The Evolution of Survivor Gameplay Norms: A Discussion of Old-School vs. New-School Strategies

Houlton Dannenberg

Abstract

Survivor is one of America's most popular reality television shows, featuring castaways stranded on tropical islands or in searing deserts to compete for one million dollars. Over the course of its 20-year run, *Survivor* has changed from a television social experiment to a dog-eat-dog game show as the castaways grow more competitive and deceptive. Using the social cognitive theory of mass communication and rudimentary aspects of evolutionary game theory, I set forth to analyze how *Survivor*'s social norms have evolved from nobility to villainy. I analyze three critical seasons in *Survivor* history epitomizing the past norms, present norms, and the transition point between the two. Ultimately, I conclude that the returning, fan-favorite *Survivor* castaways who engaged in deceptive behavior are the reason that *Survivor* continues to grow more and more cut-throat. My analysis and conclusion not only expand the understanding of *Survivor* gameplay but work to validate and expand scholarship around the social cognitive theory of mass communication.

Keywords

Introduction

Outwit, outplay, and outlast. These three tenets, inscribed on *Survivor*'s logo, characterize the gameplay that viewers have witnessed over the past 20 years. *Survivor* competitors must either have a better strategy than their competitors (outwit), win immunity challenges (outplay), and/or develop social connections and alliances to keep themselves in the game (outlast) to beat their opponents. The utilization of these tenets widely varies from season to season, resulting in a divide between Old-School *Survivor* players and New-School *Survivor* players. However, before elaborating on the stratification of players and its significance, it is important to contextualize their gameplay with the *Survivor* show structure.

Seasons begin by pitting 20 competitors (deemed "castaways") against one another and the elements; castaways live on islands scavenging for food and battling the weather while simultaneously competing against one another for rewards and immunity. The team that loses the immunity challenge is faced with Tribal Council where the team ("tribe") must vote off one of their fellow castaways. Once the total number of competitors is reduced from twenty to ~10, two teams are merged into one for the remainder of the game.[1] If a castaway is voted off between the merge and second-to-last Tribal Council, they

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[1] Although the first season of *Survivor* premiered with 20 castaways, many following seasons only had 16 or 18 depending on the game dynamic. Furthermore, the original two-team format later changed from season to season (with a maximum of 4 teams in Season 13). The merge occurs relative to the amount of people voted off, usually varying between 8-13 remaining castaways. The remaining castaways compete until the end of 39 days, although in Season 2 the castaways competed an additional 3 days.

join the jury, who ultimately votes on the season winner. The Final Tribal Council occurs when the merged tribe is reduced to two castaways who then must defend their gameplay to the jury for title. There are no official criteria for how the jury should choose a *Survivor* winner, but typically those who have utilized a combination of the three tenets make it to the Final Tribal Council. The winner of a *Survivor* season is aptly declared the Sole Survivor and awarded 1,000,000 dollars.

The dynamic ways past castaways and Sole Survivors have played the game varies widely between the 40 total seasons of *Survivor*. Old-School Survivor clashes with New-School Survivor through their gameplay strategies and how they are rewarded.[2] OSS features more socially acceptable behavior, exemplified through the punishment of deception and manipulation, whereas NSS rewards these same actions. The gameplay divide is most evident in *Survivor*'s most recent season, *Survivor: Winners at War*, where past winners from 20 seasons once again compete for a cash prize. Despite having more experience and being the foundation of *Survivor*'s success, the OSP consistently loses to NSP. *Survivor* has evolved from a social experiment to a cutthroat game show, leaving the OSP behind because of and despite their being establishing members of the show's popularity.

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[2] For the purposes of this paper, Old-School Survivor will be abbreviated as OSS and New-School Survivor as NSS. Their relative players and style of play will follow suit, where OSP = Old-School Players, NSP = New-School Players, OSGP = Old-School Gameplay, and NSGP = New-School Gameplay

In my paper, I analyze the evolution of *Survivor* gameplay social norms over the course of the show's run, drawing attention to the shift from OSGP to NSGP. Rooted in the social cognitive theory of communication and elements of evolutionary game theory, I aim to explain what norms evolved and, more importantly, how they did through analyzing three *Survivor* seasons (8, 20, and 28). After individual analyses, I put the three seasons in conversation with each other to clearly demonstrate the change in gameplay over time. Furthermore, I argue that the evolution of *Survivor* gameplay social norms is largely due to the return of beloved OSP who demonstrate controversial behavior that was punished in their seasons, such as lying to and manipulating fellow competitors. Viewers turned castaways internalize the social norms put forward by these returning OSP, creating NSGP: an exaggerated and dynamic game that is fundamentally deceitful. My work not only furthers the understanding of the *Survivor* series and the gameplay therein but demonstrates the practical application of the social cognitive theory of mass communication beyond what observed scholarship has done before.

Theoretical Foundations

Despite being one of the most popular reality television series in the 21st century, *Survivor* is not the most discussed topic within academic circles. To accurately address the scholarship regarding the evolution of social norms within *Survivor*, one must break down the topic into its essential parts: the evolution of social norms and reality television game shows. Scholarship analyzing and summarizing social cognitive theory regarding mass media and evolutionary game theory

synthesized with norm internalization give a proper basis for the eventual analysis of *Survivor* and its rapidly evolving social norms.

The principle scholar within, and the founder of, social cognitive theory, Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura, wrote "Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication," a journal article specifically addressing the role that television plays in the propagation of social norms. Bandura emphasizes the effects of observational learning in his article, explicitly stating that if behavior perpetrated by an individual on television that the viewer is attracted to is rewarded, then that behavior becomes more acceptable in the mind of the viewer (276). In other words, behavior or beliefs seen on television have the capability, if not the tendency, to directly influence a viewer's everyday societal behavior or beliefs. This element of social cognitive theory is tested in Richard Mocarski and Kimberly Bissell's analysis of NBC's *The Biggest Loser* in reference to the propagation of social norms regarding obesity, weight, and health. The two scholars conclude that *The Biggest Loser* helps normalize/spread the idea that obesity and weight gain are an individual's fault, and thus their own responsibility to remedy; this propagation prohibits society from looking at environmental or societal factors behind obesity which additionally obstructs a more holistic cure (Mocarski and Bissell 113). The analysis on *The Biggest Loser* is social cognitive theory in action, as it highlights that norms portrayed on television influence the world narrative.

Evolutionary game theory, a more nuanced and sociological perspective of mathematical game theory, further contributes to the conversation through its involvement of norm internalization. As Richard Swedberg emphasizes in "Sociology and Game Theory:

Contemporary and Historical Perspectives," the newest interpretation of (evolutionary) game theory in sociology has been focused on the social norms involved in competitive or preferential choice relationships, like analyzing the Prisoner's Dilemma (314). However, instead of studying the strategies that individuals use, in evolutionary game theory, these strategies become player-archetypes. Brian Skyrms best explains this phenomenon through an extended metaphor with Stag and Hare Hunters (an interpretation of Stag Hunt, a popular game theory visualization). Skyrms asserts that if a hunter leaves a small group of Stag Hunters and a stranger joins the group, said stranger will observe and imitate an "existing strategy," in this case stag hunting; the stranger at first is an individual who hunts stag and demonstrates a strategy, but as the population becomes uniform, the group is labeled as Stag Hunters. The strategy (hunting stag) becomes an archetype (Stag Hunters) through the stranger's adoption of the social norm/strategy (Skyrms 1095). Skyrms' described phenomenon is remarkably similar to social norm internalization as it is described by Sergey Gavrilets and Peter J. Richerson. Norm internalization is defined as the process "acting according to a norm becomes an end in itself rather than merely a tool in achieving certain goals or avoiding social sanctions" (Gavrilets and Richerson 6068). To speak in terms of the Stag Hunt and evolutionary game theory, using stag hunting as an effective strategy (acting according to a norm as a tool to achieve certain goals) creates the player-archetype of Stag Hunter (the end in itself).

The works of Skyrms, Gavrilets, Richerson, Mocarski, Bissell, and Bandura, although they differ in specific premise, all aim to analyze

and discuss how social norms evolve within a certain group. Social cognitive theory and evolutionary game theory can be synthesized together if one labels the viewer as the stranger in Stag Hunt and television programs as the Stag Hunters. The viewer/stranger will learn the social norms/strategies of the group via observation and internalize them; when it comes time to act, the viewer/stranger, now a player-archetype, further spreads the norm/strategy through their behavior and thus has the capacity to influence other new viewers/strangers. The understanding of this synthesis and cycle is integral to the later analysis of *Survivor* and the evolution of its social norms.

Methodology/Case Studies

To evaluate the evolution of social norms from OSS to NSS over the course of *Survivor*'s run, it's important to get a holistic view of the series. As such, I will analyze one season that aptly characterizes OSGP, the season that demonstrates the transition from OSS to NSS, and one season that characterizes NSGP. For the characterization of OSGP and NSGP, I have selected *Survivor: All-Stars* (Season 8) and *Survivor: Cagayan* (Season 28) respectively. The divide between OSS and NSS is largely contested, as different elements that are critical in NSGP were introduced at different points in time. For this paper, Season 20 *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains* is going to be the transition from OSS to NSS. It is not only the current halfway point in *Survivor* history but demonstrates the final blow to OSGP. All seasons will be qualitatively analyzed by the following criteria: the analysis of the notable (returning) players, their historic style of gameplay (characterized by

the outwit vs. outplay vs. outlast template), and how far they progressed in the analyzed season; any notable moments from the season and what's stated/revealed at the Final Tribal Council will be discussed to characterize gameplay norms.[3]

Seasons 8 and 20 are critically important to my research and argument because they either feature returning OSP or a combination of OSP and NSP. I hope to convey that these returning players play a vital role in the transformation of *Survivor* gameplay norms, an argument that embodies the previously described social cognitive theory of mass communication. Seasons 8 and 20 (along with any other seasons characterized by popular castaways returning) provide a platform for two things. First, the popular castaways are permitted to return and reenact their gameplay (sometimes controversial, sometimes not). Second, the viewers/fans of the show get to further connect and identify with the returning castaways on screen despite the way they behave. Eventually, some of these viewers become players and play by these internalized norms, thus creating NSGP.

Season 8: *Survivor: All-Stars*

Notable Players	Original Season	Characterization of Gameplay in Original Season	Placement in *All-Stars*
Amber Brkich	Season 2	Outlast. Brkich's strategy in Season 2 was to build alliances and have a strong social game.	1

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[3] Season 28 will be analyzed slightly differently. In Season 28, there are no returning players, so instead of the aforementioned criteria, notable players will be analyzed by the characterization of their gameplay during Season 28, whether or not they are a long-time viewer of *Survivor*, and how far they progressed in Season 28.

"Boston Rob" Mariano	Season 4	Outwit/Outplay. Mariano is/was considered the "Godfather" of *Survivor* due to his controlling, dominant strategy of deception. He was also a strong physical competitor.	2
Rupert Boneham	Season 7	Outlast. Boneham, despite his temper, is regarded as a sweet man.	4
Tom Buchanan	Season 3	Outlast. Buchanan was deemed "Big Tom" and was portrayed as a funny, fatherly figure throughout his season.	5
Richard Hatch	Season 1	Outwit. In S1, Hatch led the voting alliance. At the Final Tribal Council, he was called a "snake" by former alliance member Sue Hawk (Episode 0113).	15
Rob Cesternino	Season 6	Outwit. In S3, Cesternino was considered the ultimate strategist and was voted off because of his manipulation of the game (Episode 0614).	16

Season 8: *Survivor: All-Stars* was "Boston Rob" Mariano's game to lose. The entire season is characterized by his manipulation, domination of challenges, and romance. Throughout Season 8, Mariano made cut-throat moves and betrayed many allies to further himself and his partner, Amber Brkich.[4] Mariano and Brkich quickly established a romantic relationship, became a power couple, and systemically

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[4] An example of Mariano making moves for Amber's sake occurred in Episode 10 when Mariano makes a deal with castaway Lex van den Berghe to keep Amber safe. Later on in the game, after Amber's safety has been ensured, Mariano betrays van den Berge, saying: "What I made the deal to save Amber and I'll help you out later on? You guys didn't really believe that did you?" (Episode 0816).

dominated the game. Despite and because of Mariano's gameplay, *Survivor: All-Stars* is a great demonstration of OSGP.

Throughout the season, controversial behavior is consistently punished by the castaways (a key element to OSS). Past competitors who had used deviant strategies are voted off early with the exception of Mariano. Rob Cesternino and Richard Hatch, both castaways who are deserving of an All-Star title, were voted off the island by tribe members due to their deception in past seasons and threat to the current game. On top of controversial actions being punished, loyalty and kindness are rewarded. Of the top five castaways in Season 8, four (including Buchanan and Boneham) are viewed as friendly, genuine figures and people of their word.[5]

In episode 16 at the Final Tribal Council, Lex van den Berghe epitomizes OSS with his speech to Mariano:

> "It's just a game, I'm sure both of you said that thousands of times to wash away the guilt of playing the game the way you played it ... well it's not just a game. For all of us out here, for all of you, it's life. And the line between game and life is not cut and dry."

Castaway Alicia Calloway backs up van den Berge's testimony, telling Mariano and Brkich: "You may have outwitted us, outplayed us, and outlasted us, but you have not outclassed us" (Episode 0816). In other words, the pair may have played a better game than the jury members, but they played a less ethical and ultimately a more controversial game.

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[5] In the Final Tribal Council, Boneham asks why he should vote for Mariano. Mariano responds: "Because you're a man of your word." Ultimately, Boneham votes for Mariano (Episode 0816).

Their actions had real-life consequences that impacted and damaged relationships outside of the game. It's evident from the Final Tribal Council jury testimonies that nobility and morality are the most valued strategy. Ultimately, Mariano loses *Survivor: All-Stars* after the jury makes it clear that he has played, in their eyes, a despicable game. Mariano's deception and betrayals have been punished. Brkich, despite being complicit in many of Mariano's plots, wins the million dollars. Her comparatively more ethical actions lead her to becoming the Sole Survivor. Brkich's win can and should be characterized as OSGP because her nobility triumphs over Mariano's deception.

Season 20: *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains*

Notable Players	Original Season	Characterization of Gameplay in Original Season	Placement in *Heroes vs. Villains*
Sandra Diaz-Twine	Season 7	Outwit. Diaz-Twine used stealth to observe her opponents and ultimately win her original season.	1
Parvati Shallow	Season 11, Season 16	Outwit. Shallow is called "*Survivor*'s flirty seductress," using her charm to lower her opponent's guard. She used this in combination with her alliance to win Season 16 (Episode 2015).	2
Russell Hantz	Season 19	Outwit. Hantz's manipulative strategy is best summarized by his infamous quote: "If I can control how they feel, I can control how they think" (Episode 1915).	3

Jerri Manthey	Season 2	Outwit. Manthey is "*Survivor*'s original black widow" whose strategy appears to be the precursor to Shallow's (Episode 2015).	4
Colby Donaldson	Season 2	Outplay. Donaldson dominated the physical component of his original season and is considered "a gentleman cowboy" (Episode 2015).	5

As its name implies, Season 20: *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains* featured one team composed of heroes and one team composed of villains from past *Survivor* seasons. Season 20 best exemplifies the transition from OSS to NSS due to its conclusion. In short, the villains dominate. First led by "Boston Rob" Mariano in challenges and later by Hantz in strategy, the villains systematically eliminated every hero of the game. At the Final Tribal Council, the three castaways eligible for the million dollars were from the original villains tribe: Diaz-Twine, Hantz, and Shallow. Furthermore, the Season 20 jury was composed of 5 heroes and 4 villains. This split is significant because, in combination with the final three, the villains represented over half of the castaways at Tribal Council. The heroes' numbers were greatly reduced in the early game and therefore they are disproportionately represented.

In episode 15 at the Final Tribal Council, the apex of the split between OSS, NSS, and their relative gameplays was evident. Jeff Probst, the show's host, began the Tribal Council meeting by alluding to the inherent deception involved in *Survivor* by saying any castaway who sits at the Final Tribal Council has "something to be held accountable for." Probst's allusion is backed up by multiple heroes,

including Candice Woodcock, who bases her vote on "how you treat people" throughout the game; Woodcock abides the traditional OSS narrative that deceptive players get punished and noble players get rewarded. The main focus of the Final Tribal Council was Hantz, the comparatively most deceptive castaway. Instead of apologizing for his actions, Hantz quipped that he'd "played the game" and expected the jury members to "respect" his gameplay (Episode 2015). In Hantz's NSS-trending mind, deceptive strategies should be rewarded. In the end, Diaz-Twine won Season 20 and Hantz received no votes from the jury; every hero voted for Diaz-Twine.

Although Diaz-Twine was the least villainous villain at the Final Tribal Council, it would be unfair to solely characterize her win as OSGP or label Season 20 as OSS. It's best to evaluate the effect that Season 20 had on the transition between OSS and NSS on a micro and a macro level. On the micro level, meaning localized to only Season 20, Season 20 does exemplify OSS, but only because the jury was majorly composed of former hero tribe castaways who abide by the traditional OSGP narrative. Diaz-Twine was rewarded because her gameplay was less controversial, whereas Hantz receiving no votes exemplified a punishment for deception. However, on a macro level, Season 20 saw the collapse of OSS and the birth of NSS. The domination of the villain tribe all the way to the end of the game clearly demonstrates the victory of deception over nobility. Despite Diaz-Twine winning as the least controversial villain, the simple presence of all three final castaways being from the Villain Tribe is a reward for deceptive behavior. The reward is symbolic of the transition between OSGP and NSGP, a type of gameplay seen in the following analysis of Season 28.

Season 28: *Survivor: Cagayan*

Notable Players	Longtime fan?	Characterization of Gameplay in Season	Placement in *Survivor: Cagayan*
Tony Vlachos	Yes	Outwit. Vlachos betrayed many of his alliance members and lied blatantly, including breaking promises he made on the lives of his wife, child, and dead father.	1
Yung "Woo" Hwang	No	Outlast/Outplay. Hwang was very loyal and was one of Vlachos' key alliance members. He also won many immunity challenges.	2
Spencer Bledsoe	Yes	Outwit/Outplay. Bledsoe was an extremely strategic player and self-described "student of the game" (Episode 2815).	4

Season 28 of *Survivor* divided the 18 castaways into tribes of six based on the characteristics they utilize in their lives/professions: brains, brawn, and beauty. As one could expect, the brawn tribe, led by Vlachos, won the physically demanding early game immunity challenges. After a tribe swap in the middle of the game (a merge from three tribes to two), Vlachos solidified his alliance composed of the remaining brawn tribe members and their newly merged compatriots. Throughout the game, Vlachos made many false promises and betrayed his allies, but was still able to maintain a fiercely loyal alliance which included Hwang. At the second to last Tribal Council, where Hwang had the opportunity to vote off Vlachos and possibly secure the title of Sole Survivor for himself, Hwang saved Vlachos and voted off castaway Kassandra McQuillen.

In episode 15 at the Final Tribal Council, both castaways were forced to take responsibility for their gameplay decisions. In a heated speech, Bledsoe compared Hwang to a "dog" following the commands of his owner, i.e. Vlachos. In response, Hwang explained that he's just "a man who's trying to be honorable no matter what" and respect his alliance with Vlachos. In contrast to Hwang answering for his honor, Vlachos had to answer for his rampant lying and vicious deception. Jefra Bland, a former alliance member of Vlachos', demanded that Vlachos owned his game.

> "I want you to own your game. I want you to look me in the eyes for the first time and own the fact that you backstabbed almost everybody here on this jury ... [Tony] admit that you were the villain."

Bland's statement was reiterated throughout the night, as castaway after castaway asked Vlachos to take responsibility for his lies. Vlachos stood his ground, took ownership of his deceit, and made it clear that he was just playing a game. Vlachos defended his genuine nature and morality outside of *Survivor* but conceded that "his gameplay was a different story." Despite facing a harsh jury, Vlachos' gameplay was still highly respected. After commenting on Hwang's loyal gameplay, Bledsoe turned to the jury and professed "love him or hate him, Tony played his ass off out here" (Episode 2815). Vlachos was declared the Sole Survivor in an 8-1 vote.

Season 28: *Survivor: Cagayan* epitomizes NSGP. There is constant lying and backstabbing and, instead of being punished, the perpetrator of such actions wins the game. Hwang, the honorable castaway, loses by a landslide to Vlachos, the accused villain.

Furthermore, the castaways see a clearer divide between the game and life as is evidenced by both Bledsoe's and Vlachos' aforementioned comments. It is also critical to address that multiple castaways featured in Season 28 are longtime viewers/superfans of the show. In his profile featured on CBS's website, Vlachos admits he is a "huge fan of the show" and compares himself to Russel Hantz and "Boston Rob" Mariano (*Tony Vlachos - Survivor Cast*). Bledsoe also mentions his superfan status throughout his one-on-one interviews during Season 28. The viewer-turned-castaway phenomenon, rewards for controversial behavior, and the more rigid divide between the game and life firmly cement Season 28 as NSS.

Discussion

When put into conversation with one another, these three seasons clearly delineate the evolution of *Survivor* gameplay social norms over the course of the show's run. Season 8 shows the classic OSGP where deceptive actions are repeatedly punished, i.e. Mariano losing the season, and comparably more noble gameplay is rewarded. In Season 28, the phenomenon is completely reversed; Hwang, the honorable castaway, loses to Vlachos, the habitual liar. Previously mentioned quotes from each season best demonstrate their differences. In Season 8, "the line between game and life is not cut and dry" whereas in Season 28 Vlachos is able to separate his personal life from his gameplay completely (Episode 0816). I argue that the reasons for this change in gameplay are seasons like Season 20, where past, fan-favorite castaways return to the game.

Season 20 was exceedingly unique because it embodies both the

social cognitive theory of mass communication and aspects of evolutionary game theory. First and foremost, the returning OSP are immediately separated into two tribes: the heroes and villains. Their past strategies, however varied, are turned into player archetypes. The heroes are fan-favorite castaways who engage in OSGP, meaning they are known to be genuine and reward noble behavior. The villains, in contrast, are the castaways who were thwarted because of their lies and betrayals but the viewers loved to hate. Because the final three competitors in and eventual winner of Season 20 are from the villain tribe, the deceptive behavior they have historically engaged in is rewarded. The player-archetype of the hero falls, leaving the viewers to learn the only way to win *Survivor* is by being "villainous." The positive reinforcement that deceptive actions receive in Season 20 is imperative to the establishment of NSS. To restate Bandura's social cognitive theory of mass communication, viewers are likely to view rewarded behavior committed by an attractive or well-liked television personality as acceptable to reproduce. The fan-favorite villains win the season, leaving the *Survivor* superfans to observe, learn from, and internalize the norms the castaways engaged in to win.

These *Survivor* superfans become the newest castaways and act by these internalized norms. Lying and deception are inherent in gameplay and this negative behavior is consistently rewarded. Despite Vlachos, Hantz, and Mariano having very similar gameplays, only Vlachos was able to win; the social norms that allowed Vlachos to win had not been established in Hantz's and Mariano's original seasons. However, it's important to note that both Hantz and Mariano returned in Season 22 of *Survivor* to once again compete for the title of Sole

Survivor. Hantz is voted off early in the game, but Mariano secures the win. Mariano employed the same strategies that he used in Season 8 and, because the social norms in the game had shifted, was rewarded for it. Tyson Apostol, another villain from Season 20, returned for Season 27 and won. Because their character-archetype had ultimately won the battle in Season 20, Mariano and Apostol's individual gameplays became socially acceptable within the realm of *Survivor* as the social cognitive theory of mass communication predicted, allowing both former villains to win.

The villainous, fan-favorite OSP helped establish NSGP, but the new style of play quickly evolved beyond their influence. The process of observational learning, norm internalization, and the reproduction of those norms is a self-accelerating cycle. *Survivor: Heroes vs. Villains* began the cycle, but as more and more *Survivor* seasons are produced, its effect gets smaller. The newest *Survivor* superfans view winners like Vlachos with the same respect that the former viewed Mariano. As such, NSP become increasingly more devious. Winners like Adam Klein (Season 33) and Sarah Lacina (Season 34) are long-time viewers turned castaways characterized by betraying alliance members and making big moves. Lacina, who had previously lost to Vlachos and served as a jury member for Season 28, returned and won Season 34, *Survivor: Game-Changers*, a season built for rewarding deceptive gameplay. Before participating in Season 34, Lacina admitted that she "regret[ted] sticking to [her] morals and values" in Season 28 and said that next time she needs to "play the game" (*Sarah Lacina - Survivor Cast*). At this point, real life and gameplay are completely exclusionary.

Conclusion

The increasingly deceptive cycle evolving *Survivor* gameplay is ultimately the reason that OSP are consistently losing to NSP in Season 40: *Survivor: Winners at War*, the currently on-going season of *Survivor*. Although many of the previous winners helped create NSGP, they no longer know the game well enough to keep up with the new *Survivor* trailblazers. Some may argue that the OSP's losses in Season 40 are not due to unfamiliar social norms, but rather that the OSP are a bigger perceived threat in the game and thus voted off quicker. Although that is seemingly a convincing argument, the OSP do not have the social prowess to predict or counter those moves because they are less familiar with the newer gameplay norms. The OSP began the cycle that the social cognitive theory of mass communication suggests, but they no longer actively participate in it. I hypothesize that, if *Survivor* continues airing for another decade, the returning NSP will find themselves playing with outdated norms in a similar way that OSP are now. The current *Survivor* superfans, to once again invoke Bandura, will learn about, internalize, and recreate the norms rewarded on Season 40 and beyond. That said, my conclusions were reached through a qualitative analysis of *Survivor*, and I am interested to know if other scholars would reach the same conclusions if they quantitatively examined multiple *Survivor* seasons. I wonder if the number of lies told or frequency of deceptive behavior increases on average from OSS to NSS; I believe that this question, and those similar to it, issues further investigation.

The qualitative examination of the evolution of OSGP to NSGP not only sheds light on how a castaway wins in *Survivor* and how the

game could shift in the future but highlights the utility of the social cognitive theory of mass communication. Although applicable to all forms of mass communication, it is clear that Bandura's theory shines through in the reality television genre. Reality TV shows, especially those that have been on air for decades, are excellent texts to be used in the analysis of social norm evolution and participant-viewer influence because researchers can see to what extent the norms set by previous contestants have been normalized. With these ideas in mind, my paper becomes an archetype for how the social cognitive theory of mass communication can be best practiced and demonstrated. *Survivor* gameplay shifts embody Bandura's claims that television show viewers learn by observation and reproduce rewarded behavior. If the alternative was true, Vlachos, Klein, and Lacina would never have become Sole Survivors.

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