home (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 4).

opportunity to create an impression in the game. H soon, once again, played it on behalf of another competitor, further emphasizing the value he places on his relationships and the selflessness that drives his game[29]. Out of concern for his friend and confidant, David played his idol on behalf of Ken, and the foreseen back-stabber was ultimately sent home; therefore, David was once again able to utilize his idol to keep an ally in the game while eliminating a potential backstabber. His strategy was a true example of ingenuity within the game as he was able to build and morph the strengths of different historical moves to best fit his style of play. Further, he provided audiences with a satisfying conclusion with justice being served through the elimination of a player planning harmful deception. David's sociability, genuine kindness, and passion for meaningful connections showed the intersection of individual success and the traditional ideas of tribal-based collaboration with the knowledge of past games while accounting for his own experience within the game. The liminal phase between total individuality and tribe mentalities showcases the unique approaches players have to the ever-evolving landscape and expectations of *Survivor*.

Despite David's big heart and equally big moves that afforded him praise through the game's progression, his blind-sided exit from the final four reinforced the game's undeniable shift to a prioritization of individual needs despite the importance of group connection. Having built clear relationships based on loyalty only to be betrayed so close to the end by Ken, fans and players alike desired justice for David. In the final tribal council, Jessica provided the highly desired confrontation of Ken, questioning how he came into the game ready to be loyal only to divert on the second to last day. Ken was seen getting emotional at

[29] While he considered playing it on behalf of Cece in episode five, he ultimately held it until episode seven and played it on behalf of Ken. Even having never gone into action, David showed audiences three very powerful individual moments that he chose to characterize with social bonding and loyalty opposed to self-serving framing.

the confrontation where he said this was the "absolute hardest thing in this game," turning to speak to David directly, "You were my number two alliance, number one is my daughter. Only reason" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 13). While emotional and raw, Ken clearly had to face the fact that whether he liked it or not, he was competing for himself, and everyone had to see that. Though this season highlighted the possibility of strong and lasting partnerships in contemporary *Survivor*, players ultimately had to face a moment where they needed to abandon group play to prioritize themselves. Ken was a specifically powerful example, similar to Kelly, of the nearly-live reaction to realizing one's own harmful actions to others, and this genuine moment showed that in an environment of passionate companionship, players alone need to be the strongest to be the sole survivor. This consciously painful betrayal shows the audience's demand for consistent emotional investment and authenticity from the people displayed on the screen, even in a game that demands cut-throat individualism to win.

As players have realized their heightened need to be eye-catching in order to set themselves apart from competitors, especially since alliances are no longer reliable, a problem of egotistical inflation has arisen in the new era. Despite the all-around camaraderie that defines this age, season forty-six saw a record number of idol flushes, featuring the departure of five players with unused idols in their possessions. As evident from David's several successful idol plays, its purposes and overall importance have evolved to have an extreme amount of potential that the community has learned since the show's inception; however, the pressure on modern players to make a spectacle often leads them to think too far ahead to perfect moves, losing sight of the game occurring right in front of them. Whether attempting to replicate historically impressive idol usage or attempting novel moves, the

desire to distinguish oneself for the surveillant audience has plagued contemporary players. This, in turn, has created what I call the "individualist," a term for players naively blinded by their own ego once power is acquired.

Each contestant sent home with their unused idol had a similar, self-critical reaction; however, they also all pivoted to their strong individual moves in the exit interview so audiences would be left with the reminder that this foolish mistake shouldn't take away from their appeal. The first flush occurred pre-merge, and the player, Jem, shared that this was "the dumbest move, with an idol in [her] pocket," but turned to then point out how smart she had played up till now, commenting "I loved that I replanted the beware advantage" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 5). Despite her self criticism, Jem made sure to promote her individual strengths and leave viewers with a positive outlook on her despite being blinded by hubris. Like the other flush victims to follow, Jem made sure to reframe her self-representation following this embarrassment to ensure her public image was maintained as strong and graceful to viewers.

Post-merge, this pattern continued with four consecutive blind-side idol flushes. Beginning with Hunter, who commented "I was lulled into my own doom is what happened and it's so irritating," but noted that he loved the game and his performance up until now (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 9). Next episode, a blindside that shocked players and audiences alike, featured the exit of Tiffany, a close ally of Kenzie. In her exit interview, she frustratingly shared "I broke my own *Survivor* rule, I should have played my idol. I should have just gotten rid of it, but I was trying to stretch my idol out for one more tribal, it turns out that it bit me in the butt," one of the more humble exits who acknowledged her own blind confidence from the idol (*Survivor: 46*, Ep.10). While the next exit, of Venus, will be more deeply analyzed, the last flush featured Q who expressed the same disappointment in himself,

exclaiming "They blindsided me with an idol in my pocket! But I'm happy about the game that I played. I played hard, but I came up short and it happens in life sometimes" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep.12)[30]. These examples all show the ease with which deception was able to get through the overconfidence that comes with the power of advantages to create a spectacle in the new era. Players who were blinded by the ego boost from finding and potentially perfectly executing an idol are quick to realize their missteps and redirect viewers with a final reminder of their grace and intention within the game, both to remain relevant and to ensure they leave a positive impression with the knowledge of a judgemental audience.

One of the more valuable idol flushes for examination focuses on Venus, who declared "I went home with an idol, but I'm proud of the journey I've gone on,"[31] following her exit with an idol that was unused in an attempt to recreate a historically valuable form of power assertion. Just before tribal, Venus had gone to her competitor, Charlie, and told him she had something up her sleeve, an allusion to her possession of the idol. This statement seemed to also reference *Survivor: 28* winner, Tony Vlachos. In his season, where he was viewed as an especially strong threat, survived several tribals by claiming to have an idol and insisting he would play it, therefore people should consider other votes. Despite not having an idol, Vlachos was able to use this threat to divert voting attention away from him. This comment, whether intended as a threat or an attempt for a lifeline, still worked against her as her reliance on previous successful outcomes blinded her from her own vulnerability within the game. All of these flushes unsurprisingly left those sent home shocked; however, they

[30] Notable display overconfidence within the game, following his denied requests to be sent home Q developed a subconscious sense of invincibility where the possibility of being voted out became an afterthought.

[31] Like other players, in her exit interview used her moment to build up her character to the audience and use her platform for good, saying " I hope that I have made the women of Iran proud. I have three words to say, which is: women, life, freedom. I hope that I was one voice that helped uplift those who are voiceless" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 11).

appeared to never learn from the previous flushes, thinking they were somehow smarter. This prioritization of planning a great, strategic, game-changing move distracts modern players from the need to maintain a level of group affiliation to survive. With the overwhelming priority to perform, contemporary players have, in turn, become one of their own obstacles.

While these individualist mindsets have only increased and betrayed the players who become absorbed by them, players that reflect the authentic fun-loving nature of Greg can still exist. A comparable character seen in forty-six was Q, known for exclaiming "cancel Christmas!", organizing whole-tribe hide and seek, and even inventing the "Q-skirt," all which provided great entertainment to the contestants (*Survivor: 46*, Eps. 6; 8; 8). While these appear just as natural as Greg's authentic tomfoolery, Q was able to utilize these notable moments for profits following the show. Whether or not his actions were to perform for profit after his time on *Survivor*, the fan reception enabled him to use his charisma to pioneer multiple business endeavors through custom "cameo" videos and merch sales. With his knowledge of post-show success, especially for fan-favorites of the show, Q's performance was almost certainly tied to an awareness of the platform granted to him through his time on the show. Thus, an added element of performance under surveillance has begun to take root motivated by long-lasting impressions made.

With the decline in alliance stability, the rise in individual performance can be seen among players desperate to distinguish themselves within the game. Since strategies move faster and relationships are made to feel more expendable, it's only natural that players feel a need to focus more on themselves; however, the record increase in idol flushes in this single season reflects a strategic blindspot fostered by over-confidence due to power. Hubris in a game of uncertainty is never good, and despite knowing that, the players were too consumed

by historical performances to consider the basic demands of the game. Through the rise of "PC" attitudes paralleling this new complication, I argue that the show's production and camera presence have forced players to monitor their own self-presentation more in order to disguise the more selfish style of play necessary to win. Season one, in hindsight, seems to many viewers as almost blind trust, something that could never occur today with the complexities of creating their character for audiences. Ultimately, with surveillance in mind, players are met with increasing factors to account for when assembling their self-representation. Considering the audience at hand, it's understandable that players want to distinguish themselves while focusing on creating an image that will be well-received beyond their time on the show. With an increase in the need to play for themselves, contemporary players can be seen incorporating their own humanization to make up for the fact that alliance loyalty can no longer be honored under the surveillant gaze.

Who Wins the Money and Why?

Each season's outcomes are defined by the unique cast members and their stories; however, the ultimate chosen winner over time has also revealed a shift from the value of forceful dominance as the focus, to a more nuanced and emotionally-layered system of evaluation under the guise of surveillance. While game-play has, and always will be, on the forefront of the jury's mind, their factors for consideration have compounded over time. From valuing hard work and endurance to social strengths and backstories, the factors to weigh for juries have become far more multifaceted when considering their own relationships with finalists as well as public perception of their voting values.

As mentioned previously, the final tribal council for season one involved many jury members stating their distaste for both players and having to decide who was the least

objectionable. Before noting the reasons why Rich was chosen over Kelly, it's highly important to note that one young female jury member, Colleen, said "I'm not gonna listen to everyone's sob stories and weigh them. Everyone wants the money!" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 8). This comment seemed to reflect many of the jury members thought's, focusing only on the game opposed to any outside factors that may make one player more favorable (i.e. Kelly's character or Richard's sexuality). Unlike recent seasons, where vulnerable moments and "sob stories" are shared in nearly every episode to further their "authentic" narratives, the first winner was decided based strictly on game performance and impressions made only within the thirty-nine days.

The outcome of this season was a close one[32], between two physically strong and intense players with questionable integrity, but Rich's frustrating cockiness paid off as he was able to come out victorious. Known for being the only successful provider through fishing, many contestants claimed Rich was only still around because he fed them, to which Rich told the audience "Catching fish isn't why they're not voting me off, they're not voting me off because I'm not letting them" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 9). His frustrating comfort in competition and cockiness continued throughout the season as he displayed unwavering doubt, sans-humility, in his plan to win. While the alliance's blind level of trust seems shocking, his commitment to its success earned him votes from both alliance members on the jury. Rudy, known for being openly judgemental of homosexuality/lesbianism, overt religious practice, extra-marital pregnancies, and other outdated taboos, still gave Rich his vote saying: "We had an alliance till the end and I'm fulfilling my obligation" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13). The strength in alliance ties as well as his consistent display of

[32] 4:3 final vote, with Richard winning votes from Sue, Greg, Sean, and Rudy, and Kelly winning votes from Gervase, Colleen, and Jenna (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13).

self-confidence allowed the jury to form a strong enough view of him over Kelly to afford him the prize of sole survivor, once again highlighting the theme of traditional trustworthiness over contemporary affection. This outcome, one that values loyalty as a core value over overt kindness, reflects the early game was not yet impacted by the full extent of the surveillant gaze and its messaging of acting in alignment with social norms.

His win was no easy feat, however, as the jury still took their opportunity to grill him for his choices, actions, and overall demeanor. Colleen questioned Rich about his claims that observation and self-awareness are two strengths that got him to the end, when she observed that he did "so poorly in knowing the game of *Survivor,*" to which he replied that it was a different type of observation than needed in the real world (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13). As previously discussed, the outcome of this season was made clear by the jury that the begrudging decision was not meant to applaud the winner, but rather condemn the loser. With this shared consensus that the jury disliked both finalists, Sean's logic seemed to prevail, when he shared "I am voting for Rich because Kelly was clearly more deceptive, more manipulative, more double-faced than Richard," highlights the ultimate reason why Richard won over Kelly - asserting that confidence in a singular plan of destruction was better than inconsistent commitment to the competition. By rewarding an unlikeable, yet driven and committed player, this season signaled to early audiences that authenticity and compassion were not relevant in a competitive environment.

Kelly almost won in what would have been the deciding vote[33]; however, she was ultimately only able to receive three of seven votes in her favor from the jury due to the

[33] She had chosen the wrong number from Greg in his "pick-a-number" game, where he later shared that if she had said the number nine, she would be one million dollars richer (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13). While that style of voting was (allegedly) randomized and somewhat unfair considering the importance of this vote, her failure to gain Greg's vote sealed Rich's fate.

season's pre-established valuation of what a winner should look like. Two of the three votes, were partially in response to Sue acting like what Gervase would call "a sore loser"[34] (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13). Her third vote was truly earned through her jury speech, as Colleen's initial intent to vote for Richard switched after feeling that Kelly showed her will and genuine desire to win over Rich's more overconfident, laissez-faire approach to easily manipulating the entire game. While Colleen voted for Kelly, the theme of disliking all finalists remained when Colleen said, "Maybe this will make you be nice or something" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13). Despite having a much more complicated game of inner struggles, that reflected a very human and empathetic disposition, Rich ultimately won out for being more committed from start to finish to see his plan through. In turn, this season, yet to face the implications of surveillance, displayed an outdated, meritocracy-based valuation of what a winner should look like, showing society that an unemotional strong man is more valuable than a young woman battling her own emotions. Unlike later seasons, this outcome was simplified to replicate the capitalistic society they had lived in until now, without concern for complex contemporary considerations of character quality.

The focus on negative traits in finalists is a trend that dissipated in alignment with the shift to using more friendly language, as well as the rise of emotional motivations in jury decision-making. Adam, the winner of season thirty-three, won in a unanimous vote mainly attributed to his strong and thoughtful strategy as well as his big heart and commitment to the game. Going into the final tribal, the two primary contenders are Adam and Ken, both loyal and compassionate players. Not only was his jury speech clear and organized, displaying a well-constructed game of intentional votes and relationship building that exceeded Ken's but

[34] Especially since Sue directly said "I hope that vote is the vote that makes you lose the money," directly hoping to incite Kelly's loss (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13).

what some consider to be his "sob story" also contributed to his likeability among the jury. Thus, season thirty-three represented the increasingly complex factors of decision-making that surveillance had forced upon the jury member's final performance.

When confronted with difficult decisions, Adam was able to act competitively and succinctly while winning the respect of those sent home through humility. Adam claimed his only goal, in the end, was to make sure David didn't win immunity as he was too threatening to bring it to the end, to which David commended him saying, "Adam is a very strategic player, but he recognizes that over the past 39 days, I've played a better game than he has," a blunt but well-received remark agreed upon by players (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 13). Since the exit of David was so tumultuous, involving Ken backstabbing him, the jury further commended the strength of that move, telling Adam that "using your social game, your cunning, your intelligence and turning Ken against the biggest giant of this game," was game-defining (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 13). Adam was not only able to execute a major threat to his success while also discrediting Ken's strength of loyalty, and his humbleness afforded him a great deal of respect from having to make a difficult decision in a game where he valued every competitor. This argument contributed to the establishment of his character to a surveillant audience, showing a well-rounded individual with intentional compassion despite aggressive moves in a meaningful game.

On top of Adam's ability to articulate his individual strengths that set him apart from competitors, his raw and powerful display of emotion in sharing his harrowing backstory secured him a unanimous win. When Jay came to question Adam about why he sent him home, at the time being the only player aware of Adam's mom's diagnosis, Adam responded emotionally, "You know why I'm playing this game, and why it's so important to me okay?

And, you were in the way" showing not only remorse for having to send home someone he cared for but also validating a seemingly-harsh move to audiences (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 13). Later in the tribal, Adam gave a historically moving speech to the jury, sharing about his mom's diagnosis:

> This has been a personal dream of mine since I was nine years old. But, two years ago I applied for the *Blood v Water*[35] season with my mom, and it became our dream together to come and play this game. And so, this wasn't about a transformation for me, it was about an opportunity to bring some joy to my family that really really needs it right now. Seven months ago, my mom was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer, and she's my best friend in the whole world. But even if I don't win tonight, I feel like I was supposed to come out here. And every time I won an idol, and when I won immunity, and especially when I got the loved ones visit I felt like we were winning together. And so that's what this journey was about for me.
>
> (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 13)[36].

Through Adam's commitment to his relationships in the game and at home as well as his humble displays of vulnerability, he showed the increased aspects of consideration for contemporary *Survivor* juries. Adam showed a big, loving heart on-screen, but he was also able to identify and execute threats amongst himself. Adam's individual moves of deception were strong, yet cushioned by his overt humility and kindness in a challenging game. While some cite his emotional story as the reason for his victory, his social strengths and intentional

[35] A season theme used twice in which contestants and a loved one compete against one another on the same season.
[36] Adam's victory was announced live on TV two days before his mother's passing. While it was not a part of the show, it was a beautiful moment for players and viewers alike.

navigation of the competition also remained stronger than his competitors throughout the game, enabling him to gain the title of sole survivor. Adam's victory, therefore, reflects the increasingly complicated values one must fulfill under the surveillant gaze to gain recognition for modeling socially acceptable behavior, i.e., loveability in a dehumanizing and cut-throat game.

Adam was not the only winner to have their back story considered in the factors that make a deserving winner, in fact, the new era has increasingly implemented factors beyond the game into the considerations for each winner. In fact, in the final tribal of season forty-six, finalist Charlie explicitly stated "Part of this experience has been getting to meet and know all of you. And, if there's one thing I know, it's that every single person here had something bigger than themselves they were playing for," suggesting that personal experiences outside the game significantly contribute to what goes on within *Survivor* (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 13). Kenzie, similarly to Adam, was named the winner of season forty-six for her strong relationship building skills as well as her personal story in the real world, strategically sprinkled throughout conversations that deepen her self-presentation to maximize her positive perception[37]. This increasing trend of outside factors and core values contributing to the game's outcome displays the show's emphasis on platforming societally admirable individuals, reflecting that kindness through adversity deserves praise.

Social game, being Kenzie's strong suit since episode one where she stated, "Building connections, building repertoire is literally my bread and butter," played a significant role in not only her ability to stay in the game but to also secure jury votes in the end (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 1). Beyond simple niceties among players that the show has grown to know, Kenzie's

[37] 5:3 final vote, with Kenzie winning votes from Maria, Q, Venus, Tiffa and Tevin, and Charlie winning votes from Liz, Hunter, and Soda (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 13).

charisma and kindness went above and beyond in winning the affection of players and viewers. Known primarily for her caretaking nature seen through Ben's mental health struggles, Kenzie opened up sharing that her family has similar struggles, making her well-versed in these situations through difficult experiences. She expressed that she's been helping others regulate these difficulties before she was old enough to even understand them adding to her humanity by saying "You know, this is a game where I very easily could've been like good, don't sleep, I hope you mess up in the challenges. But I couldn't" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 7). Her thoughtful consideration of others, thereby placing the value of her morality in the forefront of everyone's minds. By intentionally portraying herself as a long-time caretaker, Kenzie was able to convince players and audiences that her values align with contemporary surveillant messaging of a well-rounded and deserving individual.

She further shared her experience before the game as a self-made hairdresser since the age of fifteen, to provide context for not only her hardworking background but also the deeper motivations to play the game, like Adam's. When asked how she would use the prize money, Kenzie shared that this would be used personally to set up her life, something that may appear selfish and distasteful to many following the other two finalists preaching about giving back to the world. However, she once again was able to provide meaningful context to her honest answer, sharing that at her salon she makes no money in operation despite it having the potential to be highly lucrative because "It's not about the money. The business is not about the money, it's about providing people an opportunity, so this money is for me." (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 13). By framing herself as this caring, selfless person who has already dedicated so much of her life to giving back, it was evident that this "selfish" answer was not only very realistic but also carried a lot of meaningful, layered weight. Through the

self-monitored presentation of her life following the historically well-received players like Adam, Kenzie was able to successfully appeal to all players and audience members under the surveillant gaze.

Similarly to the first season, however, she won by a very narrow margin against Charlie Davis, another well-liked opponent. Criticized for having a strategic game that was too similar to Maria, who he had dominated the game with until her exit, Charlie had an undeniably strong resume of vote-orchestrations and alliance leadership that could have granted him the win. Due to his emotional departure from his partnership with Maria, which (allegedly) resulted in losing her vote at the tribal council, Charlie was beaten by only receiving three of eight votes[38]. Similarly to Sue's bitter vote against Kelly in season one, the severity of betrayal significantly derailed Charlie's ability to come out victorious as his image in a surveillant image was tainted. Unlike season one, this outcome reflects the complex development of jury decision-making as values shifted from searching for any redeeming qualities to differentiate finalists, to searching for any harmful qualities to potentially distinguish two valuable members of society. While both finalists had strong strategies and loveable personalities, the season placed a strong emphasis on players' abilities to develop lasting and meaningful relationships for viewers while maintaining a deceivingly aggressive game plan to achieve capitalistic success.

While tensions exist between players of all seasons, the game's message of values has undoubtedly evolved from one of loathing and aggression to one of humility and sociability. Surveillance plays a role in all aspects of each season, as players present themselves to the cameras with the knowledge of an audience, and that can be seen regardless of how the

[38] Notably, had Charlie earned Maria's vote, the outcome would have relied on the third finalist, Ben's vote, which would have gone to Charlie, making him the winner by one vote (Ross, Par. 15).

show's message has changed. In season one, the role of surveillance in preserving self-image can be seen taking shape as jury members emphasize their own values by dissecting the absence of them in the finalists. By condemning their immoral traits, players were able to build up their own appearance; however, none of them mentioned any accountability in letting these unlikeable people get to the end. The fact that their distaste wasn't expressed until the end of the game shows an almost hindsight approach to modifying their characters to be surveilled. This season heavily emphasized who was more committed to their predetermined destruction plan rather than highlighting personable strengths in either of the finalists and it was evident that the values of the season were being constructed in real time rather than being influenced by any previous model.

As people have become increasingly aware of the perception they receive as surveillance has become increasingly normalized, it's understandable that players spend more and more time intentionally modifying their behaviors to be well-received. As society has evolved and become more critically observant of the "realities" being constructed for consumption, the game's complexities have become far more considerate of the characteristics that society values and wants to promote, like kind-heartedness and compassion. Through an increased demand for overt kindness through surveillance despite the continuous need for competitive tenacity, players and their success in the game is determined by their alignment with societal norms. Because of both the internally modified behaviors and the "norms" perceived to be in play, the rise of surveillance has pushed the competitive game of *Survivor* to assign value to those most morally righteous on top of their gameplay.

Generational Work Ethics: In Theory vs Practice

As discussed in the literature section, differences in expected work ethic vary by generation, which are both replicated and refuted in *Survivor*. While Millenials have been proven to value external validation more highly in working environments, the assumption that they are less capable or hardworking than older generations is a harmful projection onto younger members of society. In a game where physical labor determines safety and security, work ethic plays a large part in succeeding in the show. Similarly to the evolving nature of assigning value to winners, generational views on work ethic have evolved and can be seen taking a more understanding viewpoint to hardship that arises in demanding scenarios. Overall, *Survivor* has diverted from its primary focus on meritocracy but has still maintained its value of hard work across all ages. In turn, the need for consistent diligence throughout the competition disproves assumptions that the game has "gone soft" due to overly emotional younger generations.

Regarding the value of perceptions that vary among generations, the first season of *Survivor* certainly had several examples to support the increased sense of vanity that older generations perceive from younger individuals. An early boot from the season, sixty-four-year-old B.B. proved to adopt the beliefs of older workers, directly telling audiences, "I'm not tryna win a personality contest," though he was notably sent home for his overbearing personality (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 2). In fact, this episode was entitled "Generation Gap" as B.B.'s outdated sense of devoting himself strictly to work couldn't adapt to the need for some personability on a network TV program. Rudy, who was of a similar age and shaped by a military background, often insulted younger tribe members for their lazy or unfocused demeanor when approaching chores. After the merge, when all players moved to

the same beach, Kelly, who had been closely aligning with older, more traditionalist competitors, was shocked by the perception-motivated interests of the younger women from the other tribe. Seeing their silly, flirty attitudes, Kelly commented that they were "playing island 90210" instead of taking the game seriously, and she thought they were "here to have fun and look good on camera" (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 6). Despite being in a younger generation than many other competitors, Kelly went against assumptions of herself but still judged the others for what seemed like unserious work ethics and distractibility. These early presentations of traditional, nostalgic, motivations in a survivalist environment do illustrate outdated stereotypes of different age groups, though most of this is revealed through harsh insults that have now been masked through the rise in surveillance.

Beyond caring for likeability, there were gendered expectations of work ethic that have become outdated both within the game and the real world, with much of it centered around Richard's role as a provider. Once merged onto one beach, the female players began to bond over the shared sentiment that women were doing all the housework while the men fool around, with Sue and Colleen feeling especially offended by the duties almost automatically delegated to them (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 7). The sense of male entitlement among players only continued through the season, with Rich consistently catching fish, which could have been appreciated had he not asserted his control over its distribution and consumption. In one episode, after a particularly successful fishing endeavor, the fish was burnt by another member at camp, to which Richard got extremely upset and announced he would be bringing in fewer fish in the future so they could learn to appreciate his hard work (*Survivor: Borneo*, Ep. 9). In turn, Kelly fished until she was able to catch one for herself. Despite Kelly's position as a hard-working outlier for her age group, outdated expectations of

work ethic among ages and genders belittled those who were not previously viewed as powerful or hardworking by society, i.e., younger individuals, particularly women. This evidence shows that in a world less concerned with surveillant implications, traditional expectations of gender and age traits were easily assigned despite the underlying offensive nature of this work distribution.

When remembering Hassan's contributions to the understanding of generational tendencies, elements of nostalgia appear to be especially powerful for older generations. Since this season was less informed by surveillance and its impact, it makes sense that the rugged terrain and structural demands of the game allowed players to feel nostalgic for an older style of living. This could be a large contributor to the more explicit display of generational expectations; however, these have certainly been minimized as contemporary players learn to present themselves as inclusive and equity-focused to heighten their likability.

As the show has shifted to be more "PC" and overall considerate of one another's feelings, working environments on screen have become far more respectful; however, season thirty-three intentionally set out to conduct its own experiment of generational differences. Due to the season's theme, the contestants are all very vocal about what it means to be a member of their generation. While the following will show a very intentional display of generational differences, it's important to note that the show's established tribe division alongside surveillance is partially, if not entirely, responsible for the near-scripted nature of some statements.

Millennials, presented as the easy-going, adaptable yet under-experienced generation, opened with some strong references to what makes them unique. Taylor, a self-described

"Peter Pan type" who never wants to grow up or settle down, described the Millennial generation as being "all about doing what you want to do" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). Another Millennial tribemate, a professional video-gamer, shared that the advantage of their generation was the widespread interests as skills from the fact that "no one has a regular job" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). The Millennials framed these more accepting views on what it means to be a worker as an advantage to the game as they have strong adaptability and unique experiences. The show was quick to establish a cast of Millennials who defied traditional expectations of what it means to have a successful career, a difference that has been frowned upon by older members of society. These early statements within the season, however, point to a performance to satisfy the predetermined theme of the season dictated by surveillance.

Members of Gen X were quick to show their stubborn, traditionalist views on work in the world, viewing their differences from the Millennials to actually be to their advantage. One Xer, a thirty-eight-year-old attorney named Chris, said that "the older generation they take and they actually listen. And they use those life experiences. If you've never been knocked down, then you don't know how to get up and fight," implying that without the hardship of hard work and real world experiences the Millennials were far less capable of succeeding in a competitive environment (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). This season made it known early on that Millennials were viewed as unmotivated and reliant on other, older generations as Sunday, a mom of four, said Millenials are "a little bit more que sera sera. If it takes me seven years to do school, who cares? My parents are paying for it" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). Not only did the older players look down upon younger players, but they also highly valued their age category, with the oldest member

expecting players of his generation to be of his "caliber," which, to him, meant people "work hard, [have] good core values with their families. Very strong opinions, but, based on sound decision-making" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). He went on to share with his tribe that their odds had changed dramatically in favor of Gen X when the season was designed, directly undercutting the potential strengths of younger competitors[39]. While these statements, similarly to the younger tribes, were reflective of predetermined expectations of age-based work ethic, they once again are rooted in the performance for audiences to create a narrative aligning with the theme.

Despite these almost scripted introductions to each tribe, setting up a clear difference in age groups, the gameplay didn't necessarily reinforce these ideas in practice. Zeke, the oldest of the Millenials, shared that while "stereotypes of young people are that they're always on social media, always on Twitter," he didn't feel that many of the assumptions of his age group aside from that really aligned with his character (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). Additionally, Ken, one of the younger Xers, was quick to note that he was raised to have humility and not underestimate his opponents, urging his tribemates not to hold such judgment against their younger competition (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). Whether or not their nearness in age to the other tribes, each of these players entered and played the game without placing much emphasis on the assumptions of generational differences, and this served each of them well. By abandoning assumptions and simply presenting their authentic selves beyond the limitations others expect from them, each of these players was able to make it far into the game. These differences in player approaches following the establishment of the season show the modern diversion to individuality and compassion for

[39] Paul, the oldest player, notably went down with heat exhaustion in the second episode. Some viewed this as a sign of weakness in older players while others viewed it as an unrelenting drive associated with generational work ethics.

all groups that surveillance has shown to value and highlight through the show's development.

The discussion of generational differences diminished as the season went on, and by the merge, the game's tone of general cooperation despite differences appeared to take hold, with different players pulling their weight where needed. During the final tribal council, Sunday asked the three finalists (two Millennials and one Gen Xer) which generational stereotype their gameplay best fit. While Ken admitted that much of his gameplay was old-fashioned, and he was not as adaptable as other players, he made a point to note how a certain degree of it was intentional, as Hannah's over-adaptability made her look unreliable and desperate to fit in without being able to forge her own path. Adam's response, which likely contributed to his stance as a favorite among all ages, highlighted aspects of each generation's stereotypes to illustrate how we navigated a game organized around this division. Noting how the Xers of *Survivor* "may have done very well in season one of this game," lacked a sense of adaptability required to succeed in the thirty-third season (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). Ultimately, Adam placed himself in the middle of both age groups expectations to describe how he practiced an old-fashioned expectation of loyalty while also bringing a younger perspective of versatility necessary to fulfill all expectations of what a modern *Survivor* player looks like. By differentiating this nuance in the strict expectations of each group, Adam was able to challenge the binary-nature of this structure in order to express that work-ethic is a much more complex concept than this intentionally divisive theme makes it out to be, very consciously citing the changing landscape of *Survivor* as a factor that impacted this. While this season appeared to form a strict mold of expectations surrounding generational work ethic, the most successful players were able to divert from expectations

and understand the need for adaptability, compassion, and drive as primary motivations in the new era.

Season forty-six furthered the negations of generational stereotypes through the inclusion of both young yet traditionally hard-working players as well as an unconfident older player[40] to show that age transcends expectations of hard work. Before highlighting the key contestants that challenged expectations of generational work ethics, it's important to note that some moments do reflect judgments posed towards other generations. Maria consistently portrayed the traits expected of Gen Xers through her intense drive in physical and mental tasks, as well as her stubbornness to change when sent to the jury. On the other end of the spectrum, Venus can be seen in a secret scene portraying the expectation that Millennials are unmotivated. When discussing camp work ethic, she says, "Everyone's contributing in their own ways, and I feel like, should I contribute? But then I think nah, screw all of you. I'm not gonna waste what little calories I have trying to help around camp" (HMP Contests, 1:33-1:45). For context, the tribe had won every immunity challenge for the first ten days, leaving them with little to do as the other tribes went to tribal each episode; however, the blatant expression against doing unnecessary work did align with assumptions of Millenial work ethic, especially as described in the opening of season thirty-three.

Aside from Venus's apparent indolence, Young players like Kenzie and Q actively worked against assumptions that they are used to "participation trophies" without having to work hard (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X*, Ep. 1). Kenzie's care-taking nature arose from a childhood of self-reliance, forcing her to make her way through hardships at a young age.

[40] Forty-one-year-old Bhanu presented as a timid overthinker, fearful of others opinions and strengths. Despite lasting only four episodes, his time on the show was characterized by his desperation to be seen as valuable by offering acts of service or information in order to feel valued by others. This was not motivated by his desire to be viewed strongly, but rather to quell his visible insecurities.

While Xers in season thirty-three may have judged her nontraditional career path, Kenzie set viewers straight in the final tribal council when she said:

> I've been in my career since I was fifteen years old. Not because it sounded fun; I would've loved to enjoy high school like a normal kid. I couldn't. I started working in salons when I was fifteen, got my beauty license by the time I was seventeen, and opened my salon by the time I was twenty-four. I opened it to give people a place to work (*Survivor: 46*, Ep.13).

In making a point of sharing her self-made lifestyle, Kenzie not only showed her value for hard work but also actively disproved the assumptions of younger generations lacking work ethic. Q had a similar work ethic, one that frowns upon quitters, shown in the very first episode when his tribemate quit halfway through a two-person challenge[41] to earn flint for their tribe. When Jelinsky began to falter, Q was quick to say "If I let you down, we both fail. And I don't plan on failing," not only to stress the importance of this challenge but also his aversion to giving up in any scenario (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 1). Despite his encouragement, Jelinsky quit with what appeared to be a couple of hours left to complete their task, which prompted Q to later say "with Jelinsky, now I know: when the going gets tough, he's going to tuck his tail and quit. And in survivor, that's not an option period" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 1). This hard-working attitude showed audiences that Millennials are just

[41] After losing the right to get flint by losing in the first immunity challenge, their tribe was offered an opportunity to earn it back. This involved a very long and gruelling physical challenge, which Jelinsky and Q offered to participate in thanks to their appearances of strength.

as hardworking as any other age group, therefore disproving the notion that new players are "soft" because of their shift to compassion.

While the old-school determination Q displayed throughout the show may seem like a benefit, his view on people who gave less was even more severe when judging himself; therefore, his high expectations of himself worked against him at times. As mentioned before, he felt he had negatively impacted other players so much that he asked to be sent home in episode nine. Even before this moment, Q was quick to take accountability and throw himself under the bus, just the episode before sharing "When something don't sit right with me, and I feel partially responsible for it, I gotta own up to it and say you know what I'm not going to steal someone else's joy and dream" (*Survivor: 46*, Ep. 8). Similarly to Kelly, who was hard-working but equally self-critical of morally executing her goals, Q showed how expectations of a "strong" work-ethic require a balance of grace and adaptability to act with a clear mind. With the pressures of contemporary expectations under surveillance, Q's old-fashioned work ethic faced a degree of rigidity that hurt him in the increasingly complex game of valuable considerations for self-representation.

While the show began with a deep focus on intense, physical determination that brought judgment towards perceivably "lazy" younger competitors, its evolution has once again complicated the social expectations in place when the show began. With younger players on season one being shown occasionally goofing around accompanied by judgemental commentary from older players like Rudy, some generational expectations were established and enforced in the show's conception. While season thirty-three prompted commentary on expectations of generational differences, it still diverted from the black-and-white view of meritocracy within *Survivor*. Through the rise in the value of social

connections in the game, the type of "work" in the game shifted away from traditional assumptions of tasks involving physical labor, like making fire, to introduce many more tasks like monitoring behaviors and dialogues in every moment to be perceived positively by other tribemates. Being a team player by helping around at camp and the work of building connections for social games went hand-in-hand, essentially eliminating the presence of "lazy players" from the game as the two focuses become mutually beneficial. With a much more equal expectation of work ethic regardless of age, the new era's presentation of work-ethic platforms even more deeply motivated hard workers to be showcased.

Interpretation

These findings reveal considerable shifts in the tone, gameplay, and presentation of *Survivor* occurring over forty-six seasons, all tied to the adoption of self-monitoring behaviors due to the rise in surveillance and its availability. When considering the evolution of relationships, specifically alliances, within the game, contemporary players have expanded their performance criteria to include an emphasis on outward affirmations to competitors and an individualistically demanding game strategy. These dramatic shifts, which work together to conceal underlying deceptive motives, display clear behavioral shifts that are ultimately rewarded in contemporary tribals. Where winners were once chosen for their tolerability and loyalty, modern players are seen being rewarded for their vulnerability, likeability, and perceived intellect. These aspects were closely analyzed and found that these shifts are not due to generational differences, as contemporary players of all ages share the new adaptability and openness required in recent seasons. Through increased compassion, individuality, valuation of vulnerability, and deviation from generational expectations, the common trend in these behavioral shifts reveals behavioral modifications in a surveillant

society as players intentionally paint themselves well to mask their underlying malicious intentions.

While multifaceted, this analysis suggests that the gameplay in *Survivor* has grown increasingly complex while aligning with social norms in a surveillant society. The first season, characterized by its uncensored presentation of competitors with vastly differing values and opinions reflected a very harsh competitive environment that almost contradictorily ran on unwavering loyalty. This model soon became impossible as individuals began to complicate the values and moves required to win. With the shift in gameplay from group to individual, players now have far more complex concerns between presenting themselves well while also handling the elements. Even in moments like season thirty-three, where partnerships were formed and maintained, their connection to advantage possession still contributes to the development of a strong individualism for players to cite at final tribal council. As players together adapt to these intricacies and begin to replicate fabricated authenticity, they use it to mask the ruthless individuality that disregards all players except the self. Players can no longer rely on one another, when only one can win they still need to compete just as much if not more aggressively. This dramatic, multi-faceted shift in self-presentation reflects a greater societal issue of potential contrived sincerity for personal gain in life, one that frighteningly plants doubt in viewers and their real-life relationships.

The increase in self-monitoring behavior among players to best present themselves has also greatly complicated the outcome of contemporary games, reflecting a shift in the values that society awards. Reasons for choosing the winner depart from strict meritocracy, with a high value placed on the likeability and passion of players and their backstories. This messaging under the surveillant lens shows people insight into “real” experiences, and what

value gets assigned to what experiences and responses. Specifically, the outcome has greatly shifted from reluctantly choosing the least objectionable player to proudly nominating the emotionally strongest player. In fact, while the basis of a winner was decided simply off of gameplay in early seasons, the added value of backstories to the assessment of a potential winner's worthiness[42] reflects an emphasis on motivation to present oneself as unique and overemphasize their experiences to gain favor. By emphasizing the value in prevailing through hardship and treating others with respect, contemporary messaging in *Survivor* has shifted to focus on the presentation of positive characteristics to morally implicate votes.

While fans have judged the show for getting "soft," a criticism that stems from expectations of generational work ethics, this analysis disproved the narrative that younger players are more sensitive and lazy, pointing to the role of surveillance and societal messaging as the true cause of these developments. While differing generations did show some undeniable communicational differences and expectations they were really only upheld in trivial, surface-level presentations. However, when players of all ages enter this game, they must work hard. The addition of personal stories to guide the game and value of competitors, players are indirectly encouraged to share these narratives, allowing them a space to build up their self-presentation alongside the innate need to work hard each day at camp. So, rather than age being the factor to blame for the show's tone shift, it's instead caused by an increasingly hyperaware society.

With these complex, drastic shifts in social tones and presentation of characters, the show's definition of competitive success has undeniably shifted to be much more nuanced

[42] The learned power of emotional backstories were implemented early on, though far more maliciously before the rise of surveillant expectations. In the seventh season, one player pretended his grandmother had died so that he would get pity and be rewarded with the one-on-one loved ones visit (*Survivor: Pearl Islands*, Ep. 11).

and emotional than the traditional game. Through the increased pressure on self-reliance within the game accompanying the pressure to present the best version of oneself from the surveillant gaze, players have learned and replicated a model of humility that defines the new age. While these changes appear to be "soft" to fans on the surface, the terrain of public opinion in a grueling physical competition has become far more critical and difficult to navigate. As a reality program, *Survivor* is responsible for replicating "reality" in a capitalistic society and spreading messages of "social norms" for people to enact in their lives. The new age has evolved alongside the twenty-first century, spreading the "reality" of what society values, today showing that those who are genuine and hardworking with strong values are worthy of praise. This show has shaped the societal understanding of hard work, from tough and diligent to thoughtful, resilient ,and vulnerable. While this messaging shows strong individuals with resilience and kindness, the role of surveillance may have more dubious implications when platformed on a scale of this magnitude.

As surveillance continues to infiltrate and command social norms, the messaging and deeper motives shouldn't go unquestioned. While the overall changes seem to be socially positive on the surface, the deeper implications may be far more consequential. By regurgitating social norms, *Survivor* is informing viewers around the country, and world, of acceptable social attitudes. Despite evident increased respect amongst players, the show is ultimately promoting a capitalist agenda, one that suggests outward kindness excuses deceptive actions for individual gain. This outwardly saccharine tone encourages viewers to abandon values of teamwork and loyalty for the adoption of falsified sincerity to get ahead of competition.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Survivor's longevity has endured and adapted to the ever-changing landscape of social expectations as it continues to present "reality" according to social norms it wants individuals to enact in their everyday lives. While the first season is far from what contemporary seasons display regarding camaraderie, the overall transition to overt compassion and emotional investment has been used to mask and excuse deep individual actions that lead to betrayal. While the rustic environment of *Survivor* certainly strips its competitors of their creature comforts, forcing them into a nostalgic, highly demanding scenario, the level of self- and peer-monitoring has overwhelmingly adapted to social modifications despite the lack of technological advancements provided in the real world. Overall, the ability and self-training to present the most digestible and likable version of oneself to a grand audience despite the competitive narrative suggests that *Survivor* is teaching extremely harmful potentially deceptive practices.

Despite being a "reality" program, one contestant very consciously stated, "As millennials, we grew up with a television screen in front of our faces, and it's not reality" (*Survivor: Millenials v Gen X,* Ep. 1). While the fabrications of authentic self-portrayal are seemingly true to reality, even the players are aware that they are responsible for creating a narrative for viewers. Further, when considering the centuries of normalized surveillance practices as a form of control, the influenced behaviors on screen influence real-life behaviors, therefore secretly stripping viewers of their autonomy. Where strong, unapologetic confidence was once rewarded, citizens are being implicated into explicit kindness and acceptance, therefore being pushed to form a gracious population. While these shifts appear

positive, the competitive motives that these new behaviors mask suggest far more negative implications of performing in real life. Specifically, the learned strategy of kindness to deceive others of desired individual success points to a taught and increasingly replicated harmful concealment of deceptive motives.

The development of complex messaging in the program, increasingly accounting for deceptive kindness to gain social traction, suggests a shift in the values that define the modern capitalistic society. Despite changes to be more "politically correct" for audience approval, the increased need to perform suggests that capitalism rewards fully intentional actors who prioritize themselves while overemphasizing their good nature. Through increased blindness to constant vulnerability when contemporary players get some form of power, the new era furthers the narrative that humility is the best trait to express in a competitive environment. Additionally, these changes suggest that hardship and difficult experiences that contribute to emotional intelligence are worthy of reaping benefits, encouraging the further performance of "sob stories." When returning to Hassan's development of capitalist theory in a digital age, he points to who controls technology as the ultimate meaning makers for setting up the values of society. The capitalistic motives behind the surveillant messaging in this program have shown a "soft" era of competition, when in reality it promotes emotional manipulation and underlying selfishness to monetarily succeed in today's world.

Surveillance theory, on its own, is consistently evolving to disguise itself and its implications to citizens in a world of assumed free will. With the multi-faceted implementation of surveillant goals in *Survivor*, there is a surplus of content that should continue to be studied for its implications and greater meanings. While all of RTV holds

some responsibility in meaning-making and constructing a societal understanding of "reality," *Survivor* should be further studied for these behavioral shifts. Many different approaches can be taken in future research, regarding the seasonal themes, relation to "tribalistic" design, and much more. Whether gendered tones, discrimination, or interpersonal connections, each season provides a plethora of unique characters to analyze for their contribution to constructing reality. With that being said, changes to consumption practices today can help viewers more critically assess the construction of "reality."

Surveillance as a strategy to form a docile society is evolving to become even more subliminal in shaping societal attitudes. By rewarding contemporary players who express compassion and understanding, *Survivor* is showing that the adoption of surface-level social docility is encouraged by figureheads. Realizing the presence and effects of surveillance via RTV programs is only the beginning of recognizing and changing our influenced behaviors in a conscious and fully informed manner. While this analysis of *Survivor* may grant us the tools to identify and avoid potential behavioral harms from surveillance, its astounding success suggests it is unlikely to end its reign any time soon.

Today we are hyper-aware users filled with insecurities and stripped of the confidence that fuels independence, and it's not difficult to understand why. The fears dominating the minds of contemporary competitors have an undeniable impact on the response of viewers who slowly get broken down to serve a demanding society. When commenting on the concept of individual identification, Frances Stoner Saunders stresses that we have set up a society that we must rely on and submit to for basic survival:

> "Whether you're conscious of it or not, whether you like it or not, the verified self is the governing calculus of your life, the spectrum on

> which you, as an individual, are plotted from cradle to grave. (...) it presents us as passive victims of this overdetermined onslaught of verification, rather than hyperactive participants. We are (...) 'A fanatically voluntaristic society', obsessed with public self-exposure and suspicious of 'reticence or obliquity'" (Saunders, par. 11)

While bluntly showcasing the human reliance on societal structures may seem bleak and hopeless, there's optimism for the future and the autonomy of upcoming generations. Technology and RTV influence individuals only as much as they permit. Users continue to choose complacency, willingly subjecting themselves to surveillance. Simultaneously, many individuals unknowingly accept these hidden surveillance methods due to a lack of discussion about their effects. Despite feeling empowered by following the emotional narratives of players, these seemingly human features serve as forms of manipulation, capturing the attention of the next generations.

If viewers fail to question and analyze these social mediums that intensify surveillance, they risk jeopardizing their futures. As a culture accustomed to constant observation, unlearning surveillant behaviors requires consistent critical questioning. An increasingly surveillant state breeds abuse of trust, power, and control. While freedom remains subjective and motives are inherent, discussions enable individuals to make informed decisions without undue influence. Challenging their perceptions allows individuals to reclaim their agency. Today, viewers are being nudged towards passivity through *Survivor*'s outward presentation of positivity; however, open conversation and analytical scrutiny can help them regain their individuality from pervasive surveillance tactics.

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