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# BIG BROTHER AMERICA

## BEFORE THE EPISODE

In it's 15th season in 2013, the American version of Big Brother started off in 2000 and it's the text that has most deviated away from the original formatting. With it's home on commercial network CBS, Season one stayed close to international tropes of the show where housemates are voted off one by one by the viewers. This backfired when viewers voted off any remotely interesting characters. Whether CBS was being overly cautious or accurately reflected how the audience would react to anything controversial, it demonstrated that a reality show needs to be mindful of what viewers in different countries want, but also keeping the factors that make the show work in the first place.

Following a negative critical and commercial reaction against the show, season two drastically changed the show structure, where a group of contestants, now called 'houseguests', compete by voting each other off and being the last houseguest remaining.

If this format sounds familiar, it's because it is basically 'Survivor in a house'. Born from a history of quiz shows and Jerry Springer, this format is what we see in the US and the Canadian versions of the show now, and reflects an important social value of America that has been prevalent since *The Great Gatsby* and before - the chance of rebirth, that anybody can reinvent themselves if they just work hard enough. This idea of individual entrepreneurialism and the possibilities of self-transformation pervade much of American media texts, including their reality shows. Makeover shows such as *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover* give the chance of individual perfectibility, the idea that it's acceptable for Gordon Ramsey to yell at you to break you down, as it means you are able to build yourself back up again.



This social value is deeply embedded into the American *Big Brother* format. The show screens at primetime three times a week, each show having a major piece of the competition in it, the weekly eviction, the Head of House competition and the Power of Veto competition. Although the competitions played are usually silly, they are taken by the show as completely serious. In fact, much of the syntax used by the contestants of the show surrounds the competition aspect of it. As with *Survivor*, the idea of alliances is a major part of the vocabulary of the text and much of the conversations and to-camera interviews seen has to do with gameplay elements.

Most of the documentary devices are completely stripped out as all segments are about power plays, alliances and show-mances. Events are not explained through a third person voiceover but by the game players in to-camera post game analysis over dramatic music.

Given the strong competitive representations of the show the evictions are similarly dramatic. Host Julie Chen (nicknamed "Chen-Bot" by fans of the show) is playing the role of war journalist, with a cold face, giving us just the facts. The studio audience is small and subdued, this is not a celebration but a commiseration.

This specific season of *Big Brother* was marred by controversy. Texas contestant Aaryn (along with other contestants) was the centre of accusations of racial and homosexual slurs against other contestants. Originally not shown on the actual show, this arose from viewers who watch the "live feeds" - a premium service where fans of the show can watch a live broadcast of going ons of the 'houseguests via feeds over the internet.

CBS aired a segment about Aaryn's remarks when they decided it was affecting the "game". on the July 7th episode. Aaryn's remarks made national headlines, causing many viewers to demand that Aaryn be kicked out or the whole show to be taken off air. This was a time where America had just come out of another racial controversy just a month before where cooking show host Paula Deen was accused of making racist remarks in a court deposition.

## DURING THE EPISODE

Whilst watching episode 7 of *Big Brother* US (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-bAQE7vYoI>) do the following activities:

- 1. Create a breakdown of the episode - record what each segment is about and how long it goes for.**
- 2. Log any words that are used to describe the game and other players used by any of the contestants.**

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### ***Social Value 1: America and Competition***

Since Big Brother is a competition based show, it often shows the Social Values of a time and place in regards to their values towards competition.

Look at the list of “American Values” on this website ([http://www.claremontmckenna.edu/pages/faculty/alee/extra/American\\_values.html](http://www.claremontmckenna.edu/pages/faculty/alee/extra/American_values.html)).

**3. Choose one of these values that you think is shown on US Big Brother, and then state this social value as it applies to the discourse of “Winners and Losers.” For instance, your social value may start with “Winners always....”, “Losers never....” or “A Winner should/shouldn’t....”**

**4. Describe how the Social Value is shown in the episode. This is usually done through a representation of a specific character or through a representation of the game itself. Describe specific ways the person or idea has been represented using linguistic, symbolic and technical codes.**

**5. Describe what type of social value this is, and why you think this is the case.**

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### ***Social Value 2: “Winners Believe in Equality.”***

Rewatch the segment of the show about Aaryn’s racist remarks and her reaction to being confronted about it.

**6. How is Aaryn represented in this segment? Is it positive or negative? How does this segment suggest her actions will affect her in the competition?**

**7. Describe how Aaryn is represented in this segment under the following headings:**

- Linguistic Codes
- Symbolic Codes

- Technical Codes (including selection/omission through editing)

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### ***Social Value 3: “Winners Don’t Trust Women”***

Watch the segment (10:00-14:00) where McCray is deciding whether to vote with his alliance “The Moving Company” or with his “showmance” partner, Amanda.

**8. How is Amanda represented in this segment? Is it positive or negative? How does this segment suggest the men view Amanda in this instance?**

**9. Describe the representation of Amanda under the following headings:**

- Linguistic Codes
- Symbolic Codes
- Technical Codes (including selection/omission through editing)

**10. What type of Social Value do you think this is? Why do you think that?**

