

**Cultural Identity in Isolation: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Big Brother Season 23**

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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**Approvals**

This Master's Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from  
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**Abstract**

This qualitative content analysis focuses on the creation and maintenance of cultural identity amongst the houseguests in the reality television program *Big Brother*. Season 23 of *Big Brother* was qualitatively coded through the lens of cultural identity theory. The study found that cultural identity language was heavily present through the houseguest's early personal disclosure, strategic formation of alliances, demonstration of interpersonal skills, and candid sharing with the audience in Diary Room segments. Sharing cultural identity language on a national television program allows the audience to witness and interact with the information and apply it to their society.

*Keywords:* Cultural identity, Big Brother, cultural identity theory, cultural language, alliances.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The popular reality television show *Big Brother* has been enjoyed by millions of viewers internationally for over 20 years. Every year, contestants, otherwise referred to as houseguests, enter the Big Brother house where they live and compete for a monetary prize. The house is equipped with cameras and microphones that record the houseguest's every move and conversation. This creates a sense of constant observation and allows the audience to witness the impact of cultural identity language. The show is a compilation of edited strategic conversations, physical and mental competitions, and the live evictions of the houseguests. *Big Brother* is known for its voyeuristic nature, as viewers can watch the housemates' interactions, conflicts, alliances, and personal dramas unfold in real-time.

### **Overview**

This qualitative content analysis focuses specifically on language utilized in the *Big Brother* house through the lens of cultural identity theory. When playing the game, houseguests are forced to reconcile social and moral norms with society's views on race, religion, gender, and other cultural identity language. This house is a prime place to gather information on the power of cultural language due to its isolation from the world and the constant observation via the cameras. In the game, houseguests strategically form alliances with others to better their games and hurt those around them. Viewers can witness and learn about the societal roles of cultural identity throughout the show and further their understanding of society as a result of the competition reality show.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural identity theory (CIT) was developed by Jane Collier and Milt Thomas (Collier & Thomas, 1988). The foundational principles of Cultural identity theory revolve around the idea

that people categorize themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, or other defining features. Cultural identity is showcased through social comparison by others and is negotiated, co-created, and reinforced in communication with others in social settings. This study seeks to find the cultural identity language utilized in *Big Brother* and displays how that impacts the houseguests and overall society.

### **Background**

The television show made its debut in the Netherlands in 1999 and has since been adapted in over 60 countries (Deans, 2000). The show has been popularized due to its unique premise wherein the contestants are monitored 24 hours by the cameras and can be watched live throughout the season. The paper focuses specifically on season 23 of American *Big Brother*, which started in 2000. American *Big Brother* has been played for the past 10 years in a predictable pattern that has led to an increase in viewership and growing fandom showcased by the influx of recap podcasts, the introduction of all-star seasons wherein fan-favorite contestants were asked to compete together, and the success of former houseguests as social media influencers.

The show is typically comprised of three one-hour episodes a week. Two of the episodes are recorded within the week and edited for an audience. These two episodes often contain a Head of Household (HOH) competition wherein one person wins immunity for the week and the power to nominate two of their fellow houseguests for eviction during the live episode. After nominations are made, there is a Power of Veto competition (POV) where six houseguests (the HOH, two nominees, and three houseguests selected by random draw) compete for the golden power of veto, which ensures the winner's safety for the week and allows them to either leave

the nominations the same or remove one of the nominations. If this occurs, the Head of Household must choose another houseguest to nominate. After this competition, the houseguests have a few days to strategize, form alliances, and plead their case to stay in the house before the live vote and eviction. The third episode contains the live eviction, a brief interview of the evicted houseguest, and often a teaser of the next Head of Household competition.

The winner is crowned at the end of the season when there are only two contestants left in the game. The previous seven to nine players evicted from the house go to a separate house where they remain isolated from the outside world called the jury house. The season finale is a live television show where the third-place winner is evicted to join the jury. All of the jury members vote for the winner of the season after being able to ask two approved questions and hearing a live final argument from both remaining players. The jury has the power to pick the winner, which highlights the vitality of houseguests to win the physical and mental competitions, but also have a strong social game wherein people whom they voted to evict from the house would want to vote for them to win the show and its accompanying monetary prize.

The first American season started after the explosive response from the Netherlands' show did not immediately hook fans. The show was and still is being aired on Columbia Broadcasting System, otherwise referred to as CBS. The first season is entirely unrecognizable compared to how the game is currently conducted. BB Season 1 had episodes six nights a week, and the players were eliminated every week through America's vote rather than the houseguests themselves. Although the show did not receive the anticipated ratings and response, there was one item the fans appeared to be responding to: the live feed element. The idea that a person could watch the live feeds, usually comprised of four cameras, at any time was a new and intriguing idea for American viewers.

The *Big Brother* following is massive and includes people from all walks of life. There are casual fans who merely watch some of the episodes during the season to those who watch the live feeds constantly and are aware of almost every social dynamic present in the house. The show's producers and editors are tasked with the job of bridging the gap between these two fan typologies in producing an entertaining product.

### **Problem Statement**

This qualitative content analysis illuminates the problem of how language is used to wield power in the *Big Brother* house in alliances formed regarding shared cultural traits such as race, gender, or religion.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the language of Big Brother contestants and alliances is used to create and maintain cultural identity.

### **Significance of Study**

A qualitative content analysis of the television show *Big Brother* is significant since it demonstrates reality television juxtaposed with societal pressures on items such as race, gender, and other forms of cultural language. Language is a powerful tool utilized in the show to build relationships and alliances. Unfortunately, the same gift of language is also shown in an abusive way, which is explicitly demonstrated in groups of power factoring in social pressures regarding race, religion, and gender in their strategic game decisions. The show exposes how power can be both inspiring and corrupting, demonstrating societal attitudes toward authority, ambition, and the consequences of unchecked power.

Due to the live nature of the show, there have been several scandals throughout the years, which have led to negative media attention and sometimes expulsions from the game. In the past

10 years, every season has had minor scandals ranging in severity from someone claiming they were bullying others to people not showing sensitivity regarding a houseguest's physical or mental disability. These minor scandals were never discussed on the show itself but were of great importance to the show's fanbase and active social media followers (Armstrong & Cesternino, 2023). These minor scandals were the catalyst for this content analysis since they clearly demonstrate a repeated pattern of people from various walks of life when living in a contained environment, using language in a negative way to simultaneously help their own game but also tear down others to showcase the power and social manipulation.

There have also been other major scandals that have had more severe consequences for contestants. When entering the house, the contestants sign several documents allowing the producer to have the needed items to advertise the show. In those agreements, the contestants are made aware of CBS's zero-tolerance policy, which, if broken, constitutes an automatic ban from production. This policy includes but is not limited to the following: no negative speech slurs, no engaging in illegal activity, and no initiating or encouraging physical violence (Paramount, 2023). Several contestants have been expelled from the game within the past 25 years for offenses such as utilizing racial slurs and initiating a physical altercation with another houseguest.

*Big Brother* is an environment wherein language is vital to a houseguest's overall success. This also means that language has a great power to hurt other players and can be used to marginalize or exclude different groups of people. This qualitative content analysis focuses on the seven properties of cultural language outlined in Cultural Identity Theory. In a review of season 23, alliances and counter-alliances are studied to demonstrate how they have made an

impact on society, culture, and overall viewership. Some of the groups have advocated for social change moving forward, which may shift the future of the game.

### **Reflecting Society**

The television show *Big Brother* is unique because it allows viewers to watch the players in real-time at all hours of the day. In the house where the players live and compete in an isolated setting, they are forced to craft their own society. Viewers can witness the complexities of friendships, alliances, and rivalries, mirroring the intricate web of human interactions in their society. The show highlights how societal norms and prejudices influence these relationships, producing both camaraderie and discord among contestants.

This show aids its viewership in understanding society's prevailing attitudes and stereotypes since it can witness how people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are treated. In the past 25 years, there has been little diversity in the winners of the show. The first African American winner, Xavier Prather, occurred in season 23. This was accomplished through a ground-breaking alliance named the "Cookout." (Klosterman & Seemayer, 2023). This alliance was made between the six African American contestants who came together to ensure there would be an African American winner. They were successful, and the alliance constituted the final six contestants left in the house. This alliance is a prime example of people aligning and using language to connect with each other and share their common goal of crowning the first African American *Big Brother* winner (Klosterman & Seemayer, 2023).

### **Discrimination**

Unfortunately, several instances of discrimination have occurred among contestants in the *Big Brother* house over the past 25 years of the show. These instances of discrimination have taken various forms, including racial prejudice, gender-based bias, and homophobia. Contestants

from marginalized communities often find themselves targets of derogatory comments, microaggressions, and exclusionary behavior. These incidents have marred the show's reputation and raised important questions about the casting process, contestant screening, and producers' care towards the contestants of the show. In the article "Marginal Groups and Their Role within Media and Society Spectacularization - the Case of the International 'Big Brother' Television Reality Show," the authors discuss a world wherein discrimination in reality television may become more frequent. "A time when the exploitation of homeless people, prostitutes, transgender persons, and other, even more, controversial marginal groups will no longer be incidental but a normal, everyday phenomenon" (Baric-Selmic et al., 2017, p. 66). In order to avoid this potential predicament on *Big Brother*, it is essential to understand the reasoning and circumstances behind previous discrimination on the show.

Ragan Fox, a contestant on BB 12, wrote an article titled "You are Not Allowed to Talk about Production" (2013). In this article, Fox shares a detailed version of his audition process and his final interviews before becoming cast on BB 12. He claimed not to hide his homosexuality in any of the interviews and shared his responses to producers asking him how he would react to possible scenarios, including showmances (where two people on the show begin a romantic relationship).

Gays on primetime TV intervene to alter many of the misrepresentative myths upon which homophobia exerts itself. More than any other time in TV history, gay people have been present in primetime and exert control over how their characters/selves are portrayed. (Fox, 2013, p. 205)



Since Ragan was the only person in the LGBTQ+ community cast on the season, there was no hope of a showmance for the 63-year-old, and yet Ragan was still asked leading questions by production about the attractiveness levels of his fellow houseguests.

Network reality shows tend to cast only one gay male character in a season, so it is rare to see sexual minorities involved in a romantic coupling (or “showmance”) or engage in any sex act that might be marked as gay. (Fox, 2013, p.193)

The primary form of discrimination felt by Fox had to do with the edit he received. “Out of the final seven houseguests, I was the only one who did not receive a friends-and-family segment” (p. 193). After viewing the edited version of his season, Ragan wanted more awareness for his minority community.

Kyle Capener from BB 24 received some negative media attention when he made comments on the live feeds about there being a Cookout 2.0 and attempted to create an all-non-minority alliance to evict all of the remaining minority houseguests (Donnellan, 2022). During the weekly live episode of *Big Brother*, the producers sometimes put live tweets on the screen for the viewers. There were many upset fans when no tweets regarding Kyle’s actions were shown on the live episodes. The article titled “Gate-Keeping in the New Media Age” shares how live television production acts as a gatekeeper in its power to choose what messages are aired live. “The study compares the text messages received by the TV station with the ones transmitted onscreen” (Enli, 2007, p. 47). After the season concluded, Kyle publicly apologized and shared his desire to further his education and improve himself.

BB 25 aired in 2023 and had several controversies. The most significant of these resulted in the expulsion of a houseguest for using a racial slur, which violated CBS’s zero-tolerance policy for hate speech (Simpson, 2023). This was the first time in the show’s history that a player

had been expelled for using racially charged language. In Luke's post-expulsion interviews, he shares his disappointment at being expelled and anger that another less drastic action was not taken (Ross, 2023). Although it can be difficult to understand or sympathize with a person who deliberately uses words to hurt or belittle others, it is worthy of study since it can help educate those who watch the program.

### **Cultural Influence**

Media representation can influence people groups both inside and outside the *Big Brother* house. Over the past few seasons, contestants have wanted to compete to win the show for monetary gain and to be an example for people who share their ethnicity, gender identification, or religious beliefs. In season 24 of the show, an alliance named "The Leftovers" became a fan favorite since it was comprised of people who felt not only left out of the game decisions but also the alliance contained all racial minorities, as well as members of the LGBTQ community. The alliance was started by someone with a bi-sexual orientation, included an active Muslim and the eventual winner, Taylor Hale, the first African American woman to win the *Big Brother* (Brockington, 2022). This alliance used language to represent themselves to not only their fellow houseguests but also America via the live feeds and edited episodes of the show.

The cultural influence contestants hold does not end when they are evicted or the show is over. Many of the contestants of the show have shifted careers to become social media influencers (Sim, 2021). This is a job wherein they can make a living by endorsing products on their various social media platforms. This allows them to continue sharing their story with the world through the medium of social media outlets. This is made possible for them due to the television show's popularity. As the former players move forward with their, they can continue

their usage of language to better educate their followers about their heritage, gender identity, or religious beliefs.

*Big Brother* is known for casting contestants from various ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds (Naut, 2021). The show has played a role in challenging traditional norms of representation on television due to its wide casting net. When the contestants are forced to work with people outside of their ethnicity, gender identity, and religious beliefs, they form a new society wherein information is a vital commodity, and the language used to share information can influence the outside world's perceptions of culture. Although this may occur in other places, the interactions of the houseguests are broadcast on a national platform.

### **Impact on Viewers**

When attempting to analyze *Big Brother's* impact on its viewership demographics, one must first understand the magnitude of its audience. Millions of people across the nation watch the live eviction episodes every week (Kimball, 2023). As the viewers enjoy the show, they become witnesses to the behavior of the contestants and become privy to information not all of the players know based on their limited knowledge of game twists and contestants' private confessionals. The viewers can reflect on what is going on in the game, which leads them to root for players they feel are playing the best game. This reflection can lead to self-awareness and self-reflection, encouraging them to contemplate their behaviors and relationships in the context of the social dynamics portrayed on the show.

While watching the show, the viewers may find themselves fostering empathy for players with differing racial, gender, and religious backgrounds than their own. This show provides viewers the opportunity to watch and learn about people with various backgrounds that they may not have encountered previously. The format of the show allows the viewers to watch the players

continuously, which may help people of different backgrounds see similarities between themselves and the contestants. This could lead to increased tolerance and compassion for people from different walks of life all through the simple watching of a reality competition show.

*Big Brother's* overall popularity has led to the formation of communities of viewers over its many seasons of competition. Fans from all over the country gather in online communities to analyze player strategy, create polls to share their favorite players and listen to podcasts hosted by previous players commentating on how the game is progressing from season to season (Armstrong & Cesternino, 2023). The viewership/fan base culture allows people to come together from all over the country and utilize language in a powerful sense of unity. At the finale of each season, one player wins America's Favorite Player (AFP). This is the contestant who got the most votes from viewers. This is a tangible example of how the game has encompassed not only the contestant's culture but also the viewership impact on the show. *Big Brother's* ability to provoke self-reflection, foster empathy, and build communities in its viewership demonstrates the show's profound influence on society.

### **Social Change/Advocacy**

The show sheds light on various social issues in society. The contestants have conversations broadcast to the country, focusing on specific racial, religious, and gender ideologies. One of the major ways the show has accomplished this feat is through its diverse casting. When people representing a variety of ethnicities, sexual orientations, and backgrounds are living together, there is a vast amount of potential conversational content. This can help foster conversations among the contestants that challenge societal stereotypes and promote inclusivity in their "house society." The viewing of this by America can help aid similar missions in real-time.

*Big Brother* is a show that accepts, highlights, and celebrates people in the LGBTQ+ community. The show is a place for people to share their gender identity and how they have been treated by their families, friends, and society in general. Their stories and experiences can help raise awareness about the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community and help to promote understanding among viewers. There have been examples of both language being used to build alliances between the people in the LGBTQ+ community and language used to evict strong players who identify as non-heterosexual. The language utilized by the contestants is critical in analyzing how *Big Brother* has been an advocate for social change.

The reality competition show *Big Brother* has changed the scope of reality television due to its social influence, primarily from its diverse casting and live-feed component. The viewers can watch the contestants as they attempt to navigate the house and make strategic deals and alliances to better their position in the house.

### **Research Question**

The study answers the following research question.

**RQ1: How do contestants on the show *Big Brother* use language to create and maintain cultural identities?**

To answer this question, this qualitative content analysis focuses on the cultural identity language in conversations in the *Big Brother* house. The paper showcases the language of contestants in alliances that were formed explicitly for the purpose of having similar cultural identities.

### **Definitions**

*Big Brother* – A reality competition show in which 12-18 (depending on the season) contestants live in an isolated house together, continuously monitored via cameras. The contestants compete

in competitions for safety and evict their fellow housemates until one player is voted the winner of the season.

*Head of Household (HOH)* – This is the contestant who wins a competition, allowing them safety from eviction for the week and the power of placing two contestants for eviction. They also replace any nominee with another contestant if one is removed.

*Power of Veto (POV)* – A competition in which six players (the HOH, two nominees, and three other contestants by random draw) compete to win the Golden Power of Veto. This ensures the winner's safety for the week and gives them the power to remove one of the nominations.

*Jury* – This is the group of evicted contestants who will vote for the winner of *Big Brother*. They are the last 7 or 9 (depending on the season) evicted contestants who vote live for the winner at the finale of the show.

### **Summary**

The television show *Big Brother* is a reality competition show wherein players compete, strategize, and utilize persuasive tactics to win a monetary prize. As the show has progressed over the past 25 years, the shift in gameplay is evident in the alliances and their social backing. Contestants entering the house now want to align with people who share similar gender and ethnic backgrounds. In this qualitative content analysis, conversations from specific alliances will be analyzed to demonstrate the power of language between groups of people in both similar gender and racial backgrounds.

This chapter focused on the introduction to the television show *Big Brother* and the impact of cultural identity language on the show. Chapter Two will explore the existing body of literature. This literature review will serve as a critical bridge between the initial conceptualization of the research and the broader scholarly conversation surrounding cultural

identity theory, ethics in reality television, the influence of social media on the genre, casting dynamics, dialogue forms, and alliances.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

This chapter provides context found in existing academic literature on cultural identity theory as it pertains to reality television. This content analysis aims to demonstrate the power of language utilized in the *Big Brother* house. To achieve this objective, the literature review concentrates on scholarly works related to cultural identity theory, ethics in current reality television, the influence of social media on reality TV, casting procedures, diverse forms and effects of dialogue, and alliances.

### **Related Literature**

#### **Cultural Identity Theory (CIT)**

One place wherein CIT is notable is Miladi's article on transformative pan-Arab TV, which explores the intersection of national and cultural expression within the realm of reality television programs in Saudi Arabia. In recent years, pan-Arab television has undergone a significant transformation, reflecting the diverse and dynamic cultural landscape of the Arab world (Mildali, 2015). Reality television programs such as Arab Idol have emerged as a powerful medium through which individuals from different Arab nations can express their national identities and cultural nuances. The article examines the ways in which these programs serve as a platform for participants to showcase their unique perspectives, traditions, and lifestyles, fostering a sense of cultural exchange and understanding amongst the viewership.

On a different dimension, one may argue that such programs may help revive the unifying spirit of the Ummah (global Muslim community). The type of dialogue and inter-connectivity taking place is such that it extends communication among groups from



all over the Arab world. Interaction of this kind among pan-Arab audiences is hard to take place in the real world. (Miladi, 2015, p. 112)

Furthermore, the article highlights the impact of transformative pan-Arab TV on the broader cultural landscape. By providing a platform for diverse voices and narratives, reality television programs contribute to the evolution of cultural norms and challenge stereotypes (Miladi, 2015). The blending of national and cultural elements in these shows entertains and educates, offering viewers a glimpse into the rich tapestry of Arab societies.

Another version of the popular singing reality television program is also referenced in the article authored by de B'éri and Middlebrook. In this article, the show *Canadian Idol* was analyzed to better understand the dynamics of overall Canadian national identity (de B'éri & Middlebrook, 2009). The article shares how Canadian identity was portrayed throughout the production of the show, focusing specifically on the judge's interactions with the contestants. De B'éri and Middlebrook showcased how production value can influence ratings, positive social media responses, and help cultivate a sense of Canadian nationalism.

Stereotyping is a significant factor of cultural identity in reality television, as demonstrated in Price's article, where information is shared regarding how reality television can contribute to Australian stereotypes (Price, 2010). It delves into the complex relationship between reality television and the construction of Australian identity. Reality television has become a pervasive part of the media landscape, and this article examines how it contributes to the shaping and reinforcing certain myths and narratives surrounding Australian identity (Price, 2010). By analyzing popular reality shows, the author demonstrates that specific reality television programs can only portray aspects of Australian life, culture, and values, ultimately influencing public perceptions and contributing to constructing a collective national identity.

The worldwide phenomenon of 'reality TV' is well entrenched in current Australian broadcasting. While the dominant feature of the genre is the portrayal of the 'everyday' through the inclusion of ordinary people or situations, there is an underlying tension between elements of authenticity and performance regarding program production and reception. (Price, 2010, p. 451)

Likewise, the article explores the potential consequences of reinforcing certain myths within the context of Australian identity. It raises critical questions about the impact of these representations on social cohesion, cultural diversity, and individual self-perception. The article examines the broader implications for Australian society, prompting readers to reflect on the role of media in shaping and perpetuating national myths and stereotypes. It also discusses how the construction of Australian identity in reality TV may cross with historical narratives, political agendas, and contemporary social issues, influencing how Australians perceive themselves and their place in the world (Price, 2010).

Another instance of reality television impacting Australia's national identity is evident in Potter's article, wherein information on specific children's programming is used as evidence (Potter, 2013). Potter discusses aspects of reality television, national identity, and the unique position of Australian children's drama within the media background. It critically explores the role of reality TV in shaping and influencing national identity, particularly in the context of Australian children's programming (Potter, 2013). The article investigates how reality TV helps to construct identity narratives, focusing on the implications for younger audiences. By sharing how children's dramas are privileged within this framework, the article highlights the potential impact on developing cultural values and national pride among the younger generation.

An alternative way to research identity in television is by examining gender and how their roles vary depending on the gender of the actor or actress. Scharrer and Blackburn completed a study that focused specifically on how men's and women's overall traits were exemplified on television in 2018. They focused on interviewing participants from the ages of 18 to 25 and asked questions from numerous television programs, which included both drama and reality programs (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018).

Results showed significant statistical associations between viewing sitcoms, police and detective programs, sports, and reality television and scores on the Masculine Roles Norms Inventory–Revised scale. Biological sex of respondent (which very closely approximated gender identity in the sample) moderated a number of these relationships, with positive associations between viewing some genres and endorsement of traditional masculine gender roles stronger for biological male compared to biological female respondents. (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018, p.149)

The researchers concluded that sports and reality television are areas wherein masculine traits are intensified (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). Although gender identity is an item that appears to be ever-changing, this study demonstrates a pattern of masculine traits in sports and reality television.

Television is a medium that is occasionally criticized for not demonstrating characters that can be relatable to their audience. In Chittenden's 2011 article, Chittenden analyzes a reality television show called *The Hills*, wherein Chittenden focuses on the main female protagonists and how their communication styles help to portray their overall identity on the show (Chittenden, 2011). In the analysis, Chittenden justifies how the interaction between reality television

participants is relevant not only to fans of the show but also to society since the show's primary viewership was young women.

Discourse regarding identity is a significant item to study in American television since it can affect the thoughts and actions of its audience. The article by Edwards in 2016 explores the concept of discourse as it pertains to the experiences of young African American women in the context of the reality television show *Love and Hip Hop New York* (Edwards, 2016). It examines the ways in which the show addresses or overlooks the concerns, aspirations, and challenges faced by this demographic. Edwards attempts to share the sentiment expressed by these young women, emphasizing their agency in rejecting or accepting media narratives that may not align with their lived experiences.

The show, which profiles the love and relationship experiences of its Black and Latino cast, overwhelmingly perpetuates stereotypes of people of color through a narrow lens of Black masculinity and femininity. This article uses critical discourse analysis to unveil the ways in which the show invites its cast members to create hegemonic representations of themselves. It also argues against the effects model in hip-hop scholarship—which dogmatically asserts that these types of representations are inherently harmful to Black youth. Using audience analysis, the article works to add complexity to the findings of the critical discourse analysis by inviting young Black women to talk back to the representations transmitted by the show. (Edwards, 2016, p. 274)

The article contributes to a broader conversation about representation in media and the impact of reality television in its attempt to shape perceptions and expectations within the African American community.

Anger is a powerful item displayed through cultural identity language on American television. Cossey and Martin (2023) critically examined the reality television show *Love Island* to discover if women were being portrayed negatively. Reality shows often depict heightened emotions for entertainment purposes, and this article showcases specific ways in which women's anger is framed, interpreted, and managed on the show. It analyzes the societal expectations placed on women to manage their emotions in a particular way, emphasizing the intersection of gender norms and reality television dynamics.

Using both critical discourse and textual analysis, we provide a comprehensive analytical investigation of how anger is shaped across the intersections of gender, race, and class, and how it is mediated through the genre of Reality TV. Our findings demonstrate moments in which women on *Love Island* do not conform to gendered, classed, and racialized "rules of emotion." Rather, we argue that they embody an abject femininity by latently expressing their anger in order to negotiate relational issues of power and subjectivity. (Cossey & Martin, 2023, p.1205)

Cossey and Martin argue that women were able to justly demonstrate anger on the show while maintaining the culture's ideologies of femininity. The article addresses the potential impact on viewers' perceptions of acceptable emotional expression for women, examining how these portrayals may contribute to or challenge existing gender stereotypes. The evaluation of discourse regarding emotion management is key when evaluating the overall reality program.

### **Ethics in Reality Television**

One central area of scholarly research is centered around the ethics presented on television. Examples can be utilized from all aspects of media; however, reality television is one aspect wherein ethics is of particular significance due to the ideology that reality television is

comparable to an audience member's physical reality of life. Ethical dilemmas are important to study on reality television since it is a place where people from varying backgrounds are often placed together to create interesting content/dialogue for viewership.

Farias et al., in their research, were able to demonstrate the intricate connections between popular culture, moral narratives, and the depiction of organizations within the realm of reality television by using a multimodal reflexive analysis (2021). The article examines how visual and textual elements in a reality TV show contribute to the construction of moral narratives and organizational portrayals. Capitalizing on a reflexive approach, the analysis scrutinizes the content presented and how these narratives influence and reflect broader societal values and perceptions (2021). The multimodal analysis of their chosen storyline allows for a comprehensive examination of how visual and textual elements work in tandem to shape the portrayal of organizations.

The practice of stereotyping individuals or groups is a subject that encompasses various areas of ethical inquiry. One example of stereotyping in reality television is *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, wherein an Appalachian family is transported to California and filmed as they attempt to navigate their new life (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008). Cooke-Jackson and Hansen share the dangerous results a television program may inflict upon itself if its production heavily relies on stereotypes.

Although stereotyping is inevitable, when media producers erroneously attribute characteristics of a minority of a group to the whole subculture, stereotyping becomes problematic. Stereotypes usually fail to reflect the richness of the subculture and ignore the realities from which the images come. This action can result in social injustices for individuals who make up that subculture. (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008, p. 186)

Cooke-Jackson and Hansen discuss the complexities of cultural sensitivity and representation in the context of reality TV production. It raises questions about the decision-making processes within the reality television industry, urging a reevaluation of practices that may perpetuate harmful stereotypes for the sake of entertainment (2008).

In the article regarding the ethicality of reality television, Mast confronts the ethical challenges inherent in the production and treatment of participants (Mast, 2016). The article critically examines instances where the pursuit of entertainment and high ratings may overshadow ethical considerations, revealing the potential psychological and emotional toll on individuals who become subjects of intense public scrutiny (2016).

This article proposes an inventory of key ethical issues emerging from the production of reality TV shows, with a primary focus on participants' rights/interests and program makers' responsibilities. The analysis is structured according to four categories of potential harm (intrusion, humiliation, misrepresentation, and appropriation) and different stages of the production process, integrating theorizations on media, documentary, and image ethics with insights derived from 48 semi-structured qualitative interviews with reality professionals and participants and several contracts. (Mast, 2016, p. 218)

Mast writes about the relevance of power dynamics between producers and participants, demonstrating specific instances where the desire for compelling narratives and engaging content compromised the dignity and mental health of those involved in reality television. The article prompts a reflection on the industry's responsibility to prioritize the welfare of participants and adhere to ethical standards that protect individuals from public exploitation (Mast, 2016).

### **Social Media's Impact on Reality Television**

Social media plays a significant role in the television show *Big Brother* as the contestants compete for the monetary prize; the ones who compete the longest and either win or are on the jury often gain popularity with the viewers (Littleboy, 2013). After the show's conclusion, many of the houseguests move into jobs wherein social media enables them to make an income (Nocera, 2023). The popularity of various seasons has impacted the game in various ways, as the American version of the show has increased in viewership every year (Kimball, 2023). During the show, the contestants will discuss their social media following before entering the *Big Brother* house and their hopes for future increased followers at the show's end. The emergence of social media platforms has profoundly transformed the dynamics of celebrity culture within the modern media landscape.

Celebrity *Big Brother* is a version of the show in which all the players are celebrities. The celebrity type can range from a movie star to an Olympic athlete (CBS). Katie Hopkins, a well-known English journalist, was a contestant on the fifteenth season of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK. Her goal was to change the narrative of her public persona through her actions on the show.

Social media plays a pivotal role in enabling celebrities to directly communicate with a vast audience, free from the constraints imposed by traditional media outlets. This direct channel provides a unique opportunity for celebrities to express their opinions, clarify misunderstandings, and interact with fans in real-time. Unlike in the past, where celebrities relied heavily on agents such as publicists and public relations teams to convey their messages, social media allows them to have unfiltered, authentic conversations with their followers.

Social media provides an outlet for celebrities in the modern media landscape to directly address a broad audience and express their opinion in a way that is not mediated through



another publication or production team. Many prominent figures successfully utilize services like Twitter to interact with fans and set the record straight when rumor and innuendo are published about them in the media; those celebrities whose brand depends on cultivating a negative public persona, however, have taken to using the social media platform as a means of attracting followers and remaining as part of the public discourse in a non-traditional manner. (Bleakley, 2016, p. 427)

Celebrity *Big Brother* is a medium wherein celebrities can employ their social media persona in a game format and attempt to stop the spread of malicious rumors; one significant platform utilized by celebrity houseguests is Twitter. This is a platform that can be utilized after the show is over to efficiently share their true thoughts on everything from their feelings regarding the other players to their specific edit to their fan base. In Bleakley's study, celebrities' strategic use of social media was analyzed to help the audience decipher how the power of social media discourse can change a celebrity's overall popularity.

The rise of social media as a tool for celebrity expression and engagement also raises pertinent questions about the blurred lines between the personal who deliberately cultivate a negative public persona. Instead of shying away from the public eye, the *Celebrity Big Brother* contestants have embraced social media in their public life. With unfiltered access to celebrities' thoughts and emotions, fans often form parasocial relationships, feeling intimately connected to these personalities.

The fans' response, itself a violation of the rules of the game, illustrates how viewers are not only absent third parties but may also consider themselves active participants in the relationships taking place in the house. Although actual contact between viewers and housemates is minimal, such rare incidents notwithstanding, we describe below how

various structural features of the BB format systematically encourage viewers to change positions in the mediated triad of public intimacy and to gradually feel like the preferred confidants and companions of their favorite contestants. (Kaplan & Kupper, 2017, para 24)

This quote highlights part of the uniqueness of reality television. While viewers are traditionally considered observers, the unique format of *Big Brother* allows them to become involved in the interpersonal dynamics of the game. This active involvement is not only permitted but subtly encouraged by the show's overall design. Although interaction between the viewers and contestants is limited, the structural features of the *Big Brother* format help foster a sense of intimacy and connection. Viewers can learn about the house alliances, drama, and more through carefully curated content and strategic editing. This transformation of the audience from passive spectators into emotionally invested participants in the lives of the contestants exemplifies the show's ability to create a mediated triad of public intimacy, where viewers, contestants, and the audience's collective experience are intricately interwoven.

In this mediated triad, fans' violations of the game's rules, such as through online discussions or social media interactions, serve as a testament to *Big Brother*'s immersive nature. By actively engaging with the show's content, viewers are not merely observing but actively shaping the narrative. The editors can create their chosen story arcs with the information presented to them. Bleakley's article shares how Katie was at the mercy of editors regarding her social media exposure.

This example regarding Katie Hopkins exemplifies the ethical dimensions of reality television production. The producers attempted to engage with their audience by showing information that fit Katie's celebrity status (Roberts, 2004), which was already established before

she entered the *Big Brother* game. The deliberate crafting of a redemption arc raises ethical concerns about the potential manipulation and exploitation of participants' personal stories.

In Rahman's article, he shares the details about a former season five UK Celebrity *Big Brother* contestant, Jade Goody (2013). She was evicted and had to face a severe social media backlash due to comments that were interpreted as racist by the live feed viewers. Rahman studied the language utilized in the show and how it was perceived. The article shares its analysis of the linguistic choices demonstrated by Jade and how it took time for her to regain her social media following at the conclusion of the celebrity season.

The power of social media in the *Big Brother* game is undeniable. Although the houseguests have no access to their social media during their time on the show, it is a major part of the aftermath of every season, and it holds many forums wherein viewers can express their thoughts and feelings regarding each houseguest. Social media is the bridge that allows the audience to be a part of the season in a limited capacity and feel included in the conversation they are watching occur live on a weekly basis.

### **Casting**

In the world of reality television, casting for shows like *Big Brother* involves careful consideration and strategic planning. Producers aim to create a diverse and representative cast that mirrors the complex tapestry of society (Dixon, 2019). This selection process often involves meticulous attention to various demographic factors, as highlighted by Kaplan and Kupper (2017). Their research emphasizes the importance of reflecting a wide array of social groups within the cast, encompassing differences in class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion.

The contestants are typically selected to reflect diverse social groups in terms of class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, although the sizable Jewish ultrareligious

and Arab Palestinian minorities within Israeli society tend to be underrepresented. (Kaplan & Kupper, 2017, p. 764)

One of the key aspects emphasized in the casting process is the need for diversity in terms of class. By including individuals from different economic backgrounds, the show can offer viewers a glimpse into the lives and struggles of people from various financial situations. This diversity adds depth to the contestants' interactions and allows for discussions and narratives that resonate with a broad audience.

The foundation of the *Big Brother* experience lies in the intriguing premise that its players start off as complete strangers to one another. This unique concept demonstrates the social experiment element of the show wherein having solid interpersonal relationships with the other houseguests is paramount. Regardless of their backgrounds, contestants come together in the *Big Brother* house without any preexisting connections or relationships. In this unique environment, they are thrust into a situation where they must interact socially, form alliances, and navigate complex dynamics under the watchful gaze of millions of other strangers—viewers from around the world who tune in to witness this social experiment unfold.

BB housemates start off as complete strangers to one another and must interact socially under the gaze of millions of other strangers. From this egalitarian starting point of strangership, contestants are scrutinized for how they manage their interpersonal relations. (Kaplan & Kupper, 2017, p. 766)

The fact that they are all strangers is an equalizer throughout the game. In the *Big Brother* house, contestants are stripped of their familiar social circles and support networks. They are forced to rely solely on their social skills, intuition, and adaptability to navigate the challenges

presented to them. This level playing field amplifies the intensity of the experience as contestants grapple with the uncertainties of forging connections with people they have never met before.

Under the scrutiny of millions, contestants in *Big Brother* are observed for their strategic gameplay and closely examined for how they manage their interpersonal relations. The viewers dissect every conversation, alliance, disagreement, and emotional moment. This intense public scrutiny adds layers of complexity to the interactions among contestants. They must balance their authentic selves with the awareness that their every move is being analyzed, making the social dynamics within the house a delicate dance between genuine connections and strategic calculations.

Ethnic diversity is another crucial factor in *Big Brother* casting. By including contestants from various ethnic backgrounds, the show promotes cultural understanding and inclusivity. However, Kaplan and Kupper (2017) point out a notable trend in certain societies, such as Israel, where minority groups like the Jewish and Arab Palestinian communities are underrepresented. Acknowledging this discrepancy is vital, as it highlights the need for increased efforts to ensure a more balanced representation of these marginalized communities in future seasons of the show.

Sexual orientation and religion are additional dimensions that play a significant role in the casting decisions for *Big Brother*. Representing diverse religious backgrounds allows for meaningful conversations on faith, traditions, and beliefs, fostering a sense of understanding among viewers with varying religious affiliations. The article *Big Brother: Conniving Lives as Public Events*, expounds that “These are fabricated situations that arouse a prurient type of curiosity; as we watch, we are dwelling on banal questions such as, ‘Will he admit he is gay tonight?’” (Mhando, 2002, p. 186). This type of casting allows the audience to learn about the players and then watch their interactions in a live format.

There are several steps in the auditioning process when attempting to be cast on *Big Brother*. The exact process will vary by country, and different rules may apply to different seasons. However, one item needed is a video exemplifying the applicant's personality so the show's producers can get an idea of how the contestant would look and sound on camera. According to Bourdon, a producer may also want to cast someone who can represent not only themselves but also identify with whole people groups.

Applicants explicitly define their participation in the game as a specific project deeply related to their quest for identity. But, in a strikingly global manner, reality games are related to identity politics. They have given the highest form of social visibility, prime-time television, to groups altogether neglected beforehand, especially by the European public service media tradition. (Bourdon, 2008, p. 78)

The casting process for *Big Brother* is a nuanced endeavor, aiming to create a microcosm of society in the *Big Brother* house. While efforts have been made to include individuals from diverse social groups, it is essential to remain vigilant about the underrepresentation of specific communities, as noted by Kaplan and Kupper (2017). "Reality TV supposedly places 'ordinary' people in 'extraordinary' situations and allows other people (including the crew) to watch them react" (Mhando, 2002, p. 187). This "transformation" from ordinary to extraordinary is accomplished through the completion of the show and is evidenced by the positive reaction from the viewers.

### **Dialogue**

In the realm of reality television, particularly in shows like *Big Brother*, the significance of verbal communication is paramount. Kaplan and Kupper (2017) shed light on the core of the show, emphasizing that its primary product is the informal sociability derived from

conversations. “The show's main product is informal sociability consisting of ‘talk for the sake of talking’; contestants spend most of their time in mutual small talk and expressive, non-instrumental conversations” (Kaplan & Kupper, 2017, p. 766). *Big Brother* relies on the interactions and dialogues between the contestants to create engaging content for the viewers. These conversations serve as windows into the participants' personalities, emotions, and social dynamics. “The viewers judge not only the authenticity of the contestants' performance but also their behavior toward their fellow housemates” (Kaplan & Kupper, 2017, p. 767). The informal sociability, centered around casual discussions and emotional exchanges, forms a compelling narrative that draws viewers into the lives of the contestants. Through these conversations, viewers gain insight into the complex web of relationships, alliances, and conflicts that unfold within the confined space of the *Big Brother* house.

Constant surveillance and an awareness that anything they say or do is potentially available to be observed and overheard by a TV audience provide a relevant contextual frame for a talk that occurs between the participants in the BB house. (Thornborrow & Morris, 2004, p. 248)

Moreover, *Big Brother's* emphasis on 'talk for the sake of talking' serves a dual purpose. First and foremost, it fosters a sense of community among the contestants, enabling them to form bonds and connections that are essential for their survival and success in the game. These conversations allow contestants to strategize, negotiate, and build alliances, shaping the course of the game. Secondly, this constant flow of dialogue keeps the viewers engaged and invested in the show, as they become active participants in the emotional journey of the contestants.

Another major item of note displayed in the *Big Brother* house is gossip. This strong form of dialogue wreaks havoc in the isolated space. Gossip in the *Big Brother* house is a

powerful social currency, shaping relationships and strategies among contestants. The constant presence of cameras and microphones means that almost nothing goes unnoticed, making gossip a risky yet inevitable part of the game. Contestants often use gossip strategically, sharing information to form alliances or create division among their competitors. The impact of gossip lies not only in the words themselves but also in how others perceive them, influencing trust and loyalty. Thornborrow and Morris analyze specific pieces of discourse that can be classified as gossip.

Gossip in the *Big Brother* house extends beyond mere strategy; it also reflects the human nature of the contestants. It demonstrates their emotional vulnerabilities and interpersonal insecurities. Gossip often becomes a way for contestants to cope with the stress of the game, allowing them to vent frustrations and express their feelings about their fellow housemates. The pressure cooker environment of the *Big Brother* house amplifies the impact of gossip, as emotions run high, and small pieces of information can quickly escalate into significant confrontations. This emotional intensity not only adds drama to the show but also provides viewers with a glimpse into the psychological toll the game takes on the contestants.

In these data, we suggest that the sociability in play within the BB house, in terms of complicity between housemates, is a relevant contextual frame for gossip episodes.

Gossip provides an occasion to share understandings through assessments that evaluate another participant's behaviour. (Thornborrow & Morris, 2004, p. 262)

Everyday discourse within the context of the show *Big Brother* is vital for furthering the social game. Gossip is one of the many vehicles that is used to aid the contestants in sharing both personal and game-related information. The interactions and conversations that take place in the house mirror the complexities of human communication, revealing the diverse range of



personalities and perspectives present in any season. These discussions often reveal alliances, rivalries, and shifting loyalties, providing essential context for viewers to understand the evolving alliances and conflicts within the game.

Wetherell showcases how different types of discourse are applicable when analyzing the specific words chosen by the houseguests.

One of the most enduring contributions of discourse research and socio-linguistics has been to demonstrate that everyday language use which once seemed too chaotic and arbitrary to study is, in fact relatively, and sometimes highly ordered. (Wetherell, 2007, p. 677)

Wetherell analyzed specific conversations to decipher if the linguistic choices impacted both the other person in the conversation and those who happened to overhear the conversation's content. The impact of discourse in the *Big Brother* game is paramount since all the discourse is televised for viewer entertainment.

Furthermore, everyday discourse is crucial in exemplifying the emotional and psychological aspects of the game. Contestants experience a wide array of emotions, including joy, frustration, fear, and vulnerability, which are openly expressed through their conversations. These emotional exchanges provide a humanizing element to the contestants, allowing viewers to empathize with their struggles and triumphs. As viewers witness the contestants navigating the challenges of the game, they become emotionally invested, enhancing the overall viewing experience, and making the show relatable on a personal level.

The ideology of discourse is further discussed by Daalmans et al. (2014) when they discuss prime-time television and how discourse changes form in separate genres.

In the entertainment and reality cluster (i.e., documentary, consumer program, crime show, talk show, quiz, reunion program, make-over program, and therapy program), the focus shifts away from the common good and the public sphere to the perspective of the ‘common man,’ who is represented in different roles (Daalmans et al., 2014, p. 190).

The role of the ‘common man’ is explicitly shown in the *Big Brother* franchise since the viewers can watch the daily interactions live. Daalmans et al. share how, through different televised mediums, a single narrative can be spread to an audience.

Dialogue is a major influence on the strategic gameplay of the contestants. Through conversations, alliances are formed, strategies are devised, and plans are set in motion. Contestants use their communication skills to manipulate and persuade others, creating alliances and sometimes engaging in deception. These strategic conversations are pivotal in determining the course of the game, showcasing how effective communication and persuasion can directly impact a contestant’s placement.

Discourse in any form operates as the lifeblood of *Big Brother*. Through these trivial or profound conversations, the show is furthered, and the rich tapestry of human experience is woven, captivating audiences, and highlighting the power of interpersonal communication in reality television.

### **Alliances**

The formation of alliances by players of *Big Brother* is crucial in every season. Forming an alliance is when two or more players decide to work together, share information, and keep each other safe to better their chances of winning the game.

If a participant can successfully forge a useful alliance, then that participant can strengthen his/her relationships within the house and, therefore, guard against nomination

by the other housemates. This can also help ensure participants' positions with the public. (Thornborrow & Morris, 2004, p. 264)

Alliances are common and necessary to win the game. Contestants are forced to vote to evict their fellow housemates, and alliances enable participants to consolidate their votes, increasing their collective influence over eviction. This strategic advantage empowers alliance members to protect one another. A good competitor needs to have social awareness to learn who would be a good ally for them and also choose someone they can compete with to win the game.

Alliances are a place wherein discourse is displayed and digested by both the contestants and the overall viewership. Alliances are formed primarily based on shared traits, hoping that a person with the specified trait will win the game. One prime example of this is the alliance “the Cookout” in *Big Brother* 23. In this season, all African American houseguests formed an alliance and successfully evicted the other ten houseguests before being forced to turn on each other. The Cookout Alliance showcased the importance of solidarity and collaboration in the game of *Big Brother*. Their unity and determination challenged the show's long history and sent a strong message to viewers about the significance of working together to break down barriers and overcome societal challenges.

There has also been tension when an alliance does not form based on shared traits or interests. For example, Michael, in season 24, was upset with Turner, who got him evicted due to his heavy stance on not voting out a member of the LGBTQ+ community (Donaldson, 2022). Some players outwardly share opinions and declare their intentions of never voting a minority individual out of the game but change their mind when they enter a situation wherein it could benefit their game. In the study *Big Brother: Merging Reality and Fiction: An Application of the Narrative Paradigm*, Eaves shares how the narrative plays a role in alliance formation.

As an essential component of narrative development, conflict plays an important role in the portrayal of Reality TV storytelling. The dangerous situations or scenarios engage the audience, allowing the viewers to invest or empathize with the characters in the story. In relation to the elements of conflict, the producers carefully orchestrate or control the production environment to heighten or intensify the narrative conflict or character situations. (Eaves, 2005, p. 92)

The ideology of narrative and how a story is portrayed to the audience helps one understand the significance of alliances and helps the editors craft their story arcs. The producers of the show “Create a narrative, a story that ‘fit’ or adapted to the audience and the houseguests, while in reality, it was an orchestrated narrative with little foundation in truth” (Eaves, 2005, p. 95). This is significant since the story arc or specific edit given to a houseguest can drastically change how the audience perceives the person during and especially after the game’s conclusion. In the article “You are Not Allowed to Talk about Production,” Fox shares insight as a past player on how the show is produced.

*Big Brother* is unique because the program is broadcast as it is being filmed. Producers on *Big Brother* are, therefore, not privy to who will ultimately win the game, nor do they know how other forms of game-related power will shift from one week to the next.

Constructing narratives on the set of *Big Brother* is hard work because story producers can only anticipate (rather than definitively know) how the competition might unfold.

(Fox, 2013, p. 191)

The uniqueness of "*Big Brother*" lies in its real-time broadcast format, a characteristic that sets it apart from the majority of reality television shows. Unlike pre-recorded programs, "*Big Brother*" unfolds before the viewers' eyes as it is being filmed, with no predetermined script

or outcome. The "*Big Brother*" producers face a distinctive challenge: they are not privy to the ultimate winner or the shifts in game-related power from week to week. This lack of foreknowledge places a significant emphasis on anticipation and adaptability, shaping the show's narrative in a dynamic and unpredictable manner.

The absence of a scripted storyline in "*Big Brother*" necessitates a different approach to constructing narratives. Story producers are forced to work with incomplete information, relying on their ability to anticipate the contestants' moves and strategies. In the study "Rigged: Ethics, Authenticity and Documentary's New *Big Brother*," the author shares the importance of editing and how one director with multiple camera angles can form an almost endless amount of content (Littleboy, 2013).

This confirmed uncertainty adds an element of both excitement and tension to the show for the participants and the audience. The narratives that emerge are more organic since they are shaped by the contestants' unscripted interactions and strategic gameplay. Producers must skillfully navigate the massive amount of footage to capture content for their story arcs while remaining flexible enough to adapt to unexpected developments, ensuring that the show remains engaging and compelling for viewers.

The real-time nature of "*Big Brother*" also has a profound impact on the audience's experience. Viewers become active participants, following the unfolding drama and forming their own opinions about the contestants' gameplay and alliances. This live, immersive format allows the audience to engage deeply with the show, discussing strategies, making predictions, and investing emotionally in the outcomes. The unpredictable nature of the game keeps viewers on the edge of their seats, enhancing the sense of immediacy and urgency.

Furthermore, the real-time broadcast format of "*Big Brother*" fosters a sense of authenticity. Unlike edited reality shows, where storylines can be manipulated and narratives crafted in post-production, "*Big Brother*" captures genuine, unfiltered moments as they happen. This authenticity resonates with audiences, creating a connection between the viewers and the contestants. The raw, unscripted nature of the show allows viewers to witness the genuine personalities and behaviors of the participants, evoking genuine emotional reactions and making the viewing experience more compelling. "*Big Brother* is Shakespearian. The show takes place on a stage, albeit a soundstage; includes heroes and villains; features dramatic themes like war, love, and loss; and may incite catharsis in its millions of viewers" (Fox, 2013, p. 190).

Overall, *Big Brother* is a prime example of a reality television show wherein producers and editors are required to make decisions based on events occurring in real-time. The show's ability to capture genuine moments and unscripted drama creates a unique and immersive experience for viewers and catalyzes its increasing global popularity.

As the literature review has provided a comprehensive examination of existing scholarship on Cultural identity theory, reality television ethics, social media's impact on the genre, casting dynamics, dialogue forms, and alliances, it lays a solid foundation for the subsequent chapter. Building upon the insights garnered from the literature, Chapter three now shifts its focus to the methodology employed in this study. This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches that will be utilized to investigate the cultural language utilization by houseguests in season 23 of *Big Brother*.

## Chapter Three: Method

### Overview

This chapter shares the method employed to analyze how language is utilized by contestants on the reality show *Big Brother* to shape and maintain cultural identities. Information regarding the type of research, coding, and overall instrumentation is shared. The chapter also explores the show's potential impact on viewers' perceptions of privacy, trust, and ethical behavior, highlighting the role of reality television in shaping societal attitudes.

### Research Design

This qualitative content analysis attempts to answer the following research question:

**RQ1:** How do contestants on the show *Big Brother* use language to create and maintain cultural identities?

The study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing content analysis and thematic coding to analyze episodes, diary room sessions, and discussions within the show *Big Brother*. By focusing on the language used by participants, this research aims to identify recurring themes, narrative/alliance structures, and cultural identity language that shape the discourse within the show.

Examining the discourse within *Big Brother*, demonstrates how the show contributes to the construction and reinforcement of social norms, stereotypes, and power structures in society. The game's strategic use of language, alliances, and conflicts may reflect and reinforce broader societal dynamics. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the show's potential impact on viewers' perceptions of privacy, trust, and ethical behavior, shedding light on how reality television can shape societal attitudes and behaviors.

### **Credibility**

The number of codes demonstrates the study's credibility. Over 1,000 moments of cultural identity language were coded in the study, which helped to avoid outliers and data saturation. Since the codes are the seven tenets of CIT, a deductive coding approach is demonstrated. The use of pre-existing categories for coding aids the study's overall credibility regarding the presence of cultural identity language in the episodes.

### **Context and Access**

This study focuses on season 23 of the American version of *Big Brother*. This season was chosen due to the impact of race and gender identity uncovered in the overall alliances in the season. Season 23 was a historic season as the first African American contestant, Xavier Prather, won the show (Klosterman & Seemayer, 2023). Xavier utilized discourse regarding his race and gender identity in his final speech, urging the jury to vote for him to win the season. This season was one wherein race, and gender identity issues were not only discussed on the live feeds, but the episodes themselves were edited so that the casual audience was aware of the houseguest's feelings toward racial or gender identity. The season was accessed through an active Paramount+ Subscription owned by the researcher.

### **Procedure**

The data was collected by qualitatively coding the episodes of *Big Brother* for cultural identity language. This was accomplished by analyzing the episodes of season 23 for aspects of the tenets of CIT. However, after the coding took place, there was an inductive component wherein themes emerged from the data. These are presented as sub-codes of each major tenet of CIT. These themes are showcased to expose the readers to the landscape of the coding results.



### **Instrumentation**

The methodology takes the form of a content analysis focusing on deliberate viewing of the season and analyzing cultural identity language present. “A content analysis is a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories” (Berger, 2011, p. 302). The primary tool utilized will be a comprehensive color-coding framework developed by Creswell to analyze the discourse in various alliances in season 23 episodes (Creswell, 2023). This coding scheme specifically focuses on instances where contestants explicitly or implicitly discussed cultural identification language. The viewings allow the researcher to meticulously document these conversations' frequency, context, and nuances, allowing for a better understanding of these factors' role in shaping alliances and relationships within the game.

The coding process systematically examines verbal exchanges, confessionals to the cameras, and diary room sessions. “A code in qualitative analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 5). The goal is to identify patterns of cultural identification language that were invoked through discussion as contestants strategically made decisions with whom to align to better themselves. The color-coding framework also considers the reactions of other participants, examining whether these conversations had a discernible impact on the dynamics within the house. One area wherein color coding will be used is to note distinct aspects of cultural identity theory. The seven properties of CIT are as follows: avowal and ascription, modes of expression, individual, relational, and communal identity, enduring and changing aspects of identity, content and relationship levels, and salience or prominence (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The instrumentation

strategy is to uncover the subtle ways these sociocultural factors permeate gameplay, shape alliances, and influence the broader narratives constructed within the show.

### **Parameters**

This study specifically focused on the episodes of *Big Brother* season 23. This was a season wherein diversity was shown, and celebrated houseguests were made visible to the audience. This season was picked for analysis in hopes of demonstrating the impact of cultural identity language by the houseguests. No post-show interviews were conducted for this research. The only artifacts are the episodes and clips that were originally televised. Utilizing the aired episodes helps avoid biases from the researcher as they cannot pick and choose what interview clips or reality news outlets to gather information.

### **Coding**

The *Big Brother* Seasons 23 was analyzed to ensure every element was carefully evaluated. Season 23 has thirty-seven episodes, ranging from forty minutes to an hour in length. In the coding process, notes were taken, used, and referenced in the research findings. The principles of CIT are carefully examined to help determine if the contestants utilized cultural language with their fellow houseguests and to the cameras individually. In the conclusion of the coding, all alliances were analyzed, and each aspect of CIT was addressed regarding the cultural identity language used by the houseguests in the episodes.

One of the major items noted in the research are all significant alliances and their progression throughout the season. This includes their effectiveness and loyalty to the alliance. The coding provides a general overview of the season and the main story arcs provided by the show's editing. The major alliances of both seasons will each be assigned a color, and notes regarding the players in each alliance will be highlighted in their given color for clarity.

Conversations wherein alliances were formed were specifically notated by color. The episodes were transcribed by Adobe Premier. The transcriptions of the episodes aided the researcher in analyzing significant artifacts, including, but not limited to, conversations regarding why an alliance was formed, any shared traits of the alliance members, and the inclusion/exclusion of other players who may want to work with the group. Analyzing these conversations was vital since it allowed the researcher to demonstrate how discourse impacts the contestants and society. The notes were highlighted in the same color as their assigned alliance. Notes on the formation are in italics if the alliance was formed due to a racial or gender commonality.

Overall change in houseguest interaction is critical when analyzing the impact of cultural identity language. This will be noted as the season progresses how and why the players changed aspects of their identity for personal or strategic purposes. Decisions, wherein the player changes their game solely based on cultural identity, will be placed in italics in the corresponding alliance color.

Special attention is given to alliances with six or more members since a significant teamwork is required to maintain social/strategic relationships during the game. In the notes from this viewing, there are underlined portions wherein each player in the notated alliances will be analyzed to showcase their specific discourse and how that impacted their overall game.

After completing the thematic coding process for season 23, extensive notes are provided on the season's overarching storylines and insights into how cultural identity language influences the formation of alliances. This analysis effectively demonstrates the significance of cultural identity language within the context of *Big Brother*. Since the show mirrors a microcosm of society, it further underscores the impact of cultural identity language present in

society.

### **Data Analysis**

The notes taken during the thematic coding were used to analyze the data. Each episode has ample information regarding not only the overall storyline of the season but also how data showcases the formation of major/dominating alliances. This process allows for the identification of critical linguistic elements contributing to the construction of story arcs and cultural identity-focused conversations. This amount of information allows the researcher to focus on the discourse televised on the show *Big Brother* to ascertain the power of cultural identity language.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The data analyzed in this study was taken directly from the show's televised episodes. The episodes were chosen so the author could not pick specific instances of cultural identity language from the live feeds. The examples of cultural identity language were present on aired episodes for audience consumption and reflection. However, reality television does not always portray reality, so some findings may be inaccurate. The ethicality of this research is most heavily emphasized in the deductive coding process.

### **Summary**

This chapter shared the methodology for the research. The type of research and context are provided to demonstrate the validity of the topic. An in-depth discussion of the instrumentation, coding, and data analysis were disclosed to provide clarity. The results of the thematic coding are found in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Data Analysis

### Overview

This chapter shares the results of the qualitative coding of *Big Brother* season 23. An overview of the season is provided for background knowledge, along with houseguest information for reference. Each of the seven tenets of CIT was utilized as a code and presented with tables and detailed data analysis. This chapter provides a plethora of examples of cultural identity language present in the episodes.

### Overview of Season 23

American *Big Brother* season 23 took place from July 7<sup>th</sup> to September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Over the span of 85 days, 37 episodes of the show were aired. On day one, 16 houseguests entered the *Big Brother* house, and they then strategically voted out someone every week until one was crowned the winner. This was a historic season as it was the first season of American *Big Brother*, where an African American won the game.

The 16 houseguests represented a wide variety of the American population. The ethnicities represented included Caucasian, African American, and Asian. The houseguests ranged in age from 24 to 40 years old. This house of young professionals created their own society which was broadcast live to the world. In the house they had silly conversations wherein they compared each other to various celebrities to more serious discussions about representing their cultural identities well in the game.

The cast had several major personalities, allowing comedic relief and drama for the audience. There are introverts, extroverts, morning people, and night owls who all move in and must adjust to living with opposite personalities. Every region of the United States was represented by at least one houseguest, allowing the houseguests and the audience to learn more

about different parts of the country. The 16 houseguests were forced to live in close proximity with people that may never have been in their spheres of influence. This allowed them to share pieces of their cultural identities with each other and the overall national audience.

The primary story arc of the season followed one alliance of individuals who emphasized the importance of ethnic representation. To ensure an African American houseguest won the game, all six individuals of color in the house created an alliance, the Cookout. This alliance was significant since each member of the Cookout partnered with someone outside of their alliance, and by doing so, they were able to evict people outside of their alliance week by week. The Cookout made it all the way to the final six without imploding. Xavier Pranter won the season by a unanimous vote. Table 1 shows the houseguests in order of show placement. The houseguests name, age, race, and profession are listed for further reference.

**Table 1**

*Houseguest Information*

Name	Age	Race	Profession
Xavier Pranter	27	African-American	Attorney
Derek Frazier	29	African-American	Safety Officer
Azah Awasum	30	African-American	Sales Operations Director
Kyland Young	29	African-American (bi-racial)	Account Executive
Hannah Chaddha	21	African-American (bi-racial)	Grad Student
Tiffany Mitchell	40	African-American	Phlebotomist
Alyssa Lopez	24	Hispanic/Latino	Swimwear Designer
Claire Rehfuss	25	White	AI Technical Architect
Sarah Beth Steagall	27	White	Forensic Scientist
Derek Xiao	24	Asian	Start-Up Founder
Britini D'Angelo	24	White	Kindergarten Teacher
Christian Birkenberger	23	White	General Contractor Assistant
Whitney Williams	30	White	Make-Up Artist
Brent Champagne	28	White	Flight Attendant
Brandon "Frenchie" French	34	White	Farmer
Travis Long	22	White	Technology Sales Consultant

### Alliances

Alliances occur when houseguests decide to work together to improve their position in the game. Many alliances were formed in season 23, and some were motivated by the houseguests' cultural identities. Table 2 shows the significant alliances throughout the season, who was in each one, and the number of people in each alliance. This table serves as a reference for future discussion on alliances, houseguest behaviors/decisions, and the overall house community.

**Table 2**

*Alliance Information*

Alliance	Houseguests	Number of Participants
Kings	Christian, Alyssa, Sarah Beth, Xavier	4
Queens	Claire, Kyland, Tiffany, Travis	4
Aces	Brent, Derek X., Whitney, Hannah	4
Jokers	Frenchie, Azzah, Derek F., Britini	4
Cookout	Xavier, Derek F., Kyland, Tiffany, Hannah, Azzah	6
Slaughterhouse	Brent, Whitney, Alyssa, Xavier, Derek F., Kyland, Christian, Frenchie	8
French Kisses	Frenchie, Tiffany, Azzah, Claire, Sarah Beth, Hannah	6
Royal Flush	Christian, Alyssa, Sarah Beth, Xavier, Claire, Kyland, Tiffany, Derek X	8
Mafia	Brent, Claire, Kyland, Tiffany, Hannah, Derek X., Whitney	7
Monarchy	Sarah Beth, Kyland, Xavier, Alyssa	4
Con Artists	Hannah, Tiffany, Kyland	3
The Gentlemen	Xavier and Kyland	2
Chrysalis	Christian and Alyssa	2

There were several alliances in *Big Brother* season 23 which were formed due to shared cultural traits. The Cookout was formed solely based on the shared ethnic trait between its members. The Gentlemen was created because its members shared the same ethnicity and sexual orientation. The French Kisses developed over the shared gender trait (excluding Frenchie). The alliances formed over a cultural identity tie are significant and will be featured in various codes.

This qualitative content analysis focuses on the seven significant tenants of cultural identity theory (CIT). The season was analyzed through the lens of CIT, so each tenant of the theory will be analyzed based on the information presented in *Big Brother* season 23. Each section of the analysis describes different aspects of CIT portrayed through multiple quotations from *Big Brother* season 23 houseguests. Several example quotations and the frequency of their code are featured below. Each tenant will be dissected to demonstrate the impact of cultural identity in the *Big Brother* house which was broadcast to millions of viewers who were able to witness and learn about cultural identities they may never have been exposed to before.

**Table 3**

*Codes of cultural identity theory*

Code	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Avowal and Ascription (AA)	<p>“I’m Frenchie, and I am a farmer from Clarksville, Tennessee. I’m a real-life Old McDonald” (Frenchie, ep. 1)</p> <p>“I spoke to Christian, it’s baffling since he is 23, but he is such a puppy dog! He doesn’t use his brain at all that much. He kind of lets other people make decisions for him” (Hannah, ep. 13).</p>	460
Content and Relationship Levels (CaR Level)	<p>“So just so y’all know, I checked with Derek X. We’ve already been on the same page. If one of you two wins, one of the Kings wins</p>	300



we got it! So the Kings and the Queens plus an Ace up our sleeve it's feeling like we have a Royal Flush coming into the next two weeks, so we should be pretty safe" (Kyland to Queens, ep. 7).

"Claire! Claire! What are you doing? You do not tell people who your targets are unless you know who they're aligned with. Now I've got to dig you out of this hole and convince Kyland that what you said was not actually what you meant" (Tiffany ep. 18).

Individual, Relational,  
and Communal Identity  
(IRC ID)

"I nominated Brent and Britini this week. My alliances want Brent gone because not only from a game standpoint is he a threat, but on a personal level, he seems to be rubbing people the wrong way. I nominated Britini as a pawn because Britini will serve as a smoke screen to cloud Brent, who is my actual target for the week (Xavier, ep. 9). 220

"I put Christian up, and everything has gone perfectly this week. Voting out Christian, the biggest competitor in this house pre-jury, is the best move for everyone in this game. We should see Christian going out the door on eviction night" (Derek X, ep. 16).

Modes of Expression  
(MoE)

"I'm the HOH! Oh, my God, I'm so happy! Then Julie offers me two weeks. I was feeling so froggy I came about a lightning bug's length from the butt crack of a donkey to taking that, but I couldn't do it. I couldn't put my team in jeopardy because of a gamble" (Frenchie ep. 2). 199

"I've been throwing competitions. I've made sacrifice. I've been a very team-first player. I'm just starting to get pissed and I'm ready to

screw-over Tiff's game" (Xavier, ep. 27).

Salience or Prominence (SoP)	<p>"I don't like meatheads. A meathead to me is somebody that's got them big old jacked up muscles, like cocky attitude, and suave with the ladies. The meatheads in the house would definitely be Travis, Brent, Xavier, and Christian" (Frenchie, ep. 2).</p> <p>"But first, they did it! The Cookout achieved their historic goal. Now the hard part begins" (Julie Chenn, ep. 31).</p>	171
Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Aspects of Identity (ACBA ID)	<p>"Let me first say on a personal level; I love you, Azzah. I love you, Kyland. On a game level I have made it clear since the beginning I owe nobody anything. I played this game solely for myself. So at this point, I cast my vote to evict Kyland" (Derek F., ep. 34).</p> <p>"I'm the outgoing secret HOH and it was perfect. I got the target, Sarah Beth, out, but because I won the Coin of Destiny last week and was the secret HOH, I can't be the HOH again. I have to throw this competition" (Claire, ep. 26).</p>	157
Enduring and Changing Aspects of Identity (IRC ID)	<p>"I'm actually secretly rooting for Whitney. If she can pull this off and take herself off the block I think it is pretty guaranteed that Hannah is going to go home, and that's awesome for me. It's exactly what I wanted" (Sarah Beth, ep. 12).</p> <p>"Derek X. is a huge obstacle for me actually getting to a final two chair. The longer he stays in the game the more dangerous he becomes. It really made me nervous to think about him staying even one week longer. I'm winning this game, not him" (Sarah Beth, ep.</p>	125

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21).

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This chart provides quotations from the episodes that exemplify the tenets of CIT. Each of the seven tenets will be further discussed to share the specific findings in the data. All of the tenets will be described and have a chart wherein the data is categorized into sub-groups to demonstrate common themes.

**Avowal and Ascription**

Avowal is how an individual expresses their views regarding their group identity (Gudykunst, 2007). This can include self-descriptive language, but it is more clearly demonstrated in a person discussing general characteristics of their group identity. Ascription is how others perceive an individual’s group identity. Avowal and ascription both refer to in/out-group identity (Littlejohn et al., 2021). The chart below highlights examples of Avowal and Ascription in the episodes.

**Table 4**

*Sub-Codes of Avowal and Ascription*

Avowal and Ascription	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Introductions	<p>“My name is Tiffany. I’m 40, and I am the C.E.O. of my own mobile phlebotomy service. I travel around to people’s homes and suck their blood. I draw blood for a living I definitely plan to draw blood in the B.B. game” (Tiffany, ep. 1).</p> <p>“My name is Xavier. I’m an attorney at a law business firm from Milwaukee, WI. I decided to become a lawyer because I have a strong desire to help people, especially people of color. I am single. I am going to try and avoid a showmance. I don’t see it being beneficial for my game. In the Big Brother house there’s</p>	32

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	usually some lying, some manipulating, and I'm a lawyer. It's not a good thing. I'll likely tell them [houseguests] I'm a bartender or I do a bit of modeling too. I'm a man on a mission. I know what I need to do, and I'm ready to do it" (Xavier, ep. 1).	
Conversations	<p>"Hannah is a super-fan and knows this game better than anyone. I think a lot of people underestimate Hannah and what she could be capable of. I really think Whitney could be manipulated" (Alyssa ep. 11).</p> <p>"Right now, an option I am considering is to put Christian up"          "Why?"          "Because this is the last time I'll be able to take the shot before he takes one at me. Christian, in this game, is the biggest threat to me" (Christian and Alyssa, ep. 15).</p>	309
Diary Room Sessions	<p>"As an artificial intelligence engineer, I'm used to using math to solve very complex problems. I just need to figure out the perfect velocity, acceleration, momentum, friction, to get the olive down my martini glass and into the toothpick" (Claire, ep. 11).</p> <p>"On the wall I made a deal with X to guarantee him safety, but then after we fell he tried to make a deal with me to guarantee his team's safety. Yo, Man this isn't the Big Brother Burger Joint. You can't come back and add to your order" (Derek X. ep. 14).</p>	119

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This code had the most entries throughout the season, totaling 460 codes. This result is not surprising due to the nature of the reality television format. Every episode in the show had

multiple entries of this code since every episode featured conversations and diary room sessions where the houseguests talked about each other and themselves. This code is crucial to the houseguests in their attempts to create and maintain their curated cultural identities.

In the context of the *Big Brother* house, the concepts of avowal and ascription become critical for analyzing the cultural identities of the houseguests. Avowal, the way one expresses their cultural identity group, is paramount for building alliances, navigating social dynamics, and ultimately surviving and thriving in the game. Houseguests who openly share their overall group perspectives can create a foundation of trust with other houseguests, which can lead to strategic collaborations and potential long-term alliances. In a setting where deception and secrecy are inherent, avowal becomes a strategic tool, allowing players to shape their narrative and manage their perceptions within the house.

Houseguests can be defined by their perceived strengths, weaknesses, or roles in alliances. Positive ascription, where individual groups are acknowledged for their strategic acumen or competitive prowess, can enhance their standing and influence in the game. Conversely, negative ascription may lead to isolation or eviction. Recognizing and navigating these attributions becomes essential for houseguests aiming to secure their position in the house. Avowal and ascription are utilized by the houseguests to share their cultural identity with each other but also to communicate their social prowess with the audience. This is best evidenced in the introductions of the houseguests to the audience and each other, conversations between houseguests wherein cultural identity is discussed, and diary room sessions where the houseguests are able to share their thoughts about the other houseguest's cultural identities directly with the producers/audience.

## Introductions

One of the major ways cultural identity was expressed through avowal and ascription was in the first episode, where all the players were featured in an opening package. During the first episode, each houseguest was introduced to the audience in a short clip where the houseguest introduced themselves and shared some items relevant to their cultural identity. The houseguests were introduced in groups of four, two men and two women. These short clips are crucial to the audience in learning the cultural identities presented by the houseguests. In these clips, they not only introduce themselves and aspects of their cultural identity, but the clips feature other important people in the houseguest's life. In viewing who is important to the houseguest, the audience can infer more information regarding the houseguest's cultural identity. This is evidenced by both the information the houseguests decided to share, but also the reaction from their fellow housemates.

The introductory clip also allows the contestants to share what they do for a living. This is a major item since what a person chooses for their work demonstrates their passions, talents, and priorities. Several contestants share plans to lie about their professions in the house to avoid being considered a threat to others. Some contestants do not want to risk being stereotyped by their fellow houseguests due to information assumed about them regarding their profession. In this season, five contestants lied about their professions. In Figure 1, the names of the contestants are listed, including the age when they entered the Big Brother house and the profession they had when entering the game. As the houseguests got to know each other, the audience also formed relationships with the players based heavily on elements of their perceived cultural identity.

In the competitive landscape of *Big Brother*, where alliances are formed, strategies are devised, and trust is a precious commodity, the contestants often view their professions as

potential liabilities or assets due to the impact of a houseguest's thoughts depending on their cultural identity. By lying about their careers, houseguests can strategically manipulate perceptions and control the narrative surrounding their social standing, intelligence, or even their potential role in the game. A deceptive choice in revealing or concealing one's profession can create a smokescreen, enabling players to align with certain houseguests or strategically position themselves in the social hierarchy. For example, the winner of Season 23, Xavier (X), lied to his housemates about his profession as an attorney and told them he was a bartender and part-time model. This intentional ambiguity can contribute to a contestant's ability to maneuver through the game without being pigeonholed or targeted based on their professional identity. The houseguest's reluctance to share their professions with others demonstrates the impact of cultural identity in society.

The second episode, the first non-live episode, showed all the houseguests sitting together in the living room, where they formally introduced themselves to each other. This is a crucial moment for both the houseguests and the audience since this is the first impression each houseguest gets to make to each other in a communal setting. They all gave brief descriptions, including their names, ages, marital status, and profession. During this time, several people lied about their professions to their fellow houseguests, but the audience was aware of the deception and was able to utilize that information when analyzing their overall strategy and cultural identity. This was accomplished through the various diary room sessions wherein houseguests shared their plans regarding their professional disclosure and how it relates to characteristics of their cultural identity.

Although only an introductory conversation, this moment makes a big impact on the strategic gameplay, but also clearly indicates the power of avowal and ascription. Every

houseguest listening to the introductions of their fellow housemates is using their cultural identity to comprehend what is being said start to rank them in terms of their threat level. Avowal and ascription are tools utilized by the houseguests in ascertaining if the farmer is stronger than the part-time model. The introductory statements shared by the houseguests are ones that focus heavily on cultural group identity.

### **Conversations**

The lifeblood of *Big Brother* is formed through effective conversations. As the houseguests attempt to navigate their interpersonal relationships with their fellow housemate's, conversations are used as the medium of conveying pertinent information to one another. These conversations could be from one player to another wherein they divulge information about their cultural identity or houseguests discuss others to persuade one another about the danger of certain individuals.

One example of this is in episode 11, where Alyssa states to her team, the Kings, “Hannah is a super-fan and knows this game better than anyone. I think a lot of people underestimate Hannah and what she could be capable of. I really think Whitney could be manipulated” (Alyssa, ep. 11). This is a conversation wherein houseguests are deciding who would be the best player to evict and avowal and ascription are key factors. In this case, Alyssa believes that the “superfan” group identity is very strong in Hannah and feels as though she could more easily manipulate other houseguests over a person who seemingly knows the game very well. Hannah, who introduced herself to the house as a superfan of the show, is being targeted solely based on her cultural identity.

Another conversation, in which Hannah, Whitney, and Brent avowal and ascription regarding group cultural identity, is held. In this conversation, Hannah states, “I spoke to



Christian, it's baffling since he is 23, but he is such a puppy dog! He doesn't use his brain at all that much. He kind of lets other people make decisions for him" (Hannah, ep. 13). This comment is surrounded by other comments about Christian's profession as an assistant contractor and how he still lives at home with his parents. The ascription of Christian's cultural identity is being discussed by his fellow housemates, and they assume he is easy to manipulate.

Avowal regarding the LGBTQIA+ community is something that Sarah Beth opens up to her fellow housemates in episode three. She states,

Growing up in a religious family, I am really lucky that they accept me, and they love me, even though I know it still hurts them. I struggle a lot with feeling guilty because I am BI [bi-sexual], and I could just date a guy and make things easier (Sarah Beth, ep 3).

In this conversation Sarah Beth shares some of her life choices and how her cultural identity fits with her family dynamic. In stating this she is demonstrating an aspect of her group identity to her fellow housemates and the audience. Conversations like these tangibly demonstrate the impact of avowal and ascription in interpersonal relationships.

### **Diary Room Sessions**

The Diary Room acts as a confessional space, allowing contestants to reflect on their experiences, articulate their motivations, and share their cultural perspectives. In the unscripted environment, contestants reveal their genuine selves, providing viewers with a deeper insight into the participants diverse cultural backgrounds.

The dynamic nature of *Big Brother* often leads to cultural conflicts and alliances within the house. The Diary Room becomes a platform for contestants to express their reactions to these cultural dynamics, shedding light on how cultural identity influences their interactions with others. For instance, a contestant may use the Diary Room to articulate how their cultural values

shape their alliances or create tensions with other housemates. Many of the Diary Room sessions had a houseguest either giving information about themselves or reacting to the decisions/actions of other houseguests. Much of this information dealt with in/out group references and how those references correlate to the cultural identity of the houseguests.

One major example of this is Claire's diary room session after Tiffany tells her she is going to nominate her for eviction because she is not a person of color. In this quotation Claire discusses the in/out group of people of color on the show and how it has resulted in her nomination for eviction.

It really, really sucks because I can't be that bad at her. Because I know that Tiff does not want to be part of this long tradition that's happened in Big Brother where people of color and people who are black go out. They're put against each other, and they're sent out. I know so many people won't get it. But I get it. That's why I can't fight her on this.

(Claire, ep. 27)

The Diary Room Sessions stand out as a crucial narrative device that unveils the cultural identity of contestants. Through genuine reflections, emotional expressions, and cultural revelations, the Diary Room enhances the viewer's understanding of the individuals within the house, contributing to a more inclusive and culturally aware television experience.

### **Content and Relationship Levels**

This tenant of CIT refers directly to the interpersonal relationship between two or more people wherein cultural identity content is communicated (Littlejohn et al., 2021). The exchange of messages contains information regarding cultural identity that houseguests interpret based on their unique life experiences. These interactions can either better or hinder one's relationship with others.

**Table 5***Sub-Codes of Content and Relationship Levels*

Content and Relationship Level	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Positive Interactions	<p>“What I want to do is level the playing field for everyone else. Let’s say I am able to take out two and then they take me out. I think this game looks a lot better for the people remaining”</p> <p>“Extremely, extremely, extremely convincing!” (Derek X. and Azzah, ep. 22).</p> <p>“Since my teammate is in power [Xavier] I think it is only fair of me to keep his nominations exactly the same. He has a plan, and I trust his plan, so I am going to do whatever I can to make sure it goes flawlessly” (Christian ep. 10).</p>	127
Damaging Interactions	<p>“My basic strategy for the game is to remove any variable that is unpredictable.”</p> <p>“So you are calling me an unpredictable variable?” (Kyland and Britini ep. 18)</p> <p>“Right now I’m pissed off! I don’t understand why Sarah Beth is up on the block right now. Derek X. totally blew up the Royal Flush. I don’t know why he is doing it. He could’ve made an easy decision this week by putting up anyone outside of the Royal Flush alliance but he didn’t” (Christian ep. 14).</p>	173

Positive and negative conversations within the *Big Brother* house play distinct yet integral roles in shaping the dynamics of the show. Positive conversations, characterized by camaraderie, support, and alliance-building, contribute to the social fabric of the house. Cultural

identity is a major factor in these conversations as the content discussed by the houseguests showcases their various cultural identities. These interactions create bonds between contestants and foster a sense of unity that can be crucial for strategic alliances. The fluctuating content and relationship levels between houseguests exhibit their cultural identities in a substantial way. Positive conversations often showcase the human side of the participants, allowing viewers to connect with their personalities, strengths, and shared experiences. These moments of positivity can humanize the competition, offering a break from the tension and drama and providing a more balanced view of the contestants.

The juxtaposition of positive and negative conversations creates a nuanced and dynamic viewing experience. It reflects the intricate web of human relationships and emotions, showcasing the highs and lows of social interactions under the unique pressures of the *Big Brother* environment. Ultimately, this balance between positive and negative conversations contributes to the show's richness, making it a compelling blend of strategic gameplay, personal growth, and dramatic storytelling.

### **Positive Interactions**

Strategically, positive interactions contribute to the formation of alliances and partnerships. Alliances are noteworthy since they further the interpersonal relationships in the house, impacting the houseguest's cultural identities. Trust is a precious commodity in the *Big Brother* house, and alliances often rely on positive interactions as a foundation. Houseguests who can maintain friendly and positive relationships are more likely to form trustworthy bonds, allowing them to navigate the intricate web of alliances, secrets, and strategic gameplay. Cultural identity is evidenced in positive interactions by how well a particular houseguest's information and or plans are perceived by their fellow housemates. This is clearly demonstrated in episode

thirteen, in which Tiffany goes around the house to members of the Cookout in order to share her “master plan” with them. In this plan, she outlines how each member should create a final two with someone outside of the Cookout. If people in the house think that two people are close, they will nominate both people for eviction. If the Cookout member is sitting next to a non-Cookout member, the alliance will always have enough votes to save whoever is sitting on the block on eviction night. Tiffany’s plan was well-received by the members of the Cookout and was utilized until the Cookout members became the only six houseguests left to compete.

Another major way positive interactions were shown on the show was in conversations where houseguests comforted one another when they were upset. They could be upset for several reasons, including but not limited to homesickness, worry about being evicted, their alliance members treating them badly, or having one of their allies evicted. When another houseguest takes the time to sit with them and provide comfort through word or action this can be valuable for their game and overall relationship with the person upset. The ability to provide comfort and support can contribute to a positive public perception. The importance of comforting other houseguests in *Big Brother* goes beyond simple kindness; it is a strategic maneuver that can enhance social bonds, influence gameplay, and contribute to a contestant's overall success in the competition.

When players strategize together, they can share valuable information and build their trust with each other. Azzah and Tiffany have a pivotal discussion in episode 22 where they discuss their specific endgame plans. In this conversation, they both agree that they want to see an African American woman win this show and would prefer that those be the final two houseguests petitioning the jury for the win. This conversation was positive for both Azzah and Tiffany’s game and allowed them to better understand each other as they both moved forward in

the game. Although they had previously not gotten along them sharing information and creating a final two alliance benefited them both.

Content and Relationship levels are not all serious game discussions. Some of the positive interactions between houseguests had very little to do with the game, and more involved their interpersonal relationships with each other. For example, in episode eleven where Xavier compliments Britini on her ability to roll a suitcase over large distances accurately. After Britini was not evicted, she could unpack her suitcase. She rolled it dramatically from one side of the room to another, and Xavier commented on her skills, which made Britini laugh and smile. This small gesture helped the two houseguests bond. Small items like this took place constantly in the house. Positive interactions like this provide moments of relief, humor, and camaraderie that balance the intensity of the competition-heavy format. Moments demonstrating interpersonal relationships help show the audience how content and relationships can overcome cultural identity differences and find common ground.

### **Damaging Interactions**

Even in alliances, damaging conversations can take place. One of these took place after Tiffany won her second HOH competition in a row due to a twist in her alliance. The Cookout was not pleased since there was an agreed-upon target in the game with whom Tiffany was very close. Kyland kept insisting that if he was simply aware of what was going on, he would have thrown the physical competition to her. A breakdown of trust occurred between two key members of the Cookout alliance, forcing them both to re-evaluate their game decisions moving forward. Although in the same alliance, which was created due to their shared ethnic identity, they ultimately disagreed about who should be in power and who should be evicted next. The bond between Kyland and Tiffany over aspects of their shared cultural identity was not powerful

enough to enable either of them to communicate clearly about their intentions regarding the competition. This damaging blow to their interpersonal relationship impacted not only the two in the conflict but also the other members of the Cookout. When Tiffany and Kyland argued and public actions of disgust were witnessed by the house, the members of the Cookout were confused and wondered if their common goal, which was heavily influenced by cultural identity, had shifted.

Frenchie, the first HOH, created several major alliances during his week in power. One of those alliances was named the Slaughterhouse (see Table 2 for details). After only four days, Frenchie began to suspect that the entire alliance was coming after him and had indeed already been targeting him, so he decided to abandon the Slaughterhouse publicly. He went from room to room, staring at people menacingly and saying, "I'm out!" or "Slaughterhouse is dead!". Frenchie started this alliance in the first week of his HOH reign and attempted to connect with each member on an interpersonal level to not be targeted. The public expression of leaving the alliance confirmed some of the suspicions of others about Frenchie's cultural identity as not trustworthy. This major decision of Frenchie was damaging not only to his relationships with those in the Slaughterhouse but also to those who saw him make seemingly irrational decisions and publicly out his own alliance.

This season started with the houseguests in four teams of four before moving to an individual game format. This created immediate alliances due to the twist in the game. Meetings between teams were common throughout the first few weeks due to their importance to the houseguests. If one member of a team won HOH, not only were they safe, but the entire team would be safe from eviction the entire week. As the teams would meet for private talks, they could sometimes damage their team's relationship with other houseguests. For example, in

episode eleven, the Kings team meets, and they discuss how every other team and America hates them since they still had all four members at the time. Their ability to continue winning safety hurt their relationships in the house due to jealousy, and they speculated that “America” or viewers at home would not like the same people winning every week since it does not make for good dramatic television. The cultural identity of each member of the King's team was on display for both the houseguests and the audience. The team’s speculation that the audience was not a fan of them exhibits their knowledge of the game and how they assumed their team's cultural identity was being portrayed on the show.

In episode nine, Azzah and Xavier have a conversation that is very damaging to their relationship. They are both members of the Cookout and work together for the majority of the game, but despite their shared cultural identity, the two fight about who should be targeted. They were both placed on different teams, so the individual priorities did not mesh when Xavier decided to nominate Britini (a member of Azzah’s team) as a pawn next to Brent, the house target. This conversation highlights a time when Azzah’s cultural identity does not completely align with Xavier’s. Although the two of them are both members of the Cookout and share an ethnic identity, their cultural values differ. Azzah told Xavier that she did not feel like a valued member of the Cookout since she had not been included in discussions about potential Cookout targets and strategic conversations where options for nominations were weighed for both pros and cons.

Conversations between houseguests occur when they are talking about targeting someone. This is a regular occurrence as in a normal week, one houseguest is evicted. One time of particular note is a conversation between the Aces team without Brent present. They discuss the benefits of Brent being evicted and how to talk to him moving forward without giving him



any real information on how he is being targeted. This conversation is especially harmful to Brent's game since the people plotting his eviction are his teammates who have an incentive to keep him safe. It demonstrates aspects of his teammates (Derek X, Whitney, and Hannah) cultural identities that they would be willing to help evict someone who could potentially keep them safe moving forward. Brent's speech and actions impacted his relationship with the whole house, which will be further discussed in the individual, relational, and communal identity code.

Another pivotal conversation in the game occurred when Kyland was HOH. He had a significant conversation with Derek F. regarding the current twist in the game and how it could change his nominations. Kyland continues to promise safety to Derek F. and all other Cookout members but is worried about the twist wherein four people could become safe pending Power of Veto results. In this conversation, Derek F. flat-out asks Kyland who his new target would be if too many people won safety, and Kyland's refusal to give him a straight answer is a clear indicator that Kyland does not trust Derek F. fully. Although the two men are members of the Cookout alliance and share similar ethnic identities, the behavioral aspects of their cultural identities are in contrast. His actions showcase his ascription of Derek F. and how his tendency to tell everyone information has led to conversations where no information is divulged.

When analyzing the damaging interactions of the houseguests, it is important to consider the fact that most of them complain about being mentally exhausted at least once a day. The confined environment of the *Big Brother* house intensifies emotions, and negative interactions can contribute to stress, anxiety, and a general decline in mental well-being. Contestants may find it challenging to navigate the social complexities of the game when faced with hostility or conflict, impacting their ability to strategize effectively. When houseguests complain about their lack of energy or snap at people in conversation about something not game-related, such as not

doing their dishes, it demonstrates how their relationships can be greatly impacted by their psychological mindset. When the houseguests are alert and eager to play the game, conversations are often less damaging than those forced on people when they are over-tired and angry at power decisions. When houseguests have damaging conversations, it affects how they relate to people with different cultural identities and impacts how the viewers may associate specific cultural identities in their spheres of influence. This show aired live multiple times a week and is available on various streaming platforms. It may be the first time a person is exposed to people with different cultural identities. This show is a tangible demonstration of how people with diverse backgrounds and cultural identity traits can co-exist. When people of diverging cultural identities have problems getting along in the house, it may convey that it would be difficult for the audience to interact with people of differing cultural identities.

### **Individual, Relational, and Communal Identity**

This tenant of CIT focuses specifically on three aspects of cultural identity. Individual identity is based on experiences; relational identity is based on interactions; and communal identity is based on what is acceptable in the creation of a community (Gudykunst, 2007). For the *Big Brother* houseguests, communal identity is a critical part of cultural identity. While filming the show, the houseguests create their own communal identity separate from their birthed cultural identities. This section of the research exemplifies how a houseguest's newly founded communal identity and their origin cultural identity can work parallel to each other. The items found in this code demonstrate how one's community norms impact one's relationships with others in the game and those with the audience watching on television.

### **Table 6**

*Sub-Codes of Individual Relational and Communal Identity*

Individual, Relational, and Communal Identity	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Best for Community	<p>“I put Christian up, and everything has gone perfectly this week. Voting out Christian, the biggest competitor in this house pre-jury is the best move for everyone in this game. We should see Christian going out the door on eviction night” (Derek X, ep. 16).</p> <p>“It’s funny Derek X. thought that by taking out Christian he would be taking out the biggest competitor in the game. What he doesn’t realize that the biggest competitor is still in this house, and it’s the main person who has targeted him since Christian went out the door. See you later!” (Xavier, ep. 22).</p>	97
Best for Alliance Relationships	<p>“What no sympathy vote!” (Whitney, ep. 13).</p> <p>“I’m in a tough position. I have my best friend, Azzah. Who I have been on the same team with and working with since the beginning. Then I have my showmance/friend Kyland so I don’t which deal I am going to break” (Derek F. ep. 34).</p>	123

Individual, relational, and communal identities play a critical role in shaping the dynamics of the *Big Brother* house, contributing to the overall narrative and strategic landscape of the game. Every houseguest enters the house with a unique individual identity, containing aspects of their personality, background, and personal motivations. This individual identity becomes a significant factor in how they are perceived by both fellow housemates and the viewing audience. Contestants often craft and project-specific aspects of their individual identity to align with their game decisions and form strategic alliances.

Relational identity comes into play as houseguests form connections and alliances within the house. These relationships define how contestants collaborate, strategize, and navigate the complex social structure of the game. Relational identity is not only about how one is individually perceived but also about the roles and positions individuals hold within the context of alliances or partnerships. Strategic gameplay often involves managing relational identities to ensure trust and loyalty while pursuing personal objectives.

Communal identity emerges as the house evolves into a microcosm of society. The communal identity encompasses the collective culture, norms, and values established by the group of houseguests. Communal identity featured the most coded entries due to how decisions impact nearly every person in the house. Houseguests must balance their individual authenticity with their relational and communal roles. Striking this balance requires strategic game decisions, emotional stability, and the ability to adapt to unexpected twists. The interplay of individual, relational, and communal identity in the *Big Brother* house is evidenced through decisions made for the betterment of the community and decisions made for the betterment of alliances. The decisions of the community exemplify the behavioral norms of the houseguest's cultural identities. These categories encapsulate the overall ideologies of the Individual, Relational, and Communal Identity code.

### **Best for Community**

As the houseguest maneuvered their way throughout the season, there were some items that appeared to be best for the majority of the house, therefore making it the ideal decision for their community. Cultural identity language present amongst the houseguests is critical when it appears as they make decisions best for their game, but also for their interpersonal relationships. One prime example of this is when Derek X. was HOH. He decided to make a move that he

argued was not only best for his game, but best for the entire house.

I put Christian up, and everything has gone perfectly this week. Voting out Christian, the biggest competitor in this house pre-jury is the best move for everyone in this game. We should see Christian going out the door on eviction night (Derek X, ep. 16).

Derek X. wanted to evict a strong competitor and Christian was someone who had already won a few competitions and was very physically and socially strong. Derek X. was aligned with Christian in the Royal Flush alliance, but he decided to backdoor (nominate him for eviction after the POV did not allow him to compete for his own safety) him in order to help the community evict a strong houseguest.

In episode 18, a twist occurs where there will be two POVs for the week. To win the second power of veto, the houseguests are asked to bet on the competitors. During that week, the communal consensus was that Derek X. be evicted since he had won several competitions already and would be hard to argue against in a final two speech. The twist gave the houseguests the opportunity to bet on players who would use the power and allow Sarah Beth the current HOH to backdoor Derek X. When the houseguests placed their bets on which competitors, they thought would win the competition, they were tangibly showing who they thought would be better to win the power and keep the community goal of backdooring Derek X a reality.

The *Big Brother* community is affected by many items, but one of special significance is the Have Nots. A Have Not is a houseguest (community member) who is only allowed to eat slop, take cold showers, and sleep in the Have Not room where the beds are uncomfortable. The houseguests of the season create their own community in the house, and living conditions are something that impacts their community. During most weeks, the Have Nots are chosen by the HOH, but sometimes they can be chosen by people who do poorly in competitions. In episode

22, the houseguests rejoiced when Julie announced that there would be no Have Nots for the week. This piece of news spread joy by the community since it showcased how the houseguests were all able to celebrate together and have the opportunity to share the same meal. Meals are a prime opportunity for cultural identity language to be spread in the house and overheard by the audience. This decision from production was best for the entire community spirit and allowed the houseguests to focus more on the game rather than individual punishments.

### **Best for Alliance Relationships**

Alliances are a crucial part of any successful houseguest's strategic game. They are also an integral part of the communal identity formed by the houseguests in each season. This season, the community of players fostered a nurturing environment for alliances to grow and target others who would be beneficial for their survival. In episode 23, after Tiffany wins the HOH, all the women of the Cookout are shown dancing and jumping in an excited manner since they know they are safe for the week. This small yet significant action shown to the audience highlights the impact of cultural identity in an alliance setting. The Cookout women are thrilled that Tiffany won the HOH because not only will they not be nominated for eviction, but the communal strategy amongst the Cookout members will also be focused on how to make the game better for the women of the alliance. When a large alliance is dominating the game, not every person in the alliance is prioritized, and once Tiffany won, the women assume that they will be able to aid her in making powerful decisions.

The community of the *Big Brother* season can also be affected by the number of votes to evict. If the house or community has decided who they plan to evict, some houseguests may choose to cast a sympathy vote for the person leaving so they are not evicted by a unanimous vote. In episode thirteen, when Whitney is evicted unanimously, she exclaims, "What no

sympathy vote!” (Whitney, ep. 13). After hearing she was evicted Whitney was surprised that no one in the community of ten votes to evict her wanted to cast a sympathy vote for her. This was done based on the major alliances in the house all agreeing that she was the better option to evict that week.

In episode 34, Derek F. is forced to make a decision on whether to keep someone he has a strong communal tie with or someone he has a final two deal with.

I’m in a tough position. I have my best friend, Azzah. Who I have been on the same team with and working with since the beginning. Then I have my showmance/friend Kyland so I don’t which deal I am going to break (Derek F. ep. 34).

This Diary Room segment allows the audience to fully understand Derek F’s gameplay and reasoning for his ambivalence. Ultimately, Derek F. decided to keep Azzah, the person with whom he had been aligned the longest. This decision demonstrates Derek F’s cultural identity in the priorities he considered in making a decision that impacted the remaining members of the *Big Brother 23* community.

### **Modes of Expression**

This tenant of CIT describes how people can identify symbols about others and use that to identify them. This includes but is not limited to, beliefs, names, labels, and behavioral norms (Littlejohn et al., 2021). This is best evidenced in the ideology of stereotyping, wherein a person judges others based on overarching characteristics.

#### **Table 7**

##### *Sub-Codes of Modes of Expression*

Modes of Expression	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Stereotypes	“I’m a big guy, so a lot of people don’t think I can move, but I can move baby! I’m black, I’m gay, I represent everything that a Big	64

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Brother winner should have” (Derek F. ep. 1).

“I live in an immigrant household, where they [his parents] grew up in China, and between China and the US there are such different cultural values. In China some of the most important things are money and status. Then in Western culture if you ask anyone what’s important they say happiness. There’s a huge disconnect culturally between me and my parents, and I do not think that gap can ever be bridged...When you only see Asian Americans in popular culture represented in specific ways, you feel as if you have to stereotype yourself. A big reason for me coming on Big Brother was to provide an alternate image that people could look at” (Derek X, ep. 11).

The Cookout

“Everyone is here for a reason. Think about the year we just had with the whole Black Lives Matter Movement. It is important for us [talking to Azzah and Tiffany] to be here and stick together” (Derek F., ep. 3). 135

“I know from my own experience growing up that when you see someone who looks like me excel of achieve something, that can have a positive impact. It could inspire a kid to achieve whatever it is they want to do. So being on the block with a chance to go home the first week and have the ability to make that impact cut short is something that I’m pretty disappointed, concerned, and sad about that potential” (Kyland, ep. 2).

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This code encompasses ways individuals express their cultural identity, including names, labels, and norms. In the context of the *Big Brother* house, where diverse individuals with unique



backgrounds come together, understanding and navigating modes of cultural expression become essential for effective communication, building alliances, and managing conflicts. Modes of Expression are best evidenced when houseguests stereotype each other and through the behavior of the Cookout alliance.

### **Stereotypes**

Contestants entering the *Big Brother* house are acutely aware of the stereotypes and preconceived notions associated with certain professions. To break free from these stereotypes or avoid becoming a target based on their perceived income or education level, contestants may opt to lie about their professions. By doing so, they aim to be seen as individuals rather than representatives of a particular career, thereby leveling the playing field and fostering a more genuine connection with their fellow housemates.

*Big Brother* often features contestants from various cultural backgrounds, presenting an opportunity to challenge and dispel stereotypes. Diary Room Sessions become a crucial tool for contestants to address and navigate these stereotypes. By sharing personal stories and perspectives, participants can break down preconceived notions and provide the audience with a more nuanced understanding of their cultural identity. This is evident in episode two, where Brent is able to talk to Frenchie about his father's death and how that affected him. Frenchie realizes that he has misjudged Brent since he had been referring to him as a "meathead". Frenchie and the audience were able to listen to a piece of Brent's life story to better understand the player behind the muscular physique.

Certain houseguests may engage in self-stereotyping discussions. In Derek F's introduction segment, he stated, "I'm a big guy, so a lot of people don't think I can move, but I can move baby! I'm black, I'm gay, I represent everything that a *Big Brother* winner should

have” (Derek F. ep. 1). In his opening statement to the audience, he discloses personal information about himself but also dispels stereotypes about bigger men, gay men, and black men. He utilizes features of his cultural identity throughout his game and won second place due to his strength in forging and maintaining interpersonal relationships. He did not win a single competition over the course of the game but instead was forced to rely on his words and actions to move forward.

Part of breaking down stereotypes is when houseguests share their life stories with other houseguests. In episode 11, several of the houseguests talk about their family life and Derek X says,

I live in an immigrant household, where they [his parents] grew up in China, and between China and the US there are such different cultural values. In China some of the most important things are money and status. Then in Western culture if you ask anyone what’s important they say happiness. There’s a huge disconnect culturally between me and my parents, and I do not think that gap can ever be bridged...When you only see Asian Americans in popular culture represented in specific ways, you feel as if you have to stereotype yourself. A big reason for me coming on *Big Brother* was to provide an alternate image that people could look at” (Derek X, ep. 11).

Here, Derek X talks about how he felt as though he stereotyped himself and why he wants to change the narrative of Asian Americans on television in the future.

In this season, there were three parents competing, which were Frenchie, Whitney, and Tiffany. Each one of these houseguests was shown multiple times talking about their children. The messaging included them saying they missed their kids and how they were playing the game to give their children a better future. The two women with children were single moms, so they

often talked about needing the money to better support themselves and their children. *Big Brother* was an outlet for them to talk about their lives with a national audience.

### **The Cookout**

At its core, the Cookout Alliance was a strategic powerhouse, bringing together six individuals who recognized the importance of working collaboratively toward a common goal, crowning the first African American winner of the show. The members of the Cookout are Tiffany, Xavier, Kyland, Derek F., Azah, and Hannah. They strategically aligned themselves to ensure that at least one member of their alliance would reach the final six. This strategic unity demonstrated a level of cohesion rarely seen in the *Big Brother* house, as the Cookout successfully navigated alliances, competitions, and evictions to advance their shared agenda.

Their formation was a central point in the season. Without this alliance, other players could have wielded power and created a different outcome. The Cookout formed by day two in the house. Derek F. states, “Everyone is here for a reason. Think about the year we just had with the whole Black Lives Matter Movement. It is important for us [talking to Azzah and Tiffany] to be here and stick together” (Derek F., ep. 3). This is the catalyst for the alliance formation conversation, which eventually became named the Cookout. This alliance was an odd one since all the members did not meet in the same room for weeks to keep suspicion away from their overall goals.

Each of the six houseguests in the Cookout had to play their own social games. Each player had to create and maintain their cultural identity in the house while attempting to live and compete against people who did not share similar values. Many of the Cookout members became super close with non-Cookout houseguests and were forced to watch their alliance evict one of their closest friends in the game. Tiffany had the unfortunate task of nominating her best friend

in the house, Claire to ensure the Cookout made it to the final six.

The journey of the Cookout was not without its challenges. Each member faced the delicate task of balancing personal relationships with strategic gameplay, often leading to difficult decisions and emotional moments. Not all the Cookout members got along. Derek F. and Tiffany constantly talked badly about and to other houseguests and had several fights. The only reason they worked together was due to their goal to have an African American winner. The alliance had to carefully manage its public image while maintaining its focus on the overarching goal of advancing its collective presence in the game. The ability of the Cookout members to navigate these challenges with grace and resilience highlighted their individual strengths and the strength of their alliance as a whole.

### **Saliency or Prominence**

This tenant of CIT focuses on how an individual's cultural identity stands out from others or attracts the most attention from other people (Gudykunst, 2007). This is made more obvious when people of different cultural perspectives interact.

### **Table 8**

#### *Sub-Codes of Saliency or Prominence*

Saliency of Prominence	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
The Outliers	<p>“Hello Brent, this is your HOH speaking. We have arrived at our destination. Please gather all your belongings and exit to the left, where you will meet Julie Chen-Moonvez. Thank you for flying Big Brother Airlines” (Xavier, ep 9).</p> <p>“Listen, Frenchie, this is personal. You put my girl Alyssa up. I need to make sure she is safe. Frenchie wants to go fishing. Well guess what buddy? I'm the great white shark” (Christian ep. 2).</p>	106

Humorous Moments	<p>“Alyssa, you’re from Florida, the sunshine state, which is ironic considering you’re so dim!” (Zingbot, ep. 27).</p> <p>“Did you just put beans on your pasta? What in the world is that? Please look at the plate. Show it again. Look at the darn plate. Girl, what are you doing? Do you need help? She is something else,” (Derek F., ep 35).</p>	65
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Salience, or the prominence and relevance of certain aspects of a person's identity or behavior, plays a crucial role in the *Big Brother* game. More importantly, it also clearly indicates each houseguest's cultural identity. When a person stands out in the house and in the show, it highlights key parts of their cultural identity for the audience. The strategic aspect of salience is evident in how houseguests choose to present themselves. Contestants often emphasize certain traits, skills, or narratives that they believe will make them more memorable or likable to both their fellow housemates and the audience. These salient aspects can become defining features of a contestant's identity within the game, influencing alliances, conflicts, and their chances of winning. Season 23 houseguests best demonstrated the ideology of salience of prominence in outlier statements and humorous moments.

### **Outliers**

Outlier statements in the *Big Brother* game can have profound and lasting effects on a contestant's standing within the house. An outlier statement is one that deviates significantly from norms or expectations, and, in the context of the show, it can be a bold move, a controversial opinion, or a surprising revelation. Such statements often have a ripple effect, influencing alliances, shaping perceptions, and impacting the overall dynamics of the game. These are moments when the houseguests demonstrate salience by standing out to either their

fellow housemates or the audience. One example of this is when Frenchie's targets, "I don't like meatheads. A meathead to me is somebody that's got them big old jacked up muscles, like cocky attitude, and suave with the ladies. The meatheads in the house would definitely be Travis, Brent, Xavier, and Christian" (Frenchie, ep. 2). Here, Frenchie clearly states who he wants out of the house, and he is standing out for wanting a physical threat "meathead" evicted. Frenchie's salience in his desire to evict a "meathead" demonstrates behavioral stereotypes present in his cultural identity. His goal in evicting a "meathead" is more than strategic, as it allows the audience to glean information about Frenchie's ideals.

Some of the houseguests stood out to the audience and their fellow housemates based on their professions. Although in some cases houseguests are nervous to share their true profession in an attempt not to be stereotyped, sometimes a person's profession can make them stand out for other reasons. Brent is a prime example of this since many of the houseguests were featured in Diary Room segments, making fun of Brent's game utilizing flight attendant puns and or language. For example, Xavier stated, "Hello Brent, this is your HOH speaking. We have arrived at our destination. Please gather all your belongings and exit to the left, where you will meet Julie Chen-Moonvez. Thank you for flying *Big Brother Airlines*" (Xavier, ep 9). This and many other comments made about his job show how his cultural identity is being impacted by his salience as a flight attendant.

Another major outlier in this season of the game was when women would win competitions. Only five of fifteen HOH competitions were won by women. When a woman would enter power, other women would celebrate since they knew they may not be the main targets for the week. This was made clear by dance parties in the bedrooms and discussions about who the biggest threats were in the house. This is a practical demonstration of salience as

the women stood out primarily for not winning competitions. When a woman did win, however, they also stood out and their cultural identity was tied to their gender alliances. This was slightly overshadowed by the Cookout alliance, and their need to ensure the Cookout males' safety. Overall, when a woman won a competition, there were more celebrations and discussions about potential targets.

The last major outlier of season 23 is the Cookout alliance and their ability to keep all their members to the final six which is unusual. The cultural identities of all six Cookout members were heavily aired as the season progressed. The Cookout Alliance sparked important conversations about representation, diversity, and inclusion in reality television. Viewers and commentators alike celebrated the alliance's success not only in the game but also in challenging the status quo. The Cookout became a symbol of progress, prompting discussions about the importance of diverse storytelling and the need for increased representation across all forms of media.

### **Humorous Moments**

Humorous moments in the *Big Brother* house serve as vital components that contribute to the overall entertainment value and viewer engagement in the show. These moments also provide tangible examples of salience in the cultural identity of the houseguests. In the midst of strategic gameplay, alliances, and the intense competition for a grand prize, humor provides much-needed relief, making the experience more enjoyable for both contestants and the audience. These moments of levity showcase the human side of the houseguests, allowing viewers to connect with them on a personal level beyond the game. This moment may include anything from a houseguest falling while trying to master the moonwalk or the houseguests speaking to inanimate objects because they are bored with the conversational skills presented by the houseguests.

One standout moment of houseguests standing out every season is when Zingbot, the mythical robot, comes to visit the houseguests and zings or insults them. “Alyssa, you’re from Florida, the sunshine state, which is ironic considering you’re so dim!” (Zingbot, ep. 27). Zingbot calls Alyssa out for being dim, and she then exclaims, “I don’t get it!” seeming to confirm her lack of intelligence. Although there is little evidence for this claim, this stood out as a humorous moment for the houseguests. In this comment, Zingbot singles Alyssa out for being both being from Florida and calling her dim.

Day-to-day moments where houseguests can stand out due to their cultural identities are things the viewers can watch and identify with or learn more about other cultures. One example of a houseguest standing out for something non-game related is Hannah putting refried beans on her pasta. “Did you just put beans on your pasta? What in the world is that? Please look at the plate. Show it again. Look at the darn plate. Girl, what are you doing? Do you need help? She is something else,” (Derek F., ep 35). In this clip, Derek talks to the audience about food choices he does not understand. Hannah and Derek F. both stand out for not understanding each other food choices.

**Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Aspects of Identity**

This tenant of CIT engages with multiple parts of an individual’s cultural identity. It refers to the emotional reactions to messages communicated by others (Littlejohn et al., 2021). The most tangible result of this code is through analyzing one’s behaviors.

**Table 9**

*Sub-Code of Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Aspects of Identity (ACBA ID)*

Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Aspects of Identity	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Personal Decisions	“I have nominated you Kyland and you	



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	Alyssa. Last night I had a dream that I went fishing. In order to catch a big fish you have to have the perfect bait” (Frenchie ep. 2).	72
	“I have decided to use the power of veto on Xavier” (Hannah, ep. 24).	
Alliance Decisions	“I have decided not to use the power of veto. I wish you both the best of luck” (Kyland, ep 30).	85
	“I’m the outgoing secret HOH and it was perfect. I got the target, Sarab Beth, out, but because I won the Coin of Destiny last week and was the secret HOH, I can’t be the HOH again. I have to throw this competition” (Claire, ep. 26).	

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In the *Big Brother* house, the relationship of affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of identity is a complex and dynamic process that shapes how contestants navigate the social and strategic dimensions of the game. When houseguests made decisions in the game they revealed more about their cultural identities in what they prioritized. The houseguest’s character is displayed in conjunction with the ideals instilled in them through their cultural identities. Although houseguests may be unaware, the behavioral aspects of their cultural identity are on display to their fellow houseguests and the at-home audience. As individuals grapple with the emotional, mental, and behavioral dimensions of their identities, the strategic and social dynamics of the game continually evolve, shaping the narrative of the show and reflecting the complexities of human interaction within a competitive environment. This was heavily coded in the decision-making process. Decisions that were both power and alliance motivated.

### **Personal Decisions**

Personal decisions in the *Big Brother* house hold significant weight, as contestants

navigate a complex web of relationships, alliances, and strategic considerations. Every move, whether in forming alliances or making nominations, becomes a crucial personal decision with strategic implications. These decisions are not only influenced by the desire to win the game but also by the need to manage personal relationships and emotions within the confined space of the house. The confined space provides the setting for interpersonal drama and presents the audience with behavioral content to analyze. The behavior of the houseguest may vary depending on the twist or power in the game, but it implicitly demonstrates pieces of the houseguest's cultural identity. Actions such as dancing and screaming when a friend wins power and crying and moping when one is nominated for eviction are prime times for the audience to learn about the behavioral norms of core cultural identities present in society.

This season had a major twist for four weeks of the game called the High Roller Room. This was a twist where houseguests were allotted money to spend in a *Big Brother* casino where they could win power. They each received fifty dollars a week, but America could vote for their favorite players and give them more money to spend. The houseguests entered the High Rollers room alone so they could make whatever decision is best for their game. The houseguests who decided to play in these games were attempting to gain power for themselves. Using a power would enable the houseguest to showcase their specific cultural identity to the audience in a clear fashion since winners are featured in the episodes.

One player who received a lot of screen time was Derek X. He received the max amount of money every week by America, and he chose not to play any games and save his money for the ultimate prize at the end of the twist. After later realizing he may be targeted he wishes he had made other decisions. He stated,

Oh my gosh! Claire is theorizing that Sarah Beth is coming for us, and right now I think

she might be right...I got nothing from this girl [Sarah Beth] and she doesn't tell me anything. I don't trust her at all right now. I feel like the biggest idiot on the planet because I should have played in that stupid wheel. Now I could get backdoored! (Derek X., ep. 21)

This quotation demonstrates the salience of Derek X. in choosing to stand out from the other houseguests and not use the money the audience awarded him, leading to his ultimate eviction. His cultural identity is shown to the audience as he wanted to be frugal, as this was valued by his parents, and save his money for the end power.

The major decisions made in the house on a weekly basis revolved around nominations, picking players for the power of veto, and the HOH picking the replacement nominee if necessary. All of these decisions are made by an individual in power. Most of the items coded were moments when someone won power or made a decision that bettered their personal game and they described that to the audience in a Diary Room segment.

### **Alliance Decisions**

Some of the most important conversations in the *Big Brother* house are ones where houseguests decide to work together and target others to better their position in the game. Alliances may come together for various reasons, such as the compatibility of houseguest personalities, collective efforts to target a shared adversary or mutual possession of a particular item or quality. The shared qualities could be anything from sleeping in the same bedroom, all being the same gender, or sharing an ethnic background. Cultural identity is a critical component of alliance formation, as aligning with people requires trust. The houseguests reveal more about their cultural identities when choosing who to trust with information in the game and whom to withhold it. In this season, alliance conversations were focused heavily on strategic gameplay.

Tiffany came up with the “master plan” in episode 13, which allowed the Cookout to steamroll their competition and complete their goals.

There were other alliances in the season, however, that started with cultural identity in mind. The French Kisses (see Table 2) was made in week one by Frenchie, who wanted to see the women in the game make it as far as possible. Although not a heavily utilized alliance due to the explosive nature of Frenchie’s gameplay, the women of season 23 worked closely together whenever possible. The Mafia (see Table 2) was an alliance formed by Brent to execute a blindside vote in week 3. This was a fake alliance for everyone but Brent, but the formation was centered around demonstrating power moves and overall dominance from one group of houseguests to another. The Gentleman (see Table 2) was one alliance that exploded after Xavier convinced Derek F. to vote out Kyland instead of Azzah in episode thirty-three. Kyland was visibly upset that he was evicted and called Xavier out for not wanting to take the best to the end of the game. These alliances are evidence of the presence of behavioral aspects of cultural identity. These included decisions on who to nominate for eviction, who to cook dinner for, and who to hang out and play board games with. Whether or not the alliance was “fake” or genuine until the end of the game the houseguest’s made decisions on television wherein they exhibited aspects of their cultural identity.

### **Enduring and Changing Aspects of Identity**

This aspect of CIT heavily relies on the ever-revolving world wherein changes abound in a consistent manner. When an individual's cultural identity either remains the same or changes after any significant action, it is a demonstration of this tenant (Gudykunst, 2007). This change can be witnessed through actions, oral or nonverbal communication.

**Table 10***Sub-Code of Enduring and Changing Aspects of Identity*

Enduring and Changing Aspects of Identity	Example Quotations	Frequency, (n)
Breaking Promises	<p>“Now that Derek [X} has won the dadgum veto, I don’t have no option but to go back on my word with Travis. I have to make sure this veto gets used, or otherwise my HOH is a total disaster!” (Frenchie ep. 3).</p> <p>Derek X. is a huge obstacle for me actually getting to a final two chair. The longer he stays in the game the more dangerous he becomes. It really made me nervous to think about him staying even one week longer. I’m winning this game, not him” (Sarah Beth, ep. 21).</p>	47
Deception	<p>“What? An alliance? Working on getting everyone outside the alliance out of the house? It’s 100% what’s happening, and you guys don’t need to catch on to that just yet (Xavier, ep. 25).</p> <p>“When I think about the Cookout and Claire. For my own personal game it would be Claire all day, but I made a commitment to the Cookout and if I went against them now my chances of winning this game are shot. I have to find a way to break it to her that she is going to be the replacement nominee without ruining my relationship with Claire” (Tiffany, ep. 27).</p>	110

This code for this tenet of CIT received the fewest coded instances. In season 23, the major alliance was formed very early, and the houseguests' part of that did not change their communication of their identity much as the season progressed. The key areas where

houseguests' identities seemed to change were the breaking of promises and the deception of others.

### **Breaking Promises**

Breaking promises in the *Big Brother* house is a strategic minefield that can have profound consequences on a contestant's standing in the game. Promises, often made as part of alliances or strategic deals, are a currency of trust in a game built on social dynamics. Breaking these promises can erode trust, breed resentment, and lead to isolation within the house. Regarding CIT houseguests who break promises also expose pieces of their cultural identity to the world. A houseguest's cultural identity is always displayed to the audience while in the house, allowing the audience to watch the decision-making process. The cultural identity of each houseguest is available for the audience to scrutinize, and houseguests who fail to uphold their commitments risk damaging their social capital and may find themselves as targets for eviction as others question their reliability and loyalty. The repercussions of breaking promises extend beyond the strategic realm, influencing personal relationships and the overall perception of a houseguest's integrity. For example, in week 1, Frenchie promised Travis, Xavier, and Derek F. safety. "Now that Derek [X] has won the dadgum veto, I don't have no option but to go back on my word with Travis. I have to make sure this veto gets used, or otherwise my HOH is a total disaster!" (Frenchie ep. 3).

In episode 21, Sarah Beth is the HOH and decides she wants to evict Derek X without nominating him, thereby not granting him the opportunity to play in the veto competition. To accomplish her goals, she is forced to break her promises and alliance with Derek X. in the Royal Flush alliance and move forward in targeting him. Later the next week, Tiffany won HOH, lied to Sarah Beth about Kylan, and targeted her for eviction. Some of the team-based alliances

faltered as the game moved into the individual phase, and people were no longer guaranteed safety when their teammate won power. When the houseguests broke promises in the game, they showed characteristics of their cultural identity and how their identity was subject to change based on the information or opportunity provided. The behavioral decisions made by the houseguests often put their cultural identity in the limelight for the audience. When the houseguests broke promises with each other on the show, it demonstrated their ability to manipulate and deceive others. The choices made in who to manipulate and deceive were left to the audience, and producers edited to determine if the houseguest lied or betrayed someone to better their game or because their cultural identity does not get along well with others. Sometimes, in order to win the game, one's cultural values of integrity are compromised.

### **Deception**

Deception becomes a means to an end, allowing players to safeguard their own positions, mislead competitors, and strategically manipulate the outcomes of the game. However, the art of deception does coincide with potential risk. Contestants must carefully navigate the thin line between strategic cunning and outright betrayal, as the revelation of deceit can lead to damaged relationships, shattered trust, and a fast track to eviction. The Cookout had to walk this line very carefully as they moved through the game due to the deceptive nature of the alliance. CIT is demonstrated through the actions of the Cookout since they were forced to change their behavior towards houseguests to complete their goals. Although all the Cookout members shared a commonality in their race, their cultural identities varied immensely. The Cookout was firm on the decision that no one would know about the alliance until they had made it to the final six. For the Cookout to complete its goals, it needed to deceive the people it was working with closely.

In the final weeks before the Cookout achieved their goal of becoming the final six

houseguests, some other houseguests became suspicious. Alyssa and Claire made a joke about there being an alliance they did not know about, followed by a Diary Room segment of X saying, “What? An alliance? Working on getting everyone outside the alliance out of the house? It’s 100% what’s happening, and you guys don’t need to catch on to that just yet (Xavier, ep. 25). This Diary Room segment of Xavier clearly shares with the audience that he is aware that people may start to become suspicious of the Cookout, and he needs to maintain his cultural identity among the non-Cookout members in the house. This takes form in his distancing himself from the other Cookout members and downplaying the shared ethnic bond between himself and the five others in the house. The deception of others is an indication that the cultural identity of the Cookout shares several behavioral traits outside of ethnicity.

### **Exploring Further**

After analyzing all seven tenants of CIT, it is evident that the houseguest’s cultural identity has an impact on the interpersonal relationships in the house. The actions, words, and nonverbal communication observed in season 23 further the tenets of CIT and demonstrate the relevance of cultural identity in society. For the houseguests to create and maintain their cultural identities in the house, they were forced to utilize their social skills to gain power and form bonds on a national platform wherein they could inspire others to befriend people of different cultural identities.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### Overview

This chapter shares the study's results juxtaposed with its positive and negative implications for society. Specific answers to the previously stated research question are provided, along with information on how the study furthers CIT. The results are discussed, along with the study's limitations and areas for future scholarship.

### Summary of Findings

This qualitative content analysis delves into the communication used within the *Big Brother* house, specifically examining it through the framework of cultural identity theory. Contestants in the game are compelled to navigate societal norms related to race, religion, gender, and other cultural identities, providing a unique opportunity to explore the impact of cultural identity language. The isolated environment of the house, coupled with constant surveillance via cameras, makes it an ideal setting to observe the dynamics of cultural language. Through strategic alliance-building and calculated gameplay, contestants aim to advance their positions while attempting to evict others. These actions reveal aspects of each houseguest's cultural identity. As viewers witness these interactions, they gain insights into the societal roles of cultural identity, contributing to a broader understanding of society through the lens of this reality competition show.

### Specific Answers

This qualitative content analysis attempts to answer the following research question:

**RQ1: How do contestants on the show *Big Brother* use language to create and maintain cultural identities?**

After the coding was completed, four themes emerged regarding the language utilized by the

houseguests and how their cultural identities were created/maintained for the house and at-home audience. The houseguests of *Big Brother* season 23 used language to create and maintain their cultural identities through early personal disclosure, forming strategic alliances, demonstrating interpersonal skills, and sharing with the audience in the Diary Room.

### **Early Personal Disclosure**

One major way houseguests can utilize language to maintain their cultural identity in the house is through early personal disclosure. In season 23, the houseguests were quick to share information about their lives without the other houseguests. By choosing to disclose aspects of their cultural identity early on, a houseguest not only demonstrates transparency but also invites others to engage in meaningful conversations about diverse backgrounds. This early sharing can break down stereotypes, dispel preconceived notions, and promote a more inclusive environment within the house.

The episodes feature moments when houseguests are vulnerable to each other. The airing of conversations containing personal information about the upbringing/past trauma of a houseguest helps the at-home audience better understand the houseguest. By sharing information regarding their cultural identity, a houseguest can shape their narrative and potentially influence how others perceive them. Derek X. is a prime example of a houseguest who was able to share a lot about his immigrant parents early on in the game and gained the sympathy and empathy of the other houseguests, but the conversation was aired on national television where millions of people were able to witness his pain and desire for Asian Americans to be more present on mainstream television.

Since the houseguests are isolated from the world and mainstream culture, houseguests are forced to interact socially with each other. The environment of the *Big Brother* house works

as an accelerator for building interpersonal relationships. Throughout the coding, the houseguests continually comment on how well they knew each other after only meeting a couple of weeks prior. While secluded in the house, the houseguests reveal personal parts of their cultural identity to their fellow houseguests and the audience. The close-knit relational community fostered by the isolated nature of the *Big Brother* game creates a space for houseguests to disclose information to others and feel comfortable sharing information with others they may not have after only knowing them for a couple of weeks. Language is heavily utilized by the houseguests when they share personal details of their lives, and these conversations can be utilized to inform the broader audience.

### **Strategic Alliances**

In the game *Big Brother* strategic alliances can serve as a fundamental aspect of gameplay which can influence decisions, alliances, and a houseguest's overall journey in the house. Integrating discussions about cultural identity within the context of strategic alliances can be a powerful way for a houseguest to navigate the complex social dynamics of the game. When a houseguest strategically shares aspects of their cultural background with a potential ally, it fosters a deeper personal connection and opens avenues for alliance-building based on shared values and understanding. This was present in the team alliances. The team twist ended after four weeks, but many of the houseguests tried to remain loyal to their teammates for a longer time. This is a tangible representation of houseguests who made decisions based on their interpersonal relationships, which were heavily influenced by the disclosure of their cultural identities. The connection between a houseguest and a person they were closely aligned with early on showcases the solid emotional connection among the houseguests.

By revealing elements of their cultural identity strategically, a houseguest can leverage this information to form alliances that go beyond mere gameplay. Sharing such personal details can create a sense of trust and camaraderie, as allies may feel more connected to the contestant on a personal level. By aligning with individuals who appreciate and respect their background, a houseguest can potentially shape the opinions and actions of their alliance members. The primary way this is explicitly demonstrated in season 23 is through the Cookout alliance. The six African American houseguests working together throughout the season is something that changed the narrative of the season for the houseguests and those watching. This strategic use of cultural disclosure enhanced the alliance's social gameplay and allowed the houseguests to talk about their ethnicity with pride and without fear of eviction. In this way, strategic alliances become not only a means of navigating the gameplay but also an avenue for fostering understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity among the houseguests.

### **Interpersonal Skills**

In the dynamic environment of the *Big Brother* house, interpersonal skills play a pivotal role in the creation and maintenance of cultural identity. The house is a microcosm of society where individuals from diverse backgrounds coexist, and the ability to navigate these cultural differences with finesse is crucial. Houseguests with strong interpersonal skills can establish meaningful connections, foster understanding, and contribute to a more inclusive house culture.

Creating and maintaining cultural identity in the *Big Brother* house requires effective communication and active listening skills. Houseguests who excel in interpersonal skills can engage in open and respectful dialogues about their cultural backgrounds, traditions, and experiences. By sharing and appreciating diverse perspectives, they contribute to a richer tapestry of cultural identity within the house. These skills also enable houseguests to navigate

potentially sensitive conversations about race, ethnicity, and religion. Interpersonal skills are crucial due to the format of the show, where one houseguest is evicted weekly. To nurture positive relationships with allies and potential targets, a houseguest can employ interpersonal abilities to ensure that they are viewed favorably by all parties involved.

Houseguests with strong interpersonal skills can bridge cultural gaps, mediate conflicts, and champion cultural diversity. Their ability to navigate the intricate web of interpersonal relationships within the house enhances their gameplay and fosters an environment where cultural identity is celebrated and respected. Houseguests possessing these skills contribute to a more inclusive and understanding environment, paving the way for diverse cultural expressions to coexist harmoniously within the confines of the *Big Brother* house.

### **Vocal Diary Room Sessions**

Vocal diary room segments in the *Big Brother* house serve as a unique and crucial aspect of the reality show's narrative, significantly shaping and maintaining cultural identity. These segments provide contestants with a private space to candidly express their thoughts, emotions, and reflections on the ongoing dynamics within the house. In terms of cultural identity, the diary room becomes a confessional space where individuals can delve into the nuances of their cultural background and experiences and how these factors intersect with their game decisions.

In diary room segments, houseguests can articulate their perspectives on cultural issues, share personal stories, and highlight the significance of their cultural identity within the larger context of the game. When analyzing the diary room segments of the show, the vast majority were coded as avowal or ascription. In the diary room, the houseguests were able to vent their private thoughts to the audience and explain their cultural identity and what they perceived of their fellow housemates. These segments serve as a powerful medium for contestants to voice

their individual narratives, contributing to a more nuanced portrayal of cultural diversity within the show.

Moreover, vocal diary room segments allow houseguests to navigate the complexities of cultural interactions and confrontations. Houseguests can use this platform to discuss challenges related to cultural misunderstandings, biases, or stereotypes that may arise in the house. The Cookout alliance members each had multiple diary room segments aired on national television where they discussed how their ethnicity has affected them in the world and in the house. By vocalizing their experiences and feelings, houseguests can contribute to a broader dialogue about the importance of cultural sensitivity, promoting an environment where cultural identity is acknowledged and respected.

The diary room also plays a role in shaping viewers' perceptions of the houseguests, influencing how cultural identity is portrayed and understood by the audience. Houseguests who effectively use this space to articulate their cultural experiences can garner support, empathy, and understanding from viewers. This is especially evident when the game has twists where the audience votes for prizes and punishments for the houseguests. Houseguests who come across as genuine and likable to the audience can gain popularity and earn rewards in the game. Fan favorite houseguests are often ones who have had multiple diary room sessions where their cultural identity was broadcast to the audience. This season, the High Rollers Room twist allowed the audience to give certain houseguests money to compete for power. The houseguests who received the most money were the ones who were featured heavily in diary room segments.

Diary room segments function as a narrative anchor for the creation and maintenance of cultural identity in the *Big Brother* house. This space provides contestants with a private platform to express themselves to the audience. These segments contribute to a more

comprehensive and authentic representation of cultural diversity since they showcase each houseguest narrating their story.

### **Expanding CIT**

Cultural identity theory was proposed by Jane Collier and Milt Thomas to showcase how culture significantly impacts the ideology of identity. “Cultural identity is negotiated, co-created, and reinforced in communication with others when we socially interact” (Collier & Thomas, 1988, p. 103). A qualitative content analysis of *Big Brother* utilizing cultural identity theory serves as a valuable avenue for advancing the CIT’s understanding of how cultural identity is constructed and negotiated within the context of reality television. This analysis delves into the representation of cultural identities among houseguests, unveiling nuanced insights into power dynamics, language use, and communication patterns within the house. By studying the interaction of identities, the analysis explores how individuals navigate and express multiple aspects of their cultural background simultaneously.

The research investigates the impact of competitions, conflicts, and collaborations on the affirmation or degradation of cultural identities. Additionally, this qualitative content analysis extends its scope to include viewer reception and perceptions, exemplifying the broader societal implications of the show's portrayal of cultural diversity. This study contributes empirically to cultural identity theory but also offers practical insights into the complex dynamics of cultural identity within the realm of contemporary reality television and its influence on societal perceptions.

The seven tenets of cultural identity theory were utilized as the specific codes for this study. Collier originally discussed the seven tenets in her 1988 proposal of cultural identity theory. In later versions, she still discusses the importance of the tenets but lumps them together.

By applying these tenets to the analysis of cultural identity language present in strategic alliances, this study not only validates the theoretical framework proposed by Collier but also illuminates the practical implications of cultural identity theory in understanding social dynamics and strategic behavior within competitive environments.

### **Insights into Reality Television from Cultural Identity Theory**

The reality competition show *Big Brother* has redefined the landscape of reality television by exerting social influence, primarily attributable to its diverse casting and the inclusion of a live feed component. Viewers can observe contestants navigating the house, making strategic deals, and forming alliances to enhance their positions in the game, offering a unique and unfiltered perspective on the dynamics within the competition.

The television program *Big Brother* stands out as a distinctive show, offering viewers the unparalleled opportunity to observe participants in real time throughout the day. In the confined setting of the house where contestants reside and compete, they are compelled to construct their own micro-society. This setup enables viewers to witness the intricate dynamics of friendships, alliances, and rivalries, reflecting the complex tapestry of human interactions in their community. The show accentuates how societal norms and prejudices shape these relationships, giving rise to both camaraderie and discord among the houseguests.

Beyond mere entertainment, *Big Brother* is an educational tool for its audience, providing insights into prevailing attitudes and societal stereotypes. The treatment of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds becomes evident as viewers observe their interactions. This show is a medium for the audience to learn about cultural identity that is not present in their life. The houseguests can indirectly communicate their cultural identity with the vast audience through personal disclosure and their behaviors. As houseguests make interpersonal inroads



with their fellow housemates, they can showcase how the audience may be able to interact with people different from their cultural identities in their spheres of influence.

### **General Discussion**

Conducting a qualitative content analysis of the television program *Big Brother* holds significant importance as it unveils a genuine depiction of reality regarding societal influences on factors like race, gender, and various forms of cultural language. Language emerges as a powerful tool within the show, wielded to forge interpersonal relationships and alliances. Unfortunately, this linguistic gift is also wielded abusively, explicitly manifested in instances where groups in positions of power leverage social pressures related to race, religion, and gender in their strategic gameplay decisions and language. The show illuminates the dual nature of power, illustrating how it can be both empowering and corrupting and offering insights into societal perspectives on authority, ambition, and the repercussions of unbridled power.

### **Implications**

To comprehend the influence of *Big Brother* on its viewership demographics, it is essential to grasp the scale of its audience. Each week, millions of individuals nationwide tune in to watch the live eviction episodes (Kimball, 2023). As these viewers engage with the show, they become observers of the houseguest's behaviors and gain access to information that not all players are privy to, such as game twists and private diary room segments. This leads to several positive implications of the study. The viewers can reflect on the ongoing dynamics within the game, leading them to support players they either perceive as excelling or merely like their personalities. This reflective process encourages self-awareness and contemplation of their own behaviors and relationships within the context of the social dynamics portrayed on the show.

While immersed in the show, viewers may develop empathy for houseguests with diverse racial, gender, and religious backgrounds. *Big Brother* provides a platform for viewers to learn about individuals with varied backgrounds that they may not have encountered otherwise. Continuous observation of the players may facilitate the recognition of similarities between the viewers and houseguests. This could foster increased tolerance and compassion for people from different walks of life through a reality competition show.

However, negative implications can also occur as millions of viewers observe the houseguests on television. The audience could infer negative stereotypes about a cultural identity they have never encountered or even reinforce an existing prejudice against someone with a different background. As the dramatic reality television show unfolds, conflicts are often aired for audience consumption. The conflicts may hurt the audience's view of individuals with different cultural identities and potentially foster distrust of the audience and people in their spheres of influence.

### **Societal Influence**

The producers heavily impact the show. They decide what is shown in the episodes and at what point in the season they want to show it. The production team is responsible for producing an entertaining product for the audience and creating storylines. The narratives deemed worthy of airtime can be influenced by societal norms and overall perceptions. This could take shape in a variety of forms, but the episodes are masterpieces crafted by the production team.

The producers are individuals who live in society and are impacted by events, just as the houseguests were before they entered the show. One item of note for season 23 is that it was the first season to air after the death of George Floyd and the social unrest that resonated as a result of his death (Roberts, 2023). The Cookout Alliance was formed on day two in the house

alongside fifty other alliances, but the Cookout Alliance was heavily featured in the second episode of the season. Similar to McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory, the producers do not tell the audience what to think but rather what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The producers pick narratives they think will impact the audience, which can take shape in the form of entertainment and also shed light on ongoing social issues.

*Big Brother* has brought attention to various social issues prevalent in contemporary society by broadcasting conversations among houseguests that delve into specific racial, religious, and gender ideologies. The show's commitment to diverse casting is a significant contributor to this achievement. When individuals representing various ethnicities, sexual orientations, and backgrounds coexist, it creates a rich pool of potential conversational content. This dynamic often fosters discussion among houseguests that challenge societal stereotypes and promote inclusivity within their "house community." The houseguests create their own community while isolated. Their community is made up of people with various cultural identities. The houseguest's interactions are continuously monitored while living in the *Big Brother* house. The broadcast of these interactions to a national audience can contribute to real-time engagement with similar missions, fostering awareness and understanding.

### **Limitations**

While the qualitative content analysis of season 23 of *Big Brother* utilizing cultural identity theory provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the findings. One notable limitation is the study's focus on a single season, season 23. While this approach allows for an in-depth examination of specific cultural dynamics within the season, it may limit the validity of the findings to the broader context of the entire show. The season was coded using the seven central tenets of cultural identity theory. Future studies might

benefit from expanding the coding framework to encompass a broader range of cultural identity aspects, potentially capturing more intricate interactions and expressions within the *Big Brother* context.

### **Future Considerations**

There are various ways this research could be furthered to enrich the theoretical framework of CIT. Longitudinal studies spanning multiple seasons of *Big Brother* or other reality shows could offer insights into the evolutionary patterns of cultural identity representation. A researcher could analyze multiple reality programs from one or multiple broadcasting companies to provide an overview of the cultural representation across networks.

Interviewing past houseguests would be a way to learn more information about the *Big Brother* house environment. In an interview with a former houseguest, a researcher may be able to better ascertain the houseguest's decision-making process and how they were influenced by other houseguests or production to make pivotal decisions. This could be combined with audience surveys. After a sample group watched the season, a survey could be sent where the audience could rank their favorite players and answer questions regarding their levels of empathy. With those results, the researcher may be able to draw a connection between the self-disclosure in the house and the levels of empathy shown by the audience.

### **Conclusion**

*Big Brother* is a popular television program that allows its audience a glimpse into society. As the houseguests create their own isolated community, the audience can witness the cultural identity of each houseguest evolve. Language is a powerful tool utilized by houseguests to create and maintain their cultural identities. This was accomplished through early personal disclosure, the strategic formation of alliances, the demonstration of interpersonal skills, and

candid sharing with the audience in diary room segments. The houseguests of season 23 utilized language to their advantage as they attempted to win a monetary prize. *Big Brother's* multifaceted exploration of cultural identity and interpersonal dynamics stresses its significance as more than just a reality show. *Big Brother* allows its audience to witness cultural identity language in isolation. It stands as a mirror reflecting societal intricacies, offering a platform for dialogue on diversity, and shaping perceptions that resonate beyond the confines of the house, making it a culturally relevant phenomenon for society.

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