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GENDER IN REALITY TELEVISION

A semiotic analysis of masculinity and femininity in the *Survivor* franchise

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Abstract

This thesis intends to bring up masculinity and femininity as presented in the American adaptation of the *Survivor* series. Focus will lie on exposing subtle differences in the programs presentation of men and women in the first episode of the currently on-air season of the show. In attempting to do so, the following questions will also be put into focus:

- What male or female stereotypes seem to be encouraged?
- What notable signs relating to gender are featured in the episode?
- How can these signs be interpreted?
- What do these presentations imply about gender roles?

Through the use of literature to study the reality-TV genre, this thesis will provide theories on gender, stereotypes, and the broader reality-TV genre, which will be researched further through semiotic theory and representation in the media. Here, a variety of prior research on the subject, for example Henry Jenkins, Richard Dyer and Annette Hill will be presented.

Semiotic theories based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes will provide the basis for a semiotic analysis of signification within the chosen episode. Through the identification of and analysis of signs in the chosen episode, a content analysis will provide insight into underlying attitudes towards men and women in the 24th season of *Survivor*.

The analysis found evidence of the utilization of recognizable stereotypes in order to strengthen the personalities and reliability of the contestants. Both the acknowledgment of gender stereotypes and those of smaller social groups were apparent in the episode. When decoding several signs throughout the episode, there were also indications of the encouragement of traditional gender roles as the norm, and the portrayal of masculinity and femininity were depicted as central parts of established gender roles. Connotation associated with the selected signs seemed to both recognize and operate on gender roles. There was certain evidence that appeared to encourage rivalry between men and women, and suggest a society driven by historical gender roles. This episode of *Survivor* did not seem to question society's gender roles, rather encourages them, where certain male dominance over women is evident.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1. Purpose & outline.....	4
1.2. Formulating the problem.....	5
2. Material.....	5
2.1. The <i>Survivor</i> Franchise.....	5
2.2. Literature & prior research.....	6
3. Reality-TV theory.....	7
3.1. The appeal of reality-TV.....	7
4. Media theory.....	9
4.1. Gender in the media.....	9
4.2. Stereotypes.....	9
4.3. Representation.....	10
4.4. Semiotics.....	11
5. Methodology.....	12
5.1. Semiotic Analysis.....	13
5.2. Performing a semiotic analysis.....	14
6. Clip 1.....	14
6.1. Narrative description of clip 1.....	14
6.2. Analysis of clip 1.....	15
6.2.1. Stereotypes.....	15
6.2.2. Gender.....	16
6.2.3. Clothing.....	16
7. Clip 2.....	18
7.1. Narrative description of clip 2.....	18
7.2. Analysis of clip 2.....	18
7.2.1. Tribes.....	18
7.2.2. Tribe colours.....	19
7.2.3. Food.....	21
8. Clip 3.....	21
8.1. Narrative description of clip 3.....	21
8.2. Analysis of clip 3.....	21
8.2.1. Fire.....	21

8.2.2. Weaving.....	22
9. Conclusion.....	23
9.1. What male or female stereotypes seem to be encouraged?.....	23
9.2. What notable signs relating to gender are featured in the clip, and how can these signs be interpreted?.....	23
9.3. What do these presentations imply about gender roles?.....	23
9.4. Final thoughts & further research.....	24
10. Works Cited.....	25

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose & outline

The idea of reality television is relatively modern, and the genre constantly attempts to bring new and groundbreaking shows to the airwaves. An ordinary person can become an overnight celebrity after being featured in a reality television show. Therefore, the genre calls for a certain type of person to telecast, and puts a lot of focus on the personality of the participants. An easily forgotten participant will seldom be beneficial to the show as a whole, and will not remain on the show for very long without being voted off.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the reality television show *Survivor* uses the idea of masculinity and femininity in the portrayal of their characters. Using literature analyzing popular culture and various studies on the subject, this thesis will apply theories on masculinity, femininity, stereotypes and reality television to establish how reality shows portray gender. This is an area worth studying as it may provide insight into how reality shows view gender roles, and how they can use them to their advantage.

This paper will not analyze reality television as an entire genre, but will focus on analyzing and drawing conclusions about one specific reality television show – the American adaptation of the international game show, *Survivor*. The choice of this particular television show can be attributed to the fact that it portrays an equal number of male and female contestants and has consistently been one of the highest rated television shows on television.

Following a thorough analysis of the television show using the chosen literature will be a semiotic analysis. The analysis will focus on the first episode of the latest season of *Survivor*. Examples of emphasized gender roles and stereotypes will be used to make a comparison in how the creators wish to present gender, through the way they present the faces of the show. For example, by identifying any prominent differences in signs, and the presentation of the male or female competitors.

The literature providing background for this analysis is a collection of authors and academics that have conducted research on the subject of reality television. A more thorough

presentation of the literature will be provided.

The analysis will be composed of a semiotic analysis, a methodology that involves the interpretation of signs within a medium to gather knowledge. The choice to use a semiotic analysis in this case is based on its ability to expose underlying meanings and interpretations.

1.2 Formulating the problem

The focus of this thesis will lie on answering the central question: what similarities and differences can be found in the presentation of men and women in the chosen episode?

However, in the attempt to clarify and break down the general question, this paper will also concentrate on attempting to answer the following questions:

- What male or female stereotypes seem to be encouraged?
- What notable signs relating to gender are featured in the episode?
- How can these signs be interpreted?
- What do these presentations imply about gender roles?

2. Material

Due to time and space restrictions, this paper will focus on only one episode of *Survivor*. The criteria for choosing the show was that it had to be currently on-air, and preferably not be commercialized as specifically for men nor women, and the selection was made thereafter. The choice to go with *Survivor* ultimately came down to its position as a front-runner in American reality television, which prides itself in catering to everyone.

2.1 The *Survivor* franchise

Survivor is a reality competition show that exists in many countries across the globe. The general format of the show involves two tribes forced to compete against each other in various challenges, living on limited resources, and gradually voting off competitors. The participants compete for immunity, various smaller prizes, and finally the ultimate prize of being crowned the “sole survivor”. Throughout its 12 year run on television, *Survivor* has “consistently ranked in the Top 20 (and for many years Top 10) among all television programs (Martin 2011)”. The television network CBS is currently airing the 24th season of the show, and has announced that there will be a 25th season airing some time next television season. CBS and has been the carrier of *Survivor* since it first aired in 2000. This season, named “One World” and taking place in Samoa, is particularly relevant to this study, as the tribes of this season have been divided into two teams based on gender (“Survivor: One World”).

The *Survivor* series has been adapted into various international versions, but this thesis will focus on a particular episode of the American version, as it has become a popular and award-winning example of western reality television, and has been on the air for over 12 years. Also, being a broadly diverse country, American television shows must attempt to cater to many aspects of the market, and not focus on any particular social group. Also it does not particularly cater to male or female audiences.

Survivor is hosted by Jeff Probst, who has been the host of the show since the year 2000. In 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011, Probst has won the Primetime Emmy Award for his work on *Survivor* (“Jeff Probst”). As host, Probst supervises the smaller challenges within the series, and also holds the customary “tribal council”. In the premiere episode of season 24, named “Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules”, 9 male and 9 female participants are introduced. Upon their arrival to Samoa, they are divided into two tribes. The tribes are made up of the men versus the women. After having a chance to take some items that will be useful in the future off a loaded truck, such as coconuts, an axe, and some bamboo, the tribes are given maps and set off to find their camps. Upon arrival, the contestants have been led to a single camp, and realize they will be sharing the same beach for both their camps without boundaries, and start setting up. Later on, there is a physical challenge where the tribes must compete for immunity. The men win and do not have to eliminate any team member. The women however, head to tribal council, where they must eliminate one of their own team members. However, one of the women breaks her wrists during the challenge and cannot continue, so all remaining contestants are spared. In this episode, we see alliances start building at once, as well as immediate rivalry between tribes and teammates.

2.2 Literature and prior research

Reality television is a relatively modern phenomenon, and the study thereof is even more so, but there is still an abundance of research made on the subject. There is a large variety of research available, but the theories surrounding reality television that are most relevant to this particular thesis are ones discussing the appeal of reality-TV, gender and stereotypes within reality-TV shows.

In the study of these particular themes, this thesis will bring up various authors. Literature by Annette Hill (2007), Henry Jenkins (2008), Simon Lindgren (2009) and John Story (2009) have provided a general overview and give a presentation of aspects of the genre as a whole. Another particularly helpful piece of literature in gathering information on media theory has been *Reality TV. Remaking Television Culture* (2009), an anthology of various articles by

academics in the field, put together by Susan Murray and Laurie Oullette. This paper bases a lot of its theories surrounding stereotypes and gender roles in the media on the work of Richard Dyer (1993), who supports a lot of his work with the writings on Anthony Easthope. Finally, providing insight into the appeal of reality television is an article by Dutch authors Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010), found in volume 2 of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*.

3. Reality-TV theories

3.1 The appeal of reality-TV

Reality television has existed within the media since as early as the late 1940s, but grew into prominence and started taking shape into the genre that we know today during the early 1990s. Today, there is an enormous variety of reality-TV shows both scripted and non-scripted, "game-docs" and in other formats (Slocum 2006). Reality television is the one genre that allows the most audience participation, using for example voter-elimination and exclusive online material. Reality is no longer written-off as trash-television but, as Susan Murray and Laurie Oullette describe in their anthology discussing reality-TV, it "has become more pervasive and diversified, and popular non-scripted formats have become increasingly specialized and stylistically sophisticated (Murray & Oullette 2009:2)". There is a standing debate discussing what exactly is the appeal of reality-television, and for many academics, the answer is in the name. The idea that what you are watching is a reflection of someone's reality is attractive to many. The viewer demands some sort of truth in their entertainment. This allows the viewer to reflect over one's own situation, connect to other members of the same audience, and receive entertainment, as well as know that what they are watching is a reflection of something real. They are watching ordinary people, but in strange situations, and it is the characters reaction to and behaviour in those situations that the viewer finds appealing. Statistically, fact-based programming is given more airtime than other television shows. Studies show that everything from news to gamedocs and reality television shows attract a larger audience and international critical attention (Hill 2007:6).

In the second volume of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, published in 2010, Vermeulen and Van den Akker claim that we have moved away from the notion of postmodernism, which has been agreeably the characterization of modern society over the past years of recent history. Today, Vermeulen and Van den Akker suggest, we are currently living in a time they describe as "metamodernism". Vermeulen and Van den Akker give a lot of credit to global crises and the constant developing Internet as key in changing man's worldview

(Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010:8), and one can discuss how this new worldview has changed television. The authors claim that today's world is driven by a new sense of "yes we can", as well as what they have names "negative idealism", where man "seeks forever a truth that it never expects to find (Vermeulen & van den Akker 2010:10)". This means that our world is driven by both idealism and a positive view of man's own capabilities, all while still being aware of the fact that absolute truth might never be achieved. This is a relatively modern worldview, and one aspect of the appeal of reality television. Also, given the Internet's increasingly important role in constantly providing man with alternative viewpoints and realities, man has again realized the importance of "truth". John Corner describes this in a way relating to reality television. He explains a scenario where "even if the material and temporal conditions for [a certain] behaviour have been entirely constructed by television itself", the way people behave in the situation is still relevant and interesting (Murray & Oullette 2009:83). Therefore, it is no coincidence that an increasing range of documentaries and reality television shows characterizes our society.

Many other academics share this notion with Vermeulen and Van den Akker. In *Teaching Us To Fake It: The Ritualized Norms of Television's "Reality" Games*, Nick Couldry adds, that watching reality television allows the viewer to take part in scenarios that would not be acceptable or feasible in their own lives. This allows for both entertainment and self-reflection (Murray & Oullette 2009:83). In *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*, Henry Jenkins agrees that it has become increasingly important for television shows to reflect some truth and allow engagement from the viewer. He suggests that people become more intrigued than they would be otherwise, when they know that they are watching real people. This creates a kind of loyalty between the viewer and the "celebrity", and establishes a "it could be me or someone I know"-mentality that is attractive (Jenkins 2008:71). Again, the fact that they are watching real people is more prone to conversation and connections to other people, as one is talking "about [oneself] through critiquing the actions and values of others (Jenkins 2008:84)".

Some academics argue about the actual amount of reality within reality TV due to the many scripted scenarios and the use of edition. However, in response to this, academics such as Geoff King write in his book *Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood to Reality TV and Beyond* argue that "the simulated setting stimulates feeling, in part because the removal of the participants from their normal surroundings strips them to nothing but the space and affect of social interaction (King 2005:97)". Therefore, for example, feelings of love generated within the *Bachelor* franchise, while often critiqued for being scripted, are very real for both the participant and the viewer, and is by no means a ruse by the contestant to fool the viewer.

4. Media theory

4.1 Gender in the Media

Anthony Easthope and Richard Dyer discuss masculinity and femininity in the media as being quite simple. They propose certain traditional gender roles that appear in all mass-produced popular culture phenomenon. Dyer explains how media openly portrays "sexual grottness as if it were a permanent feature of the human condition (Dyer 1993a:95). Modern popular culture idolizes the stereotypical male body as an object, characterized by muscles and clean lines, dating all the way back to Michelangelo's *David* (Easthope 1986:51). The traditional male finds great importance in maintaining appearances, as it is a reflection of his ego, his identity as he wishes to present it to others, and how he wishes to see himself (Easthope 1986:53). Traditionally, it is crucial to not only look good, but to also constantly evoke masculinity, which is portrayed through the stereotypical male ideal body, narcissism, and even aggression (Easthope 1986:54).

There are certain different rules within a society that apply for males and females. The depiction of masculinity is different in that it is outside social responsibility, the gender role traditionally expected of a person by society (Dyer 1993a:93, 95). The cultural conception of masculinity that exists in modern popular culture is dominant, "tough, masterful, self-possessed" and "always in control", John Storey adds (Storey 2009:159).

In media's representation of the female, there are two different representations that generally exist – the "harridan" and the "busty blonde" (Dyer 1993a:93). The harridan is a source of entertainment as well as a representation of sexuality, as she is traditionally viewed as unattractive, but sees herself as beautiful. She has exaggerated makeup, clothes and hair, and is "randy and predatory" (Dyer 1993a:94). The busty blonde, however, is a more attractive woman who is characterized by her power over men. Men will approach the busty blonde with an "uncontrollable sexual arousal", and do not question her beauty (Dyer 1993a:94).

This thesis will bring up how the episode differs in the presentation of the men and women, and if they choose to follow or contradict the traditional notions of male and female sexuality.

4.2 Stereotypes

A stereotype is a, often exaggerated, universal agreement about a social group. It can pertain to a social class, race, ethnicity or other group. In order for a stereotype to exist, all surrounding parties must view members of any particular social group in the same way (Dyer 1993b: 13). One can find several examples of well-known stereotypes that are played upon in the

episode, such as the upper-class woman, the bachelor, the beautiful woman, and the outsider, but we will return to this later. The effectiveness of a stereotype lies in if and how there is a universally recognizable understanding about a social group. Members of the same group must be seen in the same way by different members of the outside world in order to be considered and established stereotype (Dyer 1993b:14). For example, a criticized but existing universal notion of the American is that he is overweight, boisterous, xenophobic, uninformed, and self-indulgent (Kantrowitz, Mark 2012). Though every contestant we will view in the *Survivor* will be a member of the American stereotype, they also exist in smaller social groups.

In his theories discussing stereotypes in the media, Richard Dyer expresses how traditional stereotypes have resulted in creating framework for judging entire social groups (Dyer 1993b:14). Whether these notions are true or not is irrelevant if the stereotype is well established within a society. All members of any social groups will thereafter be defined by these stereotypes and must prove themselves in order to create new guidelines by which to be defined.

There are also certain stereotypes pertaining to men and women, and their role in society. For example, as Dyer briefly explains, women should find themselves exclusively at the pub, in the salon, the workplace, and the kitchen. These are the traditionally expected and accepted social boundaries (Dyer 1993b:16). However, *Survivor* is a game show that forces all contestants to the same living conditions and social situations. Therefore, it can be interesting to view if and how these social boundaries are at all implied even in such an unfamiliar setting.

4.3 Representation

The term representation was first coined by Stuart Hall, and refers to the production of meaning derived from for example images or text (Lindgren 2009:57). In his book providing an overview of popular culture, Simon Lindgren (2009) describes representation as something occurring when one gives an object meaning through the use of language. What an object such as an image portrays, or represents, is largely reliant on the viewers pre-existing notions and connections to what this particular image depicts (Lindgren 2009:57-59). This interpretation of an image is therefore based on the mental imagery generated by the interpreter, which is in turn reliant on the culture of the interpreter. Lindgren brings up the example of a cartoon depicting Peter Parker (Spider-mans alter ego), prior to his transformation into a superhero. Looking at the image depicting Peter Parker with his glasses and schoolbooks, the mental connection generated by the viewer is that of the stereotypical nerd. Lindgren further explains this as how one cannot think with for example a photo; only with the existing mental connections one has to that photo. Representation is the link between idea and language

(Lindgren 2009:58). Stuart Hall has described representation as a system of two simultaneous processes taking place within a person while looking at an image, an object, another person, etc. These processes involve mans identifying a sign and generating a mental connection with previous notions one has of this sign. Representation is this process of associating objects, concepts and signs with pre-existing such (Lindgren 2009:57-60). In this thesis, the idea of representation will be utilized alongside semiotic theories and methodology when analyzing *Survivor*.

4.4 Semiotics

Semiotics is most commonly used in the field of linguistics, as the study of signs and their relationship to other things, both objects and people. Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes are two groundbreaking figures within semiotics, and their theories will lay the groundwork for this analysis. Barthes and Saussure have each proposed a model for analyzing linguistic signs as words. Saussure starts off by explaining that every word is constructed by and made up of both a "signifier" and a "signified". Saussure describes signifier as "the form that the sign takes (Chandler 2007:14)". The signifier, therefore, is the word itself or it's physical form. In contrast to this, Saussure defines the signified of a sign as "the concept to which it refers (Chandler 2007:14)", the mental image it generates in the mind of the interpreter of a particular sign. The relationship between these two parts is named "signification". Alone, neither signifier nor signified can be interpreted, as it is the relationship between the two that is of critical importance. It is crucial that signification exists between these parts in order to create meaning. Saussure also explains how the meaning a person gives a word is not only dependent on the word itself, but also its relationship to other words. David Chandler gives the example where the signified we give the word "tree" depends on how we see a tree in comparison to the word "bush" (Chandler 2007:19). Therefore, the generated meaning is greatly reliant on the person's surroundings and will change depending on the message recipients' culture. For example, the creators of advertisements are hired to consciously choose words that the viewer can relate to and is intrigued by. Here, it is crucial to take into consideration to recipients of the advertisement in order to determine how effective the portrayal of a product will be. If the relationship between signs in an advertisement is lost, as is the intended message of the advertisement, and the product will go without profit. Saussure describes this as all signs being "differential", where every sign is unique. In theory, no linguistic signs are completely free from connections to other terms, as it "requires at least one other term to give it definition (Chandler 2007:21)". All signs, both linguistic and non-linguistic relate to other signs, both in its definition, the relationship is has to

other signs, and the mental images it generates in the mind of the interpreter. Advertisements constantly use this notion to their advantage. Here, the positioning of a sign in connection to other signs generates a relationship between the two. Therefore, the advertised product is a result of the “differentiation of each sign from the others to which it is related (Chandler 2007:21)”.

As Saussure would expand on the nature of the linguistic sign, in *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes (1977) further develops Saussure's ideas about how meaning is produced in text and imagery, but with a stronger focus on underlying meaning of an image. Barthes has dedicated a lot of research to semiotics as the study of signs, and their existence within a culture. Barthes wishes to expose underlying social and cultural meaning within all works of popular culture. Barthes further developed Saussure's classically semiotic theories surrounding signification as only being made up of signifier and signified. Semiotics claims that there is a signifier and signified to every sign, but Barthes means that this is only the first order of signification. According to Barthes, this should be followed by a second order of signification, or level of meaning, which he claims also takes shape in all popular culture works. He names these two orders of signification as denotation, the sign itself, and connotation (Barthes 1977:15). Connotation involves a deeper and more thorough definition of a sign. Barthes describes it as “the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it (Barthes 1977:17)”. This implies that a sign can be interpreted differently in different cultures. Therefore, according to Barthes, if one were to analyze a medium clearly intended for an American audience, one would see plenty of examples of signs that would be interpreted differently in another culture.

So, meaning does not exist within a sign by itself, it is derived from a sign through the values of the interpreter, and its relationship to its surroundings. Semiotics does not allow for the production of generalized truths, but provides insight into underlying cultural meanings in various works. Semiotics will be useful in the analysis of the chosen episode of *Survivor*, and this thesis hopes to expose suggestions of gender roles and stereotypes.

5. Methodology

So far, the concept of semiotics has been introduced as the study of signs. However, to derive meaning from a sign, one must use semiotics as a methodology. This thesis will use a semiotic method in the study of the presented material. Methodology is used within the sciences to acquire knowledge. Through the application of well-defined and critically reflected research, one can gather useful empirical data, given the fact that the right method is applied and is well supported with evidence. Therefore, it is crucial for within research to choose the appropriate model for the collection of empirical data.

5.1 Semiotic Analysis

A semiotic methodology can be applied to the analysis of most content relating to communication. The idea is to expose the latent, or underlying meaning, of manifest content (Lindgren 2009:109), what is clearly depicted. Semiotic signs are generally used to conceal hidden interests, for example political or commercial. In this particular thesis, semiotics will be used to analyze masculinity and femininity in reality television, and how various signs within the chosen episode suggest certain truths about masculinity or femininity. Through the analysis of visual signs in the chosen episode, the first episode of the eleventh season of *Survivor*, one can apply semiotics to analyze the identified signs that are used, break down the sign into parts, and derive meaning. Daniel Chandler describes all signs as being within a system of related signs, which reflect the established attitudes, and values within a given society. It is then the interpreter that connects these signs to each other (Lindgren 2009:110). Within semiotics, a sign can be anything – text, imagery, or sound – that do not have any implied meaning until the viewer gives them meaning (Chandler 2007:13).

Both Saussures and Barthes theories can therefore be applied in this case to closer examine the semiotics of the chosen episode by analyzing linguistic signs, and looking at the resulting signification through a semiotic methodology. Worth noting here is semiotics' inability to produce general knowledge or rules. Since the analysis lies all worth in the decoding of a specific work, it is difficult to apply the interpretations to another medium. How a work is received relies largely on the cultural upbringing and values of the viewer.

A semiotic analysis involves breaking down signs into their signifier and signified, in order to expose the underlying meaning. As Saussure and Barthes explain, every sign is made up of these parts, what is literally depicted, and the interpretation one can derive from it. This thesis will use a semiotic method to break down and interpret signs that give clues as to what gender roles are strengthened in the episode. Simply explained, the semiotic method involves dividing a sign into its denotation and connotation, and attempting to answer smaller questions. In deriving the denotation of a sign, the interpreter wishes to understand the following (Chandler 2007:15):

- What is the literal depiction of the sign?
- How do the surrounding characters act in relation to this sign?

Thereafter, the resulting connotation of the sign can be found by answering the following question:

- So what?
- What mental associations does the interpreter have to this sign?

5.2 Performing a semiotic analysis

As previously mentioned, exposing the latent content of a sign begins with the dissection of the sign into parts. Thereafter, one can analyze said sign in its relation to surrounding signs. When analyzing a visual media such as a television show, the episode is first broken down into core scenes that can be analyzed. After watching the episode as a whole, three scenes were initially chosen according to relevance to the task at hand. All scenes were within the first half of the episode, and held several signs of importance both individually as well as collectively. Each scene was then viewed independently and analyzed according to the signs found therein.

In the analysis of this paper, each scene will be presented and a literal denotation of what the viewer sees in the episode will be provided. Thereafter, the signs identified within the core scene will be presented and analyzed so to derive the connotation of this sign in relation to the scene as a whole.

6. Clip 1

Upon first glance, *Survivor* does not specifically cater to neither male nor female audiences, or intend to unfavourably present either gender. In the 23 previous seasons, there have been 10 female and 13 male winners, which does not imply unfair advantages awarded to either gender. But when studied closer, there are apparent signs in the television show that show the recognition of existing stereotypes and gender roles.

6.1 Narrative description of clip 1

The first chosen clip ranges from 00:25 to 03:22, and largely focuses on briefly introducing the contestants. The viewer is presented with name and occupation of the contestants, and no more information is given. However, this is enough information for the viewer to instantly form opinions and receive impressions of the contestants, and relations to existing stereotypes are created.

The episode begins with the contestants approaching the Polynesian island in a truck, as voice-overs using select quotes from various contestants on how they plan to play the game are provided. For example, one male utters that he will be using the fact that he is not initially seen as a threat to his advantage, and another states his intentions to form both a male and female alliance in order to up his chances of staying in the game for as long as possible. The host, Jeff Probst arrives in a separate helicopter, promising an exciting season of twists and briefly

describing how the season will be built up – two teams living on the same camp.

Following a compilation of various images of upcoming footage from the season, as well as the *Survivor* logo, the contestants arrive on the island and face Jeff Probst. Probst takes a look at this season's contestants, asks a few questions to a few chosen individuals, before he will proceed to divide the contestants into tribes.

6.2 Analysis of clip 1

6.2.1 Stereotypes

Society's well-established stereotypes are often found in television programs. They are a way for the creators of a show to use recognizable personalities in an attempt to make the viewer associate and form connections to people that they feel they already know. How both the audience and other contestants view a character is dependent on pre-existing stereotypes of a particular group. This first impression largely important when the viewer is deciding who they feel they can relate to, and the contestants decide who they want to be associated with. The stereotypes identified in this episode are based on well-known stereotypes found in the western world. As not a whole lot of background information is provided to the viewer, most of the stereotypes are based on personality traits rather than social groups such as class or ethnic groups.

As this is the first episode of the season, the cast introductions at the beginning of the episode are the very first and most optimal chance for the show to overemphasize stereotypical competitors. In the women's tribe, we meet Courtney, the quirky girl, who does not automatically relate to all the other women, but is still positive about what will come out of the experience. The viewer is also introduced to the Sabrina, the sassy woman. She is mid-30s, she has a slight attitude, and boldly utters that "men cannot survive without women ("Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules" 3:59)", but is generally well liked by the other women. If stereotypes have taught us anything, she seems harmless now but will most likely start up some drama later in the season. Among others, the viewer also meets Chelsea, the southern belle who can catch a chicken, Nina, the slightly senior but tough female former police officer, and Alicia, the attractive woman with an attitude. This particular woman is aware of her good looks and plans on using them to her advantage as she tells us in the very beginning of the episode ("Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules" 00:30), and is well known for causing drama.

Reality television shows know the importance of presenting strong and memorable characters, and stereotypes play a large part in that. Several stereotypes are present in the male camp. There, the viewer is introduced to Colton, the young self-proclaimed homosexual guy who

gets along better with the females than the males. Although not on their team, and much to the dismay of his own teammates, he tends to associate more with the females. Also present are “Tarzan” the slightly unusual but humorous older gentleman, Matt, the arrogant attorney who knows the importance of pacts and getting rid of the weak links, and Jay, the male model who also plans of using his looks to his advantage with the females. However, his loyalty definitely lies with the other males, and a sense of fraternity is very protruding.

6.2.2 Gender

As for broader gender-based stereotypes, those presented by Richard Dyer fit in well with the males. Ego and aggression are recognizable traits in the male tribe, where the most outspoken men are the immediate frontrunners. These males form an alliance with each other and are prepared to eliminate whomever they view as the weaker males of their own team.

However, Dyers presentations of representation of femininity within the form of the harridan and the busty blonde cannot be applied as easily when discussing the female contestants of *Survivor*. To be fair, Dyers work from 1993 is becoming slightly outdated, and female independence and feminism are becoming increasingly prominent in today’s society. The female is no longer characterized simply by appearance, and there are other important characteristics that today seem more important. There are of course some notably commercially more attractive women on the show, but there is no difference in treatment toward them. This may also be attributed to the fact that this is a game show where both the male and female competitors ultimate focus is on the final prize.

6.2.5 Clothing

Modern society has become characterized by a profusion of choices. On any given day, the western world constantly offers man a variety of choices of what food to consume, what trends to wear, or what gadgets to possess. Therefore, clothing has become a form of self-expression, a way for people to associate themselves with a particular trend or phenomenon. How one decides to dress on a particular day is a conscious choice. Even when facing particular living conditions such as those provided on *Survivor*, there are obvious differences in how different contestants decide to dress. Therefore, the denotation of attire is any outfit made up of any top, bottom, and a pair of shoes, but the variety of choices thereof has allowed clothing to become a mixture of diverse signs that work together to create an outfit, which in turn can be interpreted as a sign of a particular popular culture phenomenon.

When introduced to the contestants, one of the protruding personalities is Courtney,

who in her first introduction wears a knitted hat resembling some kind of stuffed animal. Now, the weather certainly didn't call for neither a hat, nor do the rest of her ensemble suggest that she is cold. On its own, this hat suggests nothing other than a quirky addition to Courtney's clothing. However, semiotics puts all signs in a system of related things. When this hat is viewed in the system of fashion in the late 2000s, it implies something more multifaceted. To decode this statement, one must consider modern popular culture phenomenon, such as music, film, and fashion trends. With this in mind, the connotation that is made to this slightly unusual hat is one to that of the hipster movement. The hipster movement originally surfaced during 1930s and '40s, then remerged the 1990s, and has recently reappeared as a central fashion and attitude movement in the western world (Fletcher 2009). The modern hipster is characterized by distaste for the mainstream, independent films, alternative art and music, retro and atypical clothing. But above all, the hipster movement is recognized in their attempts to show themselves as being different from the accepted and conventional.

While Courtney's hat is just a piece of clothing, Courtney knowingly decides to wear this hat during the viewers first meeting with her, in a conscious effort to identify herself as being different. She is immediately characterized by the western viewers pre-existing knowledge on the subject on the hipster, that is a well-known movement in modern society. This not only immediately identifies Courtney as distant from mainstream culture, but also in a sense gives her more identity than just one of the women. The effect the connotation of this particular hat has on the relationship in how the viewer sees the rest of the women, is therefore influenced. Although it is Courtney in particular that is now viewed differently, this adds a sense of diversity among the personalities of the women.

Fashion trends can be identified very differently in different cultures, depending on the viewer's values, framework and knowledge about popular culture phenomena. As a result, it is important here to note how these particular signs are interpreted in north-American society. In another culture, the same clothing can be viewed as unorthodox and cannot be subject to interpretation due to lack of framework to which a sign can be related.

Another example of the way fashion choices within the episode can make mental connotations relating to current popular culture phenomena was seen in the attire of a male contestant, Jonas. Upon the viewers' first introduction to the characters, Jonas is the only person wearing a bandana. He wears this bandana folded and tied around his head. Jonas is also the only person of Asian (Japanese) descent. Jonas' bandana suggests the connotation of another current popular culture phenomenon – manga/anime. Anime is a form of Japanese art or cartoon storytelling, containing elaborate storylines and strong characters. One of these particular

characters is the ninja. By the looks of Jonas, he is not very physically fit. However, viewing the bandana through a mental system relating to fashion, the mental connotation is one relating Jonas to a ninja. This sign, a ninja being characterized by strength and agility, fortifies Jonas' masculinity, and this recognizable sign is useful in intimidating other contestants.

7. Clip 2

7.1 Narrative description of clip 2

Clip two, which ranges from 03:27 to 05:25, depicts the division of the contestants as they find out the tribe for which they will be competing this season, as well as the first short challenge of the season.

Coming as a shock to everyone, the contestants find out that for the first time in the *Survivor* series, the competition will be divided into teams of males versus females. The male team becomes the "Manano" tribe, with the tribe colour orange, and the female team becomes the "Salani" tribe, and receive the tribe colour blue. The women seem more content with this division and are fully confident in their capabilities against the men. The men however, seem to be more reserved towards the new tribes.

Immediately following the division, the tribes are faced with their first challenge. Though this challenge ultimately does not have any winners or losers, the tribes are faced with a large truck equipped with different materials such as food, planks, bamboo, and other building materials. The tribes are given one minute to strip as much as they want from the truck, and will get to keep all they can collect within the time limit.

7.2 Analysis of clip 2

7.2.1 Tribes

Upon first glance of the 40-minute episode, there are several signs that catch the eye of the viewer, and provide mental associations which may or may not strengthen the existing gender stereotypes within western society.

For example, once the contestants have been briefly introduced, the men and the women are separated. They are also divided into tribes. In the modern western world, tribes do no longer exist. The denotation, or the literal meaning of a tribe is actually a historic name for a community. Tribes have historically been smaller communities under one leader, characterized by land disputes and their rivalries with neighbouring tribes.

However, for the average American, the linguistic connotation of the word tribe is associated with old native-American tribes. These tribes are associated with very traditional rules.

Also a connotation of the word tribe is older gender roles – historic notions of the man as the hunter-gatherer and the woman as the caregiver. Whether or not the different genders currently competing on *Survivor* will be forced into their historic roles in society is yet to see. The teams are also distributed tribe names, tribe colours, and tribe flags – all symbols of community and nationalism. These are all symbols of unity, creating an “us versus them” mentality. The implication of this is that the viewer feels they must choose a side, most likely choosing to associate with and cheer for their own gender. As there are different tribes characterized by rivalry, the viewer feels they must also choose a side. The viewer sees several depictions further strengthening this idea of division. Although the male and female tribes share common ground on which to set up their camps, the ground is very divided, and they do not share any supplies for survival. Instead of sharing knowledge and supplies, the teams decide to focus all their energy on their own tribes. This mentality can be attributed to the fact that the linguistic sign of the word “tribe” is associated with a strong historic sense of rules, community, traditional values and rivalry against outsiders.

Historically, the fall of the tribes was due to the Europeans invasion of the Americas. Therefore, the tribes sense of that they need to protect themselves against all outsiders can be attributed to the fact that historically, foreigners tend to bring war and disease to a tribe. During European colonialism, the exploratory nature of the more developed nations led to the fall of these traditional ways of life in the east and in the Americas. Therefore, another connotation of the word tribe is a secluded and not very advanced society, which was destroyed through progressive thinking.

7.2.2 Tribe colours

Finally, the tribe colours, orange and blue, are both strongly politically charged signs. This episode was decidedly examined in and of itself, disconnected from the rest of the *Survivor* franchise. Therefore, unknowing of whether these same tribal colours are those used in every season of the series or if they are changed as the seasons progress, one can assume that they are just two colours, unrelated to outside interference or insinuation. Though the denotation of what the viewer is seeing is just two colours presumably chosen at random to create a sense of rivalry, these two particular colours connote to a concealed political agenda. Though the colours in this case are orange and blue, it suggests a connection to the two dominating political parties in the United States. Most countries have a red and a blue political party among others, but in the United States these are the only two parties that are of importance. During every election, the nation is divided into red or blue states, conservative or liberal, republican or democratic. In

addition to dividing the men and the women into different tribes and creating rivalry between the two, these politically charged colours suggest the men as republicans, and the women as democrats. These are two parties that historically never go hand in hand, they have opposing views on almost every political issue. This further fuels rivalry between the two tribes, and the viewer observes their contention as logical, and their alliance as unattainable. With the men and the women defined by these particular political parties, the men are suddenly labelled as conservative, marked by favouring traditional values such as the right to bear arms and the sanctity of marriage solely between a man and woman. The women's tribe however, insinuates liberalism, challenging historical values, progressivism and open-mindedness. This implies a difference of views on gender roles in the male and female tribes. There is a clear division of masculinity and femininity in this episode of *Survivor*, where the men are fixed in a old mindset, while the women are implied as more progressive thinkers.

With this interpretation of the tribe colours in mind, one can interpret other situations in the episode differently. When accepting the women as more advanced and men as more conventional, one can find several examples throughout the episode that strengthen this notion, and disprove the exploitation of established gender roles. For example, the women's tribe hop on the truck to gather supplies, the men go over and steal some of them ("Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules" 4:39-5:20). The women recognize the fact that they are in need of fire and are willing to make a bargain in order to get fire, the men decide not to bargain purely out of spite for the women ("Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules" 18:49). Lastly, during the challenge when one of the female competitors is injured, the men get the choice of finishing the challenge out of good will for the women. They can also decide to simply accept the victory. Though they are at a two-person lead in the challenge at this point, the men choose immunity, much to the women's dismay who wish to complete the challenge and determine a fair winner ("Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules" 33:12).

These are just a few examples where the mindset of the viewer, determined by the signs in the episode, effect how the situations and characters are viewed. After recognizing the tribal colours and interpreting these signs through a political viewpoint, one can interpret other signs in the same episode using this mindset. In this case, there are several situations shown where the women are shown as more progressive while the men choose traditional values.

Finally, thinking back to the former subsection discussing tribes, historically, progressive thinking destroyed traditional native-American tribes, which could be an interesting point to keep in mind during coming episodes.

7.2.3 Food

When the teams are set upon the challenge of collecting items off of the truck, the women focus a lot of their energy on something that will become of great worth in later episodes – food. Given the opportunity, the women immediately focus on getting coconuts, bananas, and will later on also capture a couple of chickens. While the men find importance in gathering supplies that will help them build a more elaborate shelter, the women’s attention goes to finding food in order to provide for everyone in their tribe. On the island, food entails drinkable water, coconuts or other fruits, fish and other live animals. In this case, where the woman consciously decides to focus her energy on nourishment, this connotes a representation of the historic gender roles where the woman spends a lot of her time in the kitchen, providing for those she feels responsible for by setting dinner on the table while the man works (Dyer 1993b:16).

8. Clip 3

8.1 Narrative description of clip 2

The third and final clip, ranging from 24:07 to 24:40, is a short clip yet is a good example of reinforcement of both male and female gender roles. In this short clip, the viewer sees the negotiation between the men and the women in which the women are bargaining in order to have the men help them with lighting a fire. Christina from the women’s camp, approaches the men and says frankly; “we really need fire. What is it going to take for us to work together for fire (“Two Tribes, One Camp, No Rules” 24:07)?”. The men name their price as 40 weavings made by the women. Christina manages to bargain the price down to 20 weavings, and a deal is made.

8.2 Analysis of clip 2

8.2.1 Fire

Prior to the clip, shortly upon arrival in the respective camps, the tribes begin to gather wood, palm leaves and other necessities found in nature. Knowing the importance of fire to surviving in the wild, the male tribe immediately begin attempting to light a fire, and eventually manage using rocks and pieces of bamboo. The sign of fire can easily be quite literally interpreted. The denotation of this sign is the chemical substance that can be both a danger and an aide.

However, in the world of *Survivor*, fire is a lot more than this and takes on a central role in relation to the contestants, which is portrayed in this clip. In a society characterized by challenging living conditions and limited resources, fire is associated with survival. Fire can be a

source of heat and light, a way of cooking food and boiling water. In this episode, the male tribe is able to create a fire without greater resistance. The women however, cannot manage to light a fire on their own. That same evening, the women are forced to steal fire from the men, recognizing that fire is not only a symbol of survival, but also it represents each individual contestants survival in the game. This is female admission of their need of male assistance in order to survive. This sign of fire is shown in such a way that it cannot help but be associated with gender roles, reinforces the historic gender role where the female is weak and dependent on the male. The men in turn know that the women do not know how to light a fire on their own, and use this fact to their advantage. The men use the fire as a bargaining tool, as well as a way to assert their dominance over the women. On it's own, fire is merely a commodity, but in relation to the two tribes separated by gender, fire connotes male dominance in their environment.

8.2.2 Weaving

Upon recognition of the importance of the fire, the women are willing to make a bargain. The viewer sees a representative of the women's tribe approach the men, ready to negotiate. She starts by asking the men if they would be willing to come over to the women's camp and start a fire in return for a chicken. However, it being the very first day and food not being a scarcity quite yet, the men negate this offer. They take this opportunity to demand from the women items of importance they feel they cannot get on their own. The men scour the female camp looking for something they are in need of. In return for starting a fire in the women's camp, the men want the women to weave for them. Twenty weavings made of palm trees, which can be used for example as floor mats or roof padding.

The literal denotation of a weave is a pattern of palm leaves woven together to create a flat mat that can be used as shelter away from sand, the sun or unfavourable weather conditions. It is doubtful that the women have ever weaved anything out of palm leaves before, or for many of the women, even weaved anything before, as it is not quite a central part of society as it may have been in the past. The men most likely could have attempted to do this themselves, and generated the same results. However, the men assume they cannot do this historically female task.

Again, this connotes the reinforcement of gender roles. Instead of attempting to create these mats by themselves and saving their opportunity for bargaining with the women in return for something truly of importance, they decide they simply cannot. Weaving is a connotation that in relation to these two tribes represents traditional gender roles where the women stays at home and weaves while the man hunts.

9. Conclusion

9.1 What male or female stereotypes seem to be encouraged?

Using the work of Richard Dyer, analysis of the characters on this season of *Survivor* showed several established stereotypes of smaller social groups that were played upon. Examples of this were found in the sassy African-American woman and the male model. Upon first glance, the initial stereotypes played upon are these social groups. Upon introduction, all the contestants are viewed simply as contestants, and they are all forced into the same situations. However, upon second glance there was also evidence of broader gender stereotypes suggested where males are characterized by aggression. The male also has a strong sense of ego and alliance, both of which were strongly evident in the episode among the male contestants. However, Dyer's presentation of representation of femininity was not applied as easily. This can be attributed to the fact of a changing worldview where gender stereotypes implying men as the worker while the woman stays in the kitchen is no longer relevant.

9.2 What notable signs relating to gender are featured in the episode, and how can these signs be interpreted?

There were several signs identified within the episode; the linguistic sign of the tribe, along with several visual identified signs such as the tribe colours, fire, food, weaving and fashion. When viewing the circumstances surrounding these signs and when decoding them using the mental connotations relating to these signs, they all also implied something about gender roles. The signs were interpreted in a way that seemed to encourage the pre-existing gender roles in western society.

9.3 What do these presentations imply about gender roles?

This analysis found that *Survivor* is aware of and operates on gender roles through the use of signs. Through the use of the tribe and tribe colours, the show seemed to encourage a rivalry between men and women, and suggested a society characterized by historical gender roles. In traditional native-American tribes, for example, the entire tribe is almost characterized by their male components who hunt and provide for the tribe, while the woman takes on a more central role as the caregiver. Therefore, this episode of *Survivor* did not seem to question society's gender roles, rather encourages them. The use of fire, food, and weaving all suggest male dominance over women as hunters, while women embrace a role of nurturers. This could also insinuate how the contestants are aware of pre-existing gender roles, which determine the way the competitors play the game as to not stir up much controversy and risk elimination. Finally, there was also of

how clothing connotes relates to gender and affect how the interpreter views the contestants. Two specific instances depict a situation where gender is reinforced through conscious choices of attire. Jonas choice of clothing strengthens his masculinity through the connotation of the bandana, while Courtney's style adds diversity to the women.

9.4 Final thoughts & further research

It is important to note, however, that there are no generalizations made whether or not the *Survivor* producers have chosen to portray the characters in this way, or if society forces the contestants to automatically resort back to established gender roles. These are simply statements of how the signs identified in season 24, episode 1 or *Survivor* can be decoded.

Secondly, I wish to clarify the difficulties in the semiotic analysis of signs within a television series. Given the chance to further elaborate on these ideas, perhaps a still image or advertisement would be more appropriate as the signs are more clearly depicted in order to provide the viewer with an instant relationship to the product, and finally it would be interesting to analyze the relationship between text and imagery in a medium.

However, given the agenda of this thesis, there was still an array of signs relating to gender that provided insight into the gender roles portrayed within *Survivor*. The intention of exploring masculinity and femininity in the *Survivor* franchise proved to be manageable and there were certain underlying agendas that were identified, connoted, and investigated.

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