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Reality Television and the Metapragmatics of Racism

In the contemporary United States, racism is commonly thought to be located in the hearts and minds of a particular negatively valorized social figure: the "racist." Racist discourse is often implicit and indexical, and interracial interactions may be overdetermined by mutual "racial paranoia" (Jackson 2008) about interlocutors' true thoughts. In this paper I argue that the reality television genre has a unique engagement with tropes of authenticity and intentionality that exploits this dynamic of suspicion. I take as an example a conflict that occurred on an episode of Survivor around comments made by a White southern man to an African American woman. In the scenes analyzed, racial paranoia is itself mobilized as a narrative hook. Participants prod each other to reveal the indexical meaning that they suspect is underlying each other's utterances, showing a perceived incongruence between language and intention. Casting, production, and editorial practices contribute to the dramatization of racism as interpersonal conflict. I show that interventions like sound mixing, the use of testimonial interviews, and the editorial placement of reaction shots reinscribe broader cultural oppositions between "authentic" mental states and "false" performed identities. [racism, reality television, language ideology, indexical stereotypes, performance, authenticity, suspicion, racial paranoia, personalism]

Introduction

It has been widely observed that post-civil rights racism in the United States has taken on a different form. It is no longer commonly acceptable to make explicit comments disparaging racial minorities because of alleged biological deficiencies; racism is now more often expressed in terms of cultural stereotypes (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Trepagnier 2007; Jackson 2008; Pagliai 2011). Sociological theorists may define racism in terms of "a strategy for the maintenance of privilege" (Wellman 1993:60) rather than a problem of prejudice; however, whites tend to see racism as a personal, not a structural, problem (Essed 1991; Jhally and Lewis 1992; Blauner 1994). Bonilla-Silva (2009) suggests that contemporary white racism can be characterized as "color-blind racism," since whites often profess not to see race at all. This often results in cycles in which accusations of racism by people of color are met with counteraccusations by whites of "playing the race card." Many whites argue that race should never be an issue and even posit the existence of "reverse racism," claiming that policies such as affirmative action discriminate against them and that people of color project racism where it doesn't exist; this can lead to the construal of minorities that point out racial inequality as "racist," thus further racializing and marginalizing them (Blanton 2011). Jackson (2008) has observed that because explicit racist statements are

no longer socially acceptable among many Americans, a phenomenon he terms "racial paranoia" has emerged among both blacks and whites where blacks suspect that despite expressions of political correctness, whites may secretly harbor racist thoughts or make racist comments in the company of other whites. At the same time, whites become equally paranoid about blacks' suspicions of their own racial motivations. In this deeply personalist framework for evaluating racism (see below), interracial interactions then frequently become fraught with mutual skepticism about interlocutors' sincerity and speculations about their true intentions.[1]

This article considers the intersections between these racial dynamics, the linguistic ideologies that underpin them, and the reality television genre. I begin with a discussion of the social category "racist," suggesting that it can be usefully understood in terms of a semiotic diagram where self-focal and other-focal indexical effects are mutually constituted. Following this, counteraccusations of "reverse racism" can be understood as a tropic inversion of that diagram; it formulates racial minorities pointing out racism as "racists." I argue that reality TV's casting and narrative requirements highlight racial conflict and rely on and reinforce common linguistic and racial ideologies, and that the genre's engagement with tropes of authenticity and interiority compounds the reflexive suspicion about intentionality that already plagues many conversations about racism in the United States. I present an example of a racial conflict from the CBS program *Survivor* that centered on comments made by a white contestant to an African American contestant. Through discourse analysis of two scenes, I show that because the racist nature of the comments is indirect and dependent on emergent text-metrical and text-level indexical effects, the debate is structured around issues of persona and demeanor. Although the African American cast members avoid accusations of racism, the perceived potential for accusation mediates activities and the "race card" counteraccusation is invoked. I show how formal production and editing features such as shot selection and music frame these interactions and play an important role in dramatizing racism as interpersonal conflict. Therefore I propose reality TV as an especially rich site for studying the continuous formulation and circulation of racial ideologies.

"Racists" and the "Race Card" as a Semiotic Diagram

Hill (2008:39) specifies three common language ideologies that underpin contemporary U.S. folk theories of racism: baptismal (focusing on "original definitions" of words), referentialist (focusing on the meaning of utterances as true or false), and personalist (locating linguistic meaning primarily in speakers' intentions). These linguistic ideologies obscure the racism of certain forms of talk, particularly indexical stereotypes (2008:39). Hill notes that because racism is often understood as a matter of personal belief, structural and institutional aspects of racism are obscured and "racism" comes to be understood as exclusively those activities that "racists" do. Since racists are commonly believed to be backward, ignorant people, the term "racist" has become a severe insult. Van Dijk has observed that accusations of racism are particularly face-threatening because they "[presuppose] a more enduring characteristic of people" (1992:90). In order to avoid being designated "racist," then, whites must deny the racist nature of their utterances (Hill 2008:63–64); a denial which is often enabled by the covertness of many racist statements (Parsons Dick and Wirtz 2011). If an individual can sufficiently demonstrate that they do not fit the social category of "a racist," they may thus be able to avoid accountability for their comments.

This may be usefully considered in terms of a diagrammatic icon. A diagram is, in Peircian terminology, a kind of complex icon in which there is not a one-to-one resemblance between the sign and the object (as in a normal icon), but in which the relations between the constituent parts of the sign resemble those of the object, such as a road map (Peirce 1998:13). In such diagrams, signs are interlinked so as to

motivate each other in a particular way and present a naturalized image of the social world.

In his analysis of honorifics in Tibetan, Agha (1998) identifies metapragmatic "leakage" where metasigns are extended across different objects of semiosis and relationships of iconicity, facilitating social evaluations of speakers and kinds of persons in the world. In Tibetan, the term for "shesa" (respectfulness) can be used to describe words, conduct, or persons, so that people may be deemed "shesa" (refined/pure) because of their "shesa" (respectful) conduct toward others. Purity, a self-focal indexical effect, and respectfulness, an other-focal indexical effect, motivate each other so that one's purity of character and one's conduct toward others are mutually constitutive.

In the same way, I suggest, it is often the case that when an individual in the United States makes a comment that is deemed racist, the indexical effects of linguistic signs are extended to the construction of persons in a type of second order (Silverstein 2003) or indirect (Ochs 1990) indexicality. The metasign "X is a racist" motivates characteristics of the speaker of the alleged racist comment from characteristics of their speech. (The metasigns may be less direct; the assertion "X's comment was racist" can be equally powerful in transferring focus to X's identity as "a racist.") This leakage displaces attention from the allegedly racist other-focal utterance and its referent to the speaker, who is characterized as "a racist," a self-focal indexical effect.

As noted above, the accused "racist" may respond that the accuser is playing "the race card," a term that has emerged as a rhetorical strategy by whites for delegitimizing claims of racism (Dei et al. 2005). It is used to suggest that a person of color is alleging racism or discrimination in order to gain an unfair advantage by positing racial bias where none exists, to the detriment of whites. We can see "the race card" then as a powerful enregistered term that presupposes historical developments such as affirmative action and mediates subsequent activities in interaction. It has been suggested that whites may project their own racial motivations onto people of color in order to avoid accountability for racism (Bonilla-Silva 2002); ironically, this can lead to the construal of allegations of racism as more offensive to whites than racism itself (Van Dijk 1992:90). Pagliai (2011) frames this dynamic in terms of marked and unmarked discourse, positing that accusations of racism are often more marked than racist discourses (see also Reyes 2011 on the ironic practice of "crying racist" by Asian American youth).

The counteraccusation of "playing the race card" may be considered a tropic inversion of the diagram described above, in which the characterological features of a "racist" are attributed to those who utter racist comments. The inverted diagram motivates a likeness between the racist utterance and the construal of that utterance as racist, iconically linking the two. Take the following example: A, a white person makes a comment and B, a person of color responds with an accusation of racism. A then says, "You're the one making this about race, so YOU'RE the racist." In this case, A posits a qualitative similarity between his initial comment and B's accusation of racism; the accusation of "racist" by B is metapragmatically reanalyzed by A and analogized with A's racist comment. This promotes an ontological framework in which those who make accusations of racism can be construed as "racist" aggressors.

Next, I make the argument that the reality television genre's engagement—on the part of producers, performers, and viewers—with the tension between "false, performed" identities and "authentic" mental states mobilizes the same personalist ideologies associated with racial paranoia, and that racial paranoia itself is activated as a narrative "hook" or conflict.

Reality Television, Authenticity, and Suspicion

Scholars of reality television have focused considerably on the genre's production of "ordinariness" (Couldry 2003; Kilborn 2003; Lumby 2003; Turner 2006; Grindstaff

2008, 2009). Paradoxically, part of the fascination with reality television seems to lie in its depiction of the activities of apparently ordinary, everyday people (or, in the case of the "celebreality" subgenre such as *The Osbournes*, the mundane activities of extraordinary people). Couldry attributes this appeal to what he terms the "myth of the mediated center," the notion that the media can provide privileged access to a fertile "center" of our social world where meanings are generated (2003:45). Many have challenged reality TV's promise to depict "the real"; it has been pointed out that what reality TV presents is not some unfiltered reality of everyday life but rather a highly constructed rendering of the experiences of individuals who are skilled at performing heightened versions of their ordinary selves (Andrejevic 2004; Biressi and Nunn 2005; Holmes 2004; Collins 2008; Grindstaff 2008). Biressi and Nunn (2005) have suggested that the genre produces knowledge through "tropes of 'revelation,' truth-telling and exposure" (2005:5); it locates genuineness in a specific type of emotional performance that are construed as indexical of authenticity, particularly breakdowns and personal disclosures.

The reality genre has developed a unique moral logic around cast members' motivations. Concerns that they are participating on a show for the "wrong reasons," usually defined as media exposure, have become so pervasive that some programs have even worked them in to their structure. For example, on the ABC matchmaking series *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*, after it had become clear that individuals on the show in past seasons had participated in order to promote themselves because of aspirations in show business, contestants were asked to come forward and confess whether or not they had come on the show for the "wrong reasons," as opposed to the "right reason"—a genuine search for love. On any given day a look at the celebrity weeklies and blogs will show that a central focus is the interrogation of reality stars' "real" motivations, as well as the revelation of unsavory details of their biographical histories that are presented as contradicting the personas they displayed on television.

Viewers are also often skeptical about the authenticity of cast members' emotional performances and question their motivations (Biressi and Nunn 2005; Grindstaff 2008). Audience research has shown more suspicion among reality television viewers compared with viewers of documentaries of previous decades (Hill 2001), which may in part be due to some viewers' increased familiarization with production strategies such as casting, encouraging certain behaviors among cast members, and manipulation of footage in postproduction. Though television viewers have varying degrees of knowledge about the specifics of production and editing practices, it is now taken as common knowledge that reality TV shows are highly contrived. This can be seen in a parody of the genre by the NBC sitcom *30 Rock*. *30 Rock*'s fifth and sixth season featured two episodes, titled "Queen of Jordan" and "Queen of Jordan 2," that were shot and edited in the style of Bravo's *Real Housewives* franchise. This episode brilliantly parodied many of its conventions, such as reliance on clichéd stock characters ("I'm not just a gay hairdresser," one character insists, "I'm also a homosexual party planner!") and prefab catchphrases. The show also mocked the staging of conversations by producers. In one scene, a character's phone rings and he picks it up saying, "Hello, Angie. I-I mean, hello, whoever it is . . . going . . . to . . . be." In another, a character is holding a book in his hand; over a jump cut, the book changes to a stuffed toy. This exaggerated continuity error points to fabricated reshoots and deceptive editing. All of these jokes depend on some degree of shared cultural knowledge of these tropes and practices.

As Grindstaff (2008) points out, reality TV performers must tread a fine line between performing emotional outbursts as indexical of authenticity and over-emoting to the point where they are seen as producing a calculated performance. Based on interviews with reality television viewers, Rose and Wood (2005) suggest that these tensions are part of a central pleasure in viewing these shows: engaging with contradictions of performance and authenticity. As with "racial paranoia," sus-

picion that individuals' words or expressed motives are incongruous with their true intentions is a central feature of the reality genre.

Since the explosion of various reality formats over the past decade, cast members are also increasingly viewers of reality TV, including the programs they star on, and may even explicitly refer to events from previous seasons or other shows in their performances (Biressi and Nunn 2005:12); this suggests a high degree of awareness of conventions of the genre and models of conduct expected of them. Reflexivity then becomes a central component of reality television from the perspective of the participants and the audience, both of whom orient to the cues of authenticity enregistered in this genre.

Building on linguistic anthropological work on language ideology, Gershon (2010) has proposed the concept of "media ideology," defined as "the metalanguage that emphasizes the technology or bodies through which we communicate" (2010:283). These ideologies are not just located in users; importantly, media ideologies are embedded in material technologies and media production practices as well. In his study of sound reproduction in the religious practices of Mauritian Muslims, Eisenlohr (2011) demonstrates that devotional practices are shaped by ideologies about the properties, in this case transparency, of particular technologies, and are also linked to ideas about spiritual immediacy. He states, "Media ideologies are so much an integral part of media technology that the formal and material properties of technologies can sometimes be understood as the crystallization of often long-standing assumptions and desires about mediation as processes of interaction" (2010:315). It is important, therefore, to consider formal conventions of the reality genre and the assumptions they encode. I return to this in detail in my analysis of the example from *Survivor*; here I want to show how one convention in particular, the testimonial interview, is integral to how the reality genre formulates emotional authenticity.

Testimonials, common to reality and documentary genres, are where the cast members sit against a backdrop or set and speak to the camera (more accurately, their gaze is usually directed slightly off-camera). Snippets from these interviews are often edited into the dialogue to show the cast members later reflecting on the scene. The perspectives that cast members provide in testimonials often differ from what viewers have seen in their interactions with others on the show, suggesting that they have been disingenuous with their castmates or acted in ways that may not reflect their true beliefs or motives. That testimonial interviews are a device for revealing such incongruities was addressed on the "Queen of Jordan" episode of *30 Rock*. In the episode, a self-indulgent and narcissistic actress acts as though she has a drinking problem when she's around her fellow cast members, but in the testimonial interview she reveals that she is merely pretending to be an alcoholic in order to get more camera time. Biressi and Nunn have shown that "audiences often gauge the authenticity or truthfulness of reality TV on a scale of emotional realism and personal revelation" and that the tension between individual testimonials and group dynamics enables viewers to monitor cast members' consistency (2005:5). Whether viewers necessarily interpret testimonial discourse as authentic or truthful is a separate empirical question, but these interviews appear to lend perspective to the interaction by inserting aspects of interiority to the external conflict. By implying that further one-on-one discussion is necessary to illuminate what was going on in the interaction, the generic convention of the testimonial re-enacts the opposition described above between notions of internal mental states and outward behavior.

Reality Television and Racism

Reality TV is a rich site for the study of racial conflict. First, the genre includes criteria related to narrative drama. Interpersonal conflicts make up a significant portion of storylines on many reality shows and racial conflicts are frequent. Second, reality shows tend to cast participants according to those role categories that will create

participation frameworks most conducive to such conflict (Ouellete and Murray 2008:4). For example, the repeated casting of liberal urban people of color with white conservatives, many of whom have strong personalities and proclivities for confrontation, makes it likely that such conflicts will occur. It has become a cliché that the shows cast predictable stereotypes: the "angry black woman," the "sheltered Christian," and so forth (Pozner 2010). These shows repeatedly depict racism as a matter of personal belief situated in rural conservatives, which downplays structural aspects of racism and suggests that its solution is to be found in the education of ignorant individuals (Kraszewski 2008; Bell-Jordan 2008). Furthermore, by selecting to emphasize these conflicts out of hundreds of hours of footage, producers and editors highlight them as central to the shows' narrative trajectories. Reality shows then position themselves not only as representations of the "real," but also as sites for the negotiation of racial tensions.

That racial conflict has been culturally enregistered as a common reality TV trope can be seen on the *30 Rock* parody. In one scene, a white character tells his coworker about the "drama" that occurred between him and "that cord I tripped on"; it then cuts to a black-and-white flashback showing him tripping on a black electrical cord in slow motion and yelping, "Hey!" Later in the episode, he trips on a cord again and shouts, "You again!" After a closer look he says, "I am so sorry, different cord." The cord tells him—in text captioned on the screen—"That's racist!" Drawing on the cultural trope of whites not being able to tell blacks apart, this satirizes the reality genre's overdramatization of racial conflict.

"There Was Nothing Racial that I Said": Racism on *Survivor*

The example I present is taken from the 19th season of *Survivor*, a reality competition series in which contestants are taken to remote locations and split into "tribes" to compete in various challenges for $1 million. The season featured a conflict between Ben, a white Southern self-proclaimed "country boy," and African American contestant Yasmin. I have chosen this example for several reasons. Although there have been cases where reality show cast members utter explicit racist slurs or remarks, the racist meaning of utterances in these conflicts is more often implicit and indexical. The discourse in the *Survivor* example relies on broader cultural notions of racists and the "race card" outlined above, and it demonstrates how the implicit nature of racist comments is related to mutual paranoia and suspicion. In this example, African American cast members perceive Ben's comments as racist; but because the racist meaning is indexical and emergent, it gets transformed into talk about his persona. Eventually cast members do address the text-level indexical features, testing out various logics in order to demonstrate that his comments were "racial."

The televised interactions presented here are highly edited snippets that have been constructed into a narrative. Although there are a few scenes with identifiable continuous shots (indicating that they have not been cut), most scenes are tightly cut and the end product should be understood as a very small sample of hundreds of hours of footage. However, the result is worthy of analysis qua representation of a racial conflict that is encoded with messages by both the performers and producers/editors. I do not intend to downplay the effects of editing; although it is impossible to analyze every cut, central to my argument is the way that editorial features of the show frame how these interactions are to be interpreted. I address this below in my discussion of shot selection and sound mixing.

The 19th season of *Survivor* is introduced with a reflexive play on the notion of typing and stereotypes based on physical appearance, particularly racial characteristics and bodily comportment. The first episode shows the contestants silently rowing rafts to the designated shoreline location. We are told by the host Jeff Probst that they have been instructed not to talk with one another, and when they arrive at the beach their first activity involves articulating assumptions that they've made about each other based on appearance. First Probst instructs them that each tribe must elect a

"leader" by vote, without having spoken to one another; they are instructed to cast their votes purely "based on body language and observations." They have not been told each other's names and are instructed to vote by writing down physical descriptions. Jaison, an African American contestant, dressed in khaki pants, a button-up yellow dress shirt, and a sweater vest, receives the second highest number of votes on his tribe. He is identified by one player as the "tall nicely dressed Yale-type black man." As we will see later, social indexicalities based on place—and specifically educational institutions to place African Americans, level of education—will become especially salient. Jaison is here associated with a prestigious Ivy League university, demonstrating his teammate's assumption that he is highly educated/intellectual. Once team leaders have been selected, Probst instructs them to choose members of their teams to compete in specific tasks in the upcoming challenge based on assessments of skills like "best swimmer," "smartest," "most agile," and so on. Once again, they are encouraged to use assumptions related solely to appearance, as they still have not spoken to one another. The yellow team leader, a white man named Mick, chooses Liz, an Asian cast member, as his pick for the "smartest" player (whose task in the challenge was to do a puzzle). In a testimonial, she remarks:

> I think Mick chose me because I'm Asian and, while I certainly don't take offense to the positive attributes of being an Asian because they're smart, they're supposed to be studious, there are also negative attributes like sneaky, conniving. I just don't want people attributing all the negative attributes to me.

Mick picks Jaison as the "best swimmer." Jaison comments in a testimonial that he appreciated that he was picked for swimming despite the common stereotype that African Americans can't swim, especially given that he played water polo in college. In the challenge he performs extremely well. His white teammate Mike comments in a testimonial, "Jaison surprised me. Afro-Americans aren't known to be, uh, swimmers." So from the first episode there is an emphasis on the salience of stereotypes based on appearance, particularly racialized ones, and the dissonance between them and reality. This may be a production strategy for facilitating potential racial conflict, as contestants are forced to analyze one another and articulate these impressions in terms of types.

In contrast to Jaison's image as professional, capable, and educated (he is keyed—identified with on-screen text—as a "law student"), African American contestant Yasmin is depicted as lower class. She is keyed as a "hairdresser" and in the second episode, Yasmin tells us in a testimonial that she's from "the hood" in Detroit, but that "the hood is not the woods." She is shown complaining excessively about the living conditions, foreshadowing that she may be considered a nuisance because of how vocal she is about her difficulty adjusting to the physical environment.

The conflict between Yasmin and Ben originates in a physical challenge during which he is perceived to be overly aggressive. Before the challenge, which involves contestants tackling one another, host Probst warns them against "cheap shots" such as "slapping" and "choking," warning that they will be disqualified if anything "resembling a cheap shot" is observed. During the challenge, Ben is deemed too aggressive with Yasmin and other players and is disqualified by Probst. When Probst then asks Ben how it feels to be the first player in the history of the show to be disqualified from a challenge, he flexes his arm and says, "Outlaw, baby" followed by, "Whatever. No use crying over spilt milk." We are shown reactions of his castmates, who shake their heads. His teammates subsequently describe him as "a wild card," a "liability," a "pain in the ass," and remark that he is "driving [them] crazy" and "pissing a lot of people off." We can see that he is presented as aggressive and that his fellow cast members are in disalignment with his behavior.

Later, Yasmin brings up the altercation with Ben, as transcribed below. The conversation quickly turns to personal attacks with Ben and Yasmin engaging in reflexive meta-discussion as they prod each other on the veiled meaning of their utterances and elaborate their stances.

1	**YASMIN:**	Can we have a talk for a second, please?
2	**BEN:**	Sure!
3	**Y:**	Okay. Now.
4	**B**	What's up.
5	**Y:**	Let's talk about cheap shots. I don't know if-
6	**B:**	Tripping somebody ain't a cheap shot.
7	**Y:**	Ah cause, guess what. You tackled me like a dude. Don't tell me you
8		don't remember.
9	**B:**	Well that's just the way the game's played.
10	[. . .]	
11	**Y:**	But I understand what you're saying but you know what, you're
12		not showing me no sympathy, and you're not understanding what I'm
13		saying. You're a dude! It doesn't matter. Yes it is a game!
14	**B:**	[Listen, grammar school,] listen. Here's where it's going. Alright
15		((sfx: music starts))
16	**Y:**	[Listen] ignorant. Since you want to say grammar school.
17	**B:**	[Ignorant?] You-
18	**Y:**	[Yeah!]
19	**B:**	What's the definition of ignorant?
20	**Y:**	Yeah! What's the definition of grammar school? I'm just telling you
21		how I feel. But since I see I won't get nowhere with you I won't
22		waste my energy. But I want to let you know, cause I don't back
23		down to nobody and
24	**B:**	[You won't get anywhere with me, not
25		nowhere.]
26	**Y:**	I don't appreciate you tackling me.
27	**B:** ((testimonial))	*Jasmine is just a piece of work. Jasmine has a big mouth,*
28		*Jasmine smells bad, she's got really poor grammar. I think Jasmine is*
29		*pretty close to being a hooker.*
30	[. . .]	
31	**Y:**	And I see, you know what
32	**B:**	[You don't] even know the defin-the definition of
33		ignorant.
34	**Y:**	[You're (looking for a fight)]
35		because you're ignorant. You don't walk away from me.
36	**B:**	[You don't even know] the definition of ignorant.
37	[. . .]	
38	**B:** ((to Russell))	She is ghetto trash. Plain and simple. She needs to go back
39		to eating ketchup sandwiches and drinking Koolaid and doing
40		whatever else she does.
41	**Russell:**	(laugh)
42	**B:**	and leave me alone.

In line 5, Yasmin ostensibly proffers a general topic for conversation ("let's talk about cheap shots"), citing Probst's earlier words. Ben's response demonstrates understanding that she is referring to his behavior in the challenge, but disputes her characterization of it, replying (line 6) "tripping somebody ain't a cheap shot", in other words, tripping somebody was fair game within the bounds of the challenge. Yasmin responds by making her accusation explicit: she asserts that Ben tackled her "like a dude." As they argue Ben begins to mock Yasmin's speech; in lines 11–14 he ironically addresses her as "grammar school" after she uses a double negative in "you're not showing me no sympathy." Hill (2008:35–37) shows that whites' attention to/correction of double-negatives in African American Vernacular English relies on a false rationalization of logic that reproduces stereotypes of African Americans as less intelligent than whites. Ben again targets Yasmin's use of double negatives in lines 24–25, saying "you won't get anywhere with me, not nowhere." Ben iconically links (Irvine and Gal 2000) Yasmin's nonstandard grammar—and specifically those features linked with African Americans—to a negative persona, as seen in lines 27–29.

The text-metrical or poetic features of the interaction are important to see how discourse is metapragmatically typified by its structural unfolding (Jakobson 1960; Silverstein 1985). Agha (2007:100) and Lempert (2008, 2011) have shown that cross-

turn text-metrical structures can map onto features of social relations and interactional stance that may not be explicitly articulated. In line 16, Yasmin says, "Listen ignorant. Since you wanna say grammar school." By using the causal discourse marker (Schiffrin 1987) "since" to mark the subordinate clause "you wanna say grammar school," Yasmin shows that calling Ben "ignorant" was a result of, and can be explained by, his "grammar school" comment. Yasmin uses the word "listen," in "listen, ignorant," mimicking Ben's use of the same command in "listen, grammar school" (line 14). And when Ben says "What's the definition of ignorant?" she repeats his words in her response, "Yeah! What's the definition of grammar school?" Goodwin (1990:176–181) has shown how African American children use parallelism in the form of "format tying," taking the prior speaker's talk and transforming it to escalate arguments, such as in the case (180):

A: Why don't you get out my yard.
B: Why don't you *m*ake me get out the yard.

In this case, cross-turn parallelism draws equivalence between the terms "grammar school" and "ignorant" indicating that they are both indexical of broader social identities. Ben's term "grammar school" draws on indexicalities of place and specifically the authority of educational institutions. The reference to "grammar school," as noted above is ironic; suggesting that Yasmin is not even at the level of an elementary school student; rather, she *lacks* a grasp of basic English grammar.

Lempert (2012:198) shows that indirectness may be normative in many ethnographic contexts, and should be studied not as a problem but as "a quality imbued with value through reflexive, ideological engagement." For those who make racial accusations, indirectness is an appealing strategy because it allows them to benefit from plausible deniability. This is consistent with Pagliai's (2011:99) observation that indirectness is often used in accusations of racism to save face and Van Dijk's (1992:93) finding that "the very notion of 'racism' may become virtually taboo in accusatory contexts." In the interaction between Yasmin and Ben, Yasmin never specifies why she finds Ben's "grammar school" comment offensive. As I mentioned, it seems to imply a stereotypical formulation of African Americans as unintelligent. Yasmin may suspect racial motivations on Ben's part but does not accuse him of racism; she calls him "ignorant" (line 16). Ben urges Yasmin to elaborate, but she doesn't; instead she responds (line 20), "What's the definition of grammar school? I'm just telling you how I feel." Yasmin cites Ben's refusal to provide a definition as justification for her own, suggesting but not making explicit the second-order indexical meaning of both comments.

In line 32, Ben returns to Yasmin's characterization of him as "ignorant," repeating that she doesn't "even know the definition of ignorant." To say that Yasmin doesn't "know the definition" of words suggests that she has a poor vocabulary, which is consistent with his earlier "grammar school" comment implying that she is unintelligent, and specifically uneducated, as it evokes the kind of rote memorization of vocabulary definitions that is routine in elementary school curricula. That both Ben and Yasmin press each other for "definitions" of their utterances demonstrates their mutual orientation second-order indexicalities and the fact that the other person may be able to mask or deny their intended meanings.

At the subsequent "Tribal Council" meeting, African American contestant Jaison confronts Ben. Initially Jaison frames his dislike of Ben in terms of Ben's general demeanor around camp, stating that Ben is "negative" and "constantly criticizes everyone." However, it becomes clear that Jaison is really angry about Ben's remarks about Yasmin when another white contestant, Russell, reveals to host Jeff Probst that Ben "made some comments that might have been racial" and that this "changed the way Jaison thought about him." Jaison replies, "That *might* have been racial? Okay." The conversation continues as follows:

1	**BEN:**	I have said from the get-go, everybody knows, I've been very very
2		consistent. I have not started one fight. Not started one.
3	**JAISON:**	That's not even what I was talking about. I was talking more about
4		the "ghetto trash" that you tried to call her over there. Talking
5		about her inflection and-
6	**B:**	[Okay well if she's from] the ghetto and she's trashy, that's ghetto
7		trash. I'm sorry. Like, that's not r-that's not racial whatsoever.
8	**J:**	Kay.
9	**B:**	That's where you're from, and how you're acting. That's ghetto
10		trash.
11	**J:**	[If that's really] what you think, Ben
12	**B:**	So if you can't understand that
13	**J:**	Well let me make another point then, Southern guy with Southern
14		ways, do you really think you should talk to a woman that way?
15	**B:**	You know what? If she's going to be disrespectful
16	**J:**	[Southern gentleman?] Do you-do you speak to a
17		young lady that way?
18	**B:**	She's not a lady.
19	**J:**	Really? She wasn't a lady? I mean, come on.
20	**B:**	Ladies have manners. Kay? This girl right here? ((points to Natalie))
21		Southern. Has manners. Says yes sir, yes ma'am, please, thank you.
22	**J:**	Okay,
23	**B:**	So, Yasmin's being a bitch, then she's not a lady. I mean it's not that
24		hard.
25	**J:**	[Okay.]
26	**B:**	There was nothing racial that I said.
27	**J:**	[Whatever.]
28	**B:**	It was strictly what I saw.
29	**J:**	If you say so.
30	**B:**	How she was acting towards me. So if you want to call it a racial
31		game and play that card, then go for it buddy.
32	**J:**	You know, you should have some sensitivity, to history. And
33		historically when certain comments are made, and directed
34		towards certain people? It is because of race. I mean, if what you're
35		telling me, is that what you said had absolutely no racial context,
36		then maybe Yasmin was right and you are ignorant. Maybe you
37		really don't get it.

Silverstein (2001) identifies features that render indexical signs more susceptible to metalinguistic awareness—continuous segmentability, unavoidable referentiality, and presupposition—and suggests that signs that lack these qualities are much harder to talk about in later discourse. Elements of aggression that are less metapragmatically describable often get transformed into talk about "persona" (Agha 1997). It is likely for this reason that Jaison initially frames his criticism of Ben in terms of his "negative energy" rather than accusing him of racism. When Russell describes Ben's offensive remarks, Jaison displays reluctance to accuse Ben of racism in his use of the modal "might" about whether Ben's comments were "racial" (not even "racist"). As Pagliai (2011:98) notes, "if a racializing discourse is introduced as unmarked, to ask the speaker to account for it—to contest its appropriateness, for example—may become the marked behavior." Ben construes Jaison's challenge of him as itself marked and worthy of interrogation. Although Jaison never explicitly accused Ben of racism, his response to Russell ("that *might* have been racial? Okay") and criticism of his "ghetto trash" comment (line 4) implied that Ben's racism was easy to identify. This is what motivates Ben's defensiveness, leading him to retaliate by accusing Jaison of "playing the race card." This is a version of the inverted diagram outlined above, where people of color who make accusations of racism are constituted as the offenders.

Ben's first defense depends on a baptismal ideology: he insists that there was "nothing racial" about his comment and that its meaning was purely denotational: "If she's from the ghetto and she's trashy, that's ghetto trash" (lines 6–7). Formulating

this claim as a factual conditional implies that it is a general truth. He continues, "that's where you're from, and how you're acting" (line 9); this logic draws on a referentialist ideology, implying that if his words accurately describe Yasmin's behavior, they cannot be "racial." He later follows with a witness evidential to support his claims: "it was strictly what I saw" (line 28). After Ben insists on the denotational transparency of his utterance, Jaison tries appealing to what Agha (1997:24) has referred to as "text-level indexicality." Jaison argues that Ben's comments were inappropriate if not for their denotational/propositional content, then for emergent co(n)textual conditions of the interaction, specifically biographical attributes of the interactants. In lines 13–14, Jaison invokes the social category "Southern guy" and suggests that Ben's comments were inappropriate because of a participation framework in which Yasmin is a "woman," "a young lady." The implication is that Southern models of propriety prohibit rudeness to women; this would make Ben, a self-described Southerner, a hypocrite. Ben does not dispute Jaison's logic; rather he disputes what constitutes the denotational class of "ladies" (lines 18–24), arguing that it does not refer to all women but rather a subset of women who observe a certain model of conduct. According to Ben, Yasmin does not fit the role designator "lady" because she is a "bitch," unlike Natalie (a white woman), who is "Southern. Has manners. Says yes sir, yes ma'am, please, thank you."

Again, place-based indexical stereotypes, which are linked to typecasting described above, are invoked to do interactional work. Cox (2011) has pointed out that the South is imagined in popular culture and particularly in reality television as rural and backward, reinforcing stereotypes of Southerners as uneducated hicks and ignoring progressive or liberal Southern culture (see also Slade and Narro 2012).[2] On *Survivor*, Ben's rural background is highlighted. When his team arrives at their camp and have to figure out how to build shelter and a fire, Ben tells his teammates that he is "country" and "a hillbilly," and has knowledge of the outdoors. In a testimonial, he says:

> I've shot, killed, and cleaned about everything you're allowed to in Missouri and probably a few things you're not. So I've done a lot of this stuff before, and I think a lot of these people are kind of candy asses.

Ben's stereotypical depiction of himself as a "hillbilly" is typical of how *Survivor* cast members talk about one another. Value-laden social category labels such as "bitch" and "lady," and models of conduct associated with them, are repeatedly invoked in characterizations of individuals in these interactions. In Ben's testimonial (lines 27–29) he projects an iconic relationship between the diverse signs of body odor, verbal aggression, and poor grammar so as to typify them as being emblematic of the social category "hooker" (he also mispronounces Yasmin's name, calling her "Jasmine"). Similarly, in his comments to Russell (lines 38–40) he draws on stereotypes of poor African Americans, saying that Yasmin should "go back to eating ketchup sandwiches and drinking Koolaid." The preponderance of the use of such terms by performers themselves is linked to a broader discursive field of the reality television genre in which, as described above, the cliché of casting for role categories in terms of stereotypical social types is well known.

After Ben argues that Yasmin is not a "lady," Jaison tries another tactic. Again he addresses text-level indexical features—specifically biographical details of the interactants—but this time using race and not gender as the determining factor. In line 34, he uses an impersonal construction to assert that such comments are typically motivated by race. In lines 32–37, Jaison invokes a speech chain that interdiscursively (Silverstein 2005) links Ben's comments to historical series of comments where "certain comments"—likely referring to "ghetto trash"—are motivated by race. Modan (2007:81) has shown how geographic locations become racialized, creating a "moral geography" where class and ethnic relations are "articulated through space." Though "ghetto" ostensibly refers to a geographic place, the discomfort comes from

a history of pejorative use to describe blacks. The racist nature of Ben's utterance is then not localizable in the utterance itself; it is emergent and depends on configurations of the conditions of performance, including who was talking to whom. These indexical effects are not visible to a referentialist, baptismal, or personalist ideology, which is why the racism here is difficult to "prove" within those ideological frameworks.

Dramatizing Racism through Editing

In their argument for focusing on the media in the study of language ideology, Johnson and Milani state (2010:6), "in the very act of choosing, citing and 'styling' certain voices (but not others) in particular ways, all media producers have the potential to re-scale social, cultural and symbolic capital, and thereby 're-shuffle' authority and expertise on particular issues." It is also the case that that formal aesthetic features of particular media formats are themselves informed by and reinforce linguistic ideologies.

I have shown how reality TV's casting and narrative requirements serve to dramatize racial conflict; here I consider some editorial features of the *Survivor* scenes to show the ways in which they frame the scenes. First, the music laid underneath the dialogue contributes significantly to the dramatizing of the interaction. As can be seen in line 15, background music begins directly after Ben says "grammar school." I consulted a television sound mixer from the television station where I conducted my fieldwork and he informed me that this music is an Indian musical style called "Tabla," a hand drum with a rhythm that he said is commonly thought to sound disjointed and tense to Western ears. The song is looped so the Tabla sound is consistent in its timing, but it still contains tension. This metapragmatically indexes this as a dramatic moment and locates Ben's comment as the start of the trouble—no music was playing until that point. In this context the music suggests that this comment has heightened the tension. Later, around line 35, different music begins that sounds creepy and almost sinister. This music uses a "synth pad," a sustained sound with a synthesizer that is used for dramatic effect, often in scripted genres like soap operas, horror, and crime, denoting that tension or conflict is coming to a head.

It's important to note here the circumstances under which such "background" music is procured. Producers often use stock music from music libraries that license pre-cleared music produced by (usually) anonymous work-for-hire artists to customers for subscription fees that are considerably lower than the cost of purchasing the music of well-known artists. The producers at my field site used one such service, which offers a wide spectrum of music so that customers can select music from a specific genre ("rock") or subgenre ("punk," "acoustic," "folk"). In addition, it is possible to select a tempo ("fast," "medium," "multi," "slow"), or a mood ("aggressive," "dramatic," "laid back"). Furthermore, if looking for a very narrow or clichéd musical style, one can enter in specific search terms ("scary," "heist," "elevator music"). I mention this to point out that these services can be seen as facilitating a kind of hyper-conventionalization, where the database is set up to provide the customer with options that are most easily recognizable as belonging to a category or a cliché. That is, it's not only that producers are selecting music to create a "dramatic" or "laid back" mood, but that they are often choosing from pre-selected music that has been typified in such a way by a third-party company. The search parameters set up by these databases themselves can be seen as indexically presupposing and entailing (Silverstein 2003) the metasemiotic typifications of musical styles as recognizable stereotypical cultural tropes.

Park (2009) and Jaffe (2011) have shown how television captioning practices can typify certain voices or linguistic varieties as authoritative or undermine them. Reaction shots may have a similar effect. Reaction shots, shots that cut away from the person speaking or scene unfolding to show others' reactions (usually just visually), are another important editing resource. In the second *Survivor* scene they contribute

significantly to depicting the stance of other cast members toward the dialogue between Jaison and Ben. When Jaison is talking, the reaction shots depict the other cast members either looking at him or looking down, with the exception of one case. When Jaison says "when certain comments [. . .] It is because of race" (lines 33–34), we see Russell nodding. These reactions show alignment with his statements. But when Ben is speaking, the reaction shots show the other cast members, both white and non-white, expressing disagreement or disbelief. When Ben says, "I have not started one fight" we see Ashley (a white cast member) smiling and raising her eyebrows, implying that she has seen otherwise. When he says, "if she's from the ghetto and she's trashy that's ghetto trash," we see Elizabeth (an Asian American cast member) scrunching her eyebrows in a kind of a wince and pressing her lips together, suggesting discomfort. And when Ben says, "she's not a lady" we see Shannon (a white cast member) shaking her head. It is important to mention that these shots should not be interpreted as the individuals' actual reactions to the dialogue they are paired with. Reaction shots can be taken from anywhere in the sequence and inserted somewhere else (in addition to showing emotion, they often serve a double purpose as a visual resource with which to cover cuts). However, they are an important resource in representing how others react to these moments and contribute to bolstering or undermining the cast members' authority.

This apparent disalignment with Ben is consistent with the positioning of him by other cast members as a troublemaker. For example, in a testimonial, Russell remarks that he enjoys the conflict between Yasmin and Ben because "that just makes everybody not like Ben." Ashley describes him as a "wild card" and a "liability" to their team because of his aggression. Jeff Probst, on his widely read blog on EW.com (Entertainment Weekly), praises Ben for exactly this. He writes (2009), "Ben delivered exactly what he promised he would in casting. For that we owe him a thank you. He didn't back down or cower in a corner and wait for someone else to drive the story. He came strong. Very strong." Here Probst explicitly acknowledges that individuals are cast to perform particular roles and that Ben made good on his "promise" in casting, presumably to be an instigator of conflict and propel the narrative forward.

In the same blog post, Probst reinforces an emphasis on interpersonal conflict in his discussion of the Tribal Council argument between Ben and Jaison. He portrays it not as reflective of racism but as a matter of "two people from very different walks of life, going jaw-to-jaw with their personal beliefs." Probst does not take a position on the nature of Ben's comments; he describes them as "what [Jaison] perceived to be racist comments." However, he also declares Jaison as a "hero" for his behavior at Tribal Council, saying that he "elevated himself" and commending his "eloquence." As in the show itself, the depiction of racism here is complex and reflective of multiple ideologies: while he praises Jaison's debate skills, Probst does not characterize Ben's comments as racist or even necessarily problematic. He reinforces a folk theory of racism as a problem of individual belief and demeanor, delighting in how Ben's aggressive persona provides "drama" and propels the narrative, a central concern from the perspective of production. This description by Probst of Jaison's demeanor, as well as descriptions of him by his castmates, are typical of the tendency discussed by Alim (2012:4) of whites to "exceptionalize" blacks' verbal competence by describing them with labels such as "eloquent" (the word used by Probst), "in control" (Russell described Jaison as "calm and collected"), and "highly educated" (recall the earlier description of Jaison as a "Yale-type black man"). Such descriptions are in implicit contrast with an expected lack of linguistic competence; the construction of such eloquence as exceptional reinforces stereotypes of blacks as unintelligent or uneducated.

Conclusion

Most work on racism and reality TV has focused on racial stereotypes, arguing that shows "brainwash" audiences with toxic messages (Andrejevic and Colby 2006;

Pozner 2010). Pozner (2010) characterizes reality television producers as manipulative puppet masters who poison powerless audiences with negative images of women and racial minorities. But though reality shows may employ racial caricatures, they do not create them out of whole cloth; they make use of cultural models and stereotypes already familiar to audiences. The problems with their depictions of racial conflict reflect broader cultural beliefs about language and racism and should be considered as part of an ongoing speech chain.

I have argued that reality television constitutes a mediatized genre that highlights depictions of racial conflict. Reality show casting tends to reinforce a model of racism as located primarily in rural conservatives, and the highlighting of racial conflicts as interpersonal drama emphasizes racism as an individual problem. I have suggested that the genre has a unique engagement with models of individual authenticity and intentionality (as seen through conventions such as the testimonial) which encourages a particular mode of reflexive engagement on the part of both performers and audiences, emphasizing the interrogation of performers' true motives. These shows commonly depict a familiar pattern of racism accusation and counteraccusation where metapragmatic leakage underpinned by a personalist ideology motivates a characterization of speakers of implicitly racist comments as "racists." These individuals are put on the defensive and may trope on this diagram, positioning themselves as innocent victims of attacks and even racism on the part of their accusers. These interactions are both predicated on and reinforce a condition of racial paranoia, which revolves around the fact that individuals' explicit comments may not reflect their true intentions. Editorial features such as shot selection and sound mixing work to dramatize racism as interpersonal conflict.

However, to say that the reality genre reinforces only one model of racism does not account for the nuance of the range of tools that are used to create meaning in production. As I have shown, these practices, in the form of more obvious choices, like casting, and less obvious, like shot selection in editing, have the potential to present and endorse multiple perspectives, such as the use of apparently aligning reaction shots to Jaison's remarks at Tribal Council, and the inclusion of remarks about historical/structural context of racist utterances. Such interventions play an important role in endorsing and legitimizing viewpoints and may be instructive in how the audience is meant to perceive cast members' comments. The scenes I have examined are not just isolated interactions from a particular television genre. Rather these representations encapsulate multiple scales of social relations, both highlighting and downplaying the powerful indexical aspects of contemporary American racism that are at once so pervasive and yet difficult to identify in interaction.

Notes

1. Of course, as Jackson points out, blacks' suspicions of racism are not "paranoid" in the sense of being unfounded; the term "paranoia" refers to the experience of sensing racist intent but being unable to prove it.

2. Cox presents the following excerpt from a casting notice for one program, "Redneck Riviera": "Do you drink sweet tea, talk endlessly about NASCAR, sport a rebel flag (on your bikini or jacked-up pickup truck), listen to loud country and/or Southern rock, or enjoy walking around shirtless or in Daisy Dukes?"

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