Capstone Prospectus

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Capstone Seminar

Honor Pledge

I have acted with honor and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.

/s/ Natalie Yeatts

Introduction: can act as a form of intro for other 2 sections, and introduce the cited article, specific info

For this paper, I would like to focus on how Page, Kateb, and Craig disrupted the expectations for racialized gender presentation as well as specifically how race and gender function within television on *Love Island USA*. With *Love Island USA* functioning as an exaggerated and isolated micro-culture that reflects existing racial dynamics and heteropatriarchy, these three women were disruptive to the culture in different ways, from the perception of them to their words and actions. For this analysis, I would like to focus on specifically the episodes of the Casa Amor recoupling (episode 22), the finale (episode 36), and several other short scenes within the season to create a context for the analysis to live within, including a couple short lines from the *Aftersun* show in order to show what was deemed as a highlight or a debatable topic. In addition, within the show and the *Aftersun* I can not only look at the actions and words of the women, but

also what was seen as a controversial form of behaviour to other people and deemed worthy of discussion. In addition, since the winner of the show and places of the final four couples is decided by audience voting, the finale and order of couples is a reflection of audience reactions to the couples, which includes not only the couple's relationship as a whole but also the perception of both members in order to make the decision.

While the research of television and popular culture can be of interest to theorists in both fields, it is important to note that there have been many articles in overlapping areas that I am discussing, whether they are discussing reality television, dating shows, and even certain aspects of the *Love Island* franchise, so why does this matter? Within these contexts, Love Island USA Season six is an important season of the show that is at least partially due to these three women creating an atmosphere of friendship and care for each other, and that credit is also reflected in how the women are continuing to be well known within the pop culture sphere, with several brand deals, television appearances on other shows, and lasting notoriety (either positive or negative impression) from their appearances on the show.

The article I would like to focus on as a core part of the discussion I am participating in

Literature Review: Cite sources, look at ex (subheaded sections, engage with the sources and do not do an annotated bibliography)

Within the context of the research object of Page, Kateb, and Craig disrupting the villa in order to create a form

As there are many more facets of what I believe is important to add context to the discussion, I would like to split these facets up into different categories and their relationality to my topic within the larger field on communication, power in reality television, the importance of language, and othering.

Power in Reality Television:

While reality television is not a reflection of what is considered normal as a whole in any way shape or form, as it puts normal people in abnormal situations or abnormal people in normal situations (Orbe 2008), there are still reflections of the normalized power structures even within more 'rebellious' shows. For instance, within the show *Queer Eye*, there is a reflection of moderated rebellion through only breaking a certain set of normalized rules (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix 2006). Whether it both relying on stereotypes of straight men as well as challenging them, or making sexualized jokes about the male 'clients' while still 'taming' their sexuality and queerness, *Queer Eye* is meant to challenge stereotypes within a very small area, which allows for both adaptation of allowances and reinforcement of certain power structures. Whereas the issues within the television shows can be seen as representations of certain types of people, there can still be issues with othering through attempts to normalize one identity by stripping away all other 'abnormal' factors (Boylorn 2008). This discussion of representation and the creation of dual identities was also discussed in Harbin's (2023) paper on how racialized (specifically Black) reality television contestants can feel a sense of racial duty due to the conflation of marginalized groups as one sole unit, where non-marginalized people are expected to have differences within a group.

While existing power structures are an important aspect of reality television, there is literature that suggests that reality television has created some power structure of its own within a specific formula that these shows follow. Tal-Or and Hershman-Shriti's (2015) points of the likeability of reality television constructed character correlating to the willingness to be emotionally open on camera is an important point that I believe plays a role within the context of Page, Kateb, and Craig being liked by a wider audience as they all were emotionally open in different forms throughout the season to an unknown audience of the camera. While the openness is often improvised while on camera, there is an established pattern within dating shows of an ending love declaration that McAlister (2018) analyzed within the format of *The Bachelor*'s episodes. Lindenfield's (2013) book review article elaborates on how the Bachelor franchise functions within the discussions of not only reality television and the surveillance that comes within the genre. It also discusses the emotional version of the "money shot" as the women crying or experiencing tough situations in order to further heighten drama with not only love at stake, but people's feelings as well. Within these contexts, gender is exploited as a focal point, within competitions and relational appeal being judged constantly, by not only the person they are attempting to start a romantic relationship with, but also within relationships with the other contestants there, usually of the same gender. In these contexts, race and ethnicity can be exploited, through either highlighting or sidelining from the production and editing staff, to create an interesting facet of a person through a mystery or to change how a person is perceived in order to justify a decision to end the romantic relationship or continue to pursue it. While the article by Lindenfield is a well-thought out article that discusses an academic book, it

does not cover all the aspects of what I would like to discuss. While *Love Island USA* follows a different format of couples and how they operate, both the recouplings and the finale episode follow a similar format of needing to be emotionally open and follow the established pattern of offerings of love and receival.

Within the show Love Island USA, there is a clear reflection of the established reality television relationships to communication concepts being adapted to work within a context.

The Importance of Language:

Within reality television dating shows especially, there is relationality through communication that is expected to create a 'connection'. *Love Island USA* especially has the infamous line of "Can I pull you for a chat" that is borrowed from *Love Island UK*. Within both shows, there is an interesting adaptation and combination of several different language forms and slang in order to create an almost entirely new dialogue. There is a mix of the 'British-isms' present in the UK version ('mugged off'), Black queer slang phrasing ('it's giving'), and occasionally between Black contestants especially, some African American vernacular English (AAVE) present in both sentence and grammatical structures (stressed tenses, zero copula, etc) as well as some slang. This queering of standardized American English speech patterns is based on the mixed backgrounds on the show, and as studied by Branson (2026), the usage of different forms of language (specifically AAVE) leads to different assumptions about intelligence levels and education achievements. These assumptions based on the usage of language can also apply to Eguchi & Pindi (2024) and specifically Pindi's discussion of

the masculinization of the self as a form of self-protection against both “tomboyphobia” and blatant misogyny. This masculinization of self can not only apply to the visual perceptions, but also how one speaks. This establishment of feminine versus masculine language has been studied in different ways, including conclusions drawn about jobs (Formanowicz et al 2013) through feminizing language. While language is gendered, commonalities within storytelling and self determination through media (Krikowa & Aguas 2025) is an established concepts, especially within queer theory and among other marginalized groups. Through this storytelling, it becomes easier to highlight important demonstrations of power, as Andrade (2025) does in their writing on queer forgiveness. While the situation that Andrade focuses on in their writing is extraordinarily different that what I am discussing, the aspects of power in the language of forgiveness have very real applications within conflict-ridden environments such as *Love Island USA*. While there are many aspects of language that matter within a talking-heavy media piece, the main focus is what the language does.

Othering:

Othering within a given area can happen in many different ways and for different reasons. Within the context of the paper, othering can discuss other ing through racialization, gender presentation, or queerness through the subversion of these expectations, whether intentional and unintentional subversions.

For instance, Ajewole & Bunn (2026) focus on how racialized othering of Black students at predominately white schools affects children psychologically and can reflect social biases, Bogard’s adaptation of Foucault's theory of the panopticon to the 80s era

(1991) discusses how sociological systems can create small coercive actions in order to express larger systems of power, which can relate to respectability politics and racial microaggressions (Thorpe et al 2025, Vine & Holmes 2026). However, these articles (aside from Bogard) focus on how anti-Blackness specifically others Black people and effects, whereas Van Gilder & Abdi (2014) focuses on a multi-othering within Iranian-American communities of queer women. Van Gilder and Abdi's writing focuses on different aspects of the queering of expectations in multiple forms, whether it is familial and cultural expectations of women's familial roles and heteropatriarchal relationship roles. This queering of expectations can also relate to the full, well-rounded characters we can see within the show, despite the edited and condensed timelines. These timelines are also discussed within Taylor's (2024) article on queering timelines within the hero's journey formula within writing, whether it is shifting expectations and making relationship timelines appear later in life, or shifting expectations for life milestones such as adding a coming out or shifting. Within this queering of timelines in romantic relationships especially, *Love Island*'s timelines and relationship milestones altering within the context of the villa can be seen in a more queer lens.

Methodology:

Through this paper, I will be utilizing a queer lens to do a textual analysis of *Love Island USA* Season 6, focusing on certain episodes and scenes to show how a queering of expectations matters within the context of reality television. This alteration of expectations within an extremely public platform, such as the explosion of attention that was *Love Island USA* Season 6 has an outgoing effect of what is expected within the

context of television and *Love Island USA* specifically. The disruption produced by the top three women of the season (Page, Kateb, and Craig) had a ripple effect from their actions, to show participants (other contestants and the Aftersun hosts), to the audience of the show. With this methodology and the research object here, I believe the academics that have done similar research that I would like to expand upon are Harbin (2023), Van Gilder & Abdi (2014), and Dubrofsky (Lindenfeld, 2013). Harbin's relationality to othering through a sense of responsibility to racial representation within Black reality television contestants. Where that does touch on multi-othering, Van Gilder and Abdi are scholars who focus on the multiple layers that different forms of othering can create as well as the compounding effect. Dubrofsky's book on *the Bachelor* television franchise and its relationships with surveillance and gender, which I am referencing Lindenfeld's review of, has the most closely related topic to the relationality of production and product within reality dating show and allows a focus on what is put as a part of the show.

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Seminar Materials

RO Example: Casa Amor Recoupling because that was a point where all women discussed displayed different aspects of their personalities in a high-stress time

Core Article: Harbin, M. B. (2023). Don’t make my entertainment political! Social media responses to narratives of racial duty on competitive reality television series. *Political Communication*, *40*(4), 464–483. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2195365
Article copy to be attached in an email

This article looking at narrative of racial duty within competition reality shows and how representation of racialized persons are displayed, also discusses how gender affects racialization