

LOSING SIGHT OF OURSELVES: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF REALITY
TELEVISION IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is the emergence and encouragement of the false self in our society and how this is portrayed through four reality television shows: *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Hoarders*, *Sister Wives* and *Catfish: The TV Show*. Content analysis in combination with various theoretical perspectives will be utilized in order to examine the effects of narcissism, consumerism and the emergence of the false self.

The limitless character of a consumer society coupled with narcissism and an increased focus on the self contributes to the development of the false self within the individual. People may not even be aware of the push to be narcissistic, focused on our own biographies and self-promotion, yet people are aware of their suffering and unhappiness. Many individuals are left questioning why it is that they are never completely satisfied even as they accumulate notoriety, success, material wealth and possessions. An ideology of greatness and being the best is found in so many avenues of our daily lives, and at times it can be overwhelming, and if we do not possess these skills and qualities we are encouraged to just fake it.

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CHAPTER I
OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

"He sees the world, even in its emptiness, as a mirror of himself" (Lasch 1978: 21)

Many people in the U.S. tend to idolize individuals who achieve greatness: celebrities, movie stars, the wealthy, and the brilliant. Reality television not only provides the viewer with an insight into daily life and routines but may answer deeper, more existential questions about how we define our sense of self and how we as individuals relate to the rest of society. Today the individual is offered a plurality of choices including the realm of what we watch on television. Is reality television a reflection of our “selves” and is it reflecting a pattern of narcissistic tendencies present in our society today?

The old Greek story of Narcissus follows a young man known for his beauty that sees his image in a pond and falls in love with it. Narcissus was fixated upon his reflection and was so enamored with his reflection that he starves and dies. Our culture today, contains youth posing in front of bathroom mirrors, fixated upon their reflections, sharing these images with those around them seeking attention and admiration. What may be emerging is a new cultural narcissism that can be witnessed with the growth of social media and the growth of reality television within American culture. Do we care more about what others think today than people did just a few decades ago?

There are many avenues of our world that are drastically changing on a daily basis. The growth of social media and reality television are a major aspect of our daily

lives that are altering the way we look at ourselves and others. Whereas too much television consumption was once a concern for members of our society, a new cultural narcissism found within reality television is arguably a growing concern for our youth and our future. Few are discussing this matter and reality television is one way in which our society can better understand these changes that are encouraging narcissistic behavior and what it means for us as individuals. While narcissism is a central focus of this study the emergence and development of the false self will be a prevalent and recurring theme.

What may be most haunting in the discussion which is to follow, are that these reality television shows portray our society's ideology. A society obsessed with greatness, of being the best and most admired, ultimately leading to a hollow, empty and fragile self. The following discussion and analysis of consumerism, narcissism and reality television is grim and is meant to portray the concerning messages that reality television has to offer the modern individual and how internalizing these messages and even utilize them in order to aid in the formation and construction of the self may lead to devastating consequences not only for the modern individual but for our society as a whole.

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE: ENCOURAGING THE FALSE SELF

How is it possible that our society is becoming narcissistic? Where did this begin and how did it develop? Television and the media are a fairly recent development in our

world. Prior to television the newspaper and then the radio seeped into our lives informing our thoughts and ideas. The extent to which all of media affects the individual has been debated for decades. Most agree however, that the media does have an effect upon the individual in some way, shape and form.

Individuals have long been concerned with their sense of self and defining who they are as a person. What is different about our sense of self today and how we are developing our identity is that the process is now a mediated experience. Television, radio, print, and film are engulfing our lives and we are submerged in this mediated world from the moment we are born. Today, births are recorded, photographed, posted on Facebook and tweeted. The growth of a child is tracked and photographed then posted for all the parent's Facebook friends to follow. Does the child have a choice in their life being put on display? Social media and reality television have grown up together. Reality television came from the periphery to primetime television slots in the late 1990s and social media took off in the early 2000s.

It is important to pause and reflect on the idea that the self is a socially constructed, ongoing process. As Peter Callero states:

[T]he social construction of selfhood is also about the meanings and understandings associated with the public self, the self that is visible and known to others and encompassed by what we come to accept within the cultural category of personhood. (2003: 121)

As reality television becomes an increasingly central aspect of our culture today it is important to understand the common themes and messages found within these programs

in terms of an individual's identity. Reality television reflects something about our current culture and requires further study.

Todd Gitlin: Saturated by Media

Todd Gitlin's work *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*, delivers insight into how the growth of media saturation in the United States is affecting the individual. "The United States is the world capital of tinsel and celebrity, the homeland for the manufacture of images and soundtracks in unprecedented numbers and at unprecedented velocity" (2001: 9). Gitlin, who was a student of David Riesman, argues that we are now living our lives in the presence of the media. This research supports Gitlin's argument that an individual's constant connection and immersion in media (radio, television, film and Internet) is beginning to alter the formation and maintenance of the self. "Media are occasions for experiences—experiences that are themselves the main products, the main transactions, the main 'effects' of media. This is the big story; the rest is details" (2001: 10). Constant contact with the media provides the individual with opportunities to feel or experience feeling. Think about the last time you were moved by a sad movie or when you laughed until you cried at your favorite comedy. The media provides opportunities to feel. Gitlin argues though, that this constant immersion and saturation of the media in our lives leads to confusion as to authentic, meaningful feeling.

We are on our way here into a society of nonstop popular culture that induces limited-liability feelings on demand—feelings that do not bind and sensations that feel like, and pass for, feelings. A society consecrated to self-interest

ends up placing a premium on finding life interesting.
(2001: 41)

A society focused on finding life interesting doesn't sound so bad. This research hopes to point to how the increase of reality television may very well be portraying the negative effects of media saturation. Where does an individual find authentic, meaningful feeling; in their interactions with others or by the consumption of reality television? The answer is likely a bit of both, but the more important question is what is being consumed when one watches reality television?

Anthony Giddens: Media and the Self

Anthony Giddens' book *Modernity and Self Identity* provides a great foundation for understanding how individuals may go about constructing their sense of self and the effects media may have. In modern times, life has become discontinuous and full of anxiety. Social institutions are disembedded, otherwise understood as the "lifting out of social situations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracks of time-space" (Giddens 1991: 18). For Giddens, media serves as an example of such an institution that causes time and space to be separated from one another, placing the viewer in a position where they are physically separated from what they are watching. Media is a "mediated experience," according to Giddens, reliant on language to link time and space which provides a basis for understanding society and its structures. Giddens is extremely concerned with the increase of mediated experience in modern times and how it affects the self. Media does not necessarily display or mirror reality but in a sense help form it. There has also been a vast increase in the number of options available to the

viewer and Giddens explains that it becomes “a question of selecting between possible worlds” (1991: 29). With modernity comes increased specialization and disembedded social institutions separating time and space leading to an increased focus on individuality and concern with defining one’s sense of self.

Existential questions such as *who am I* and *who shall I become*, aid the individual in making the self a reflexive project. One becomes focused on constructing one’s own biography and defining who they are as a person. As a result, Giddens argues that the self becomes fragile, brittle, fractured and fragmented, anxious about the world and themselves. The “child learns about its body primarily in terms of its practical engagements with the object-world and with other people” (Giddens 1991: 56). The important relation of the body and self is important for understanding how one may go about constructing their sense of self. Giddens draws upon the work of Kierkegaard and Foucault arguing that the self is essentially separated from the body causing it to act as if under remote control. An ironic description of this relationship considering we are looking at the effects of television on defining one’s sense of self. Questions of what to do, how to act and who to be, cause the individual to be completely wrapped up in shaping their own individuality. Émile Durkheim articulates that “[r]eflection [...] has about it something personal and egoistic; for it is only possible as a person becomes detached from the outside world, and retreats from it into himself” (1951: 279). An individual can reflect upon his or her actions and decisions in a healthy way. However, “[t]he moment the individual becomes so enamored of himself, inevitably he increasingly detaches himself from everything external and emphasizes the isolation in

which he lives, to the point of worship” (1951:279). Angela McRobbie also discusses our current situation in what she refers to as “reflexive modernization” where there is an “unhealthy degree of belief in the self” (2001: 3). The self becomes a project to work on: being defined and then re-defined as a result of change.

Erving Goffman: The Presentation of Self

Similarly Erving Goffman discusses changes in the self in our modern world. Goffman argues that individuals are constantly performing depending upon the current situation they are involved in. For example, in a work environment we might perform differently than say when on a first date with someone. Individuals “present a front for an organization as well as for themselves” (Goffman 1959: 77). Presenting a front for an organization would look like behaving in a professional manner at a business lunch or putting on a face/personality that reflects that particular organization. For example if your organization has a fun, up-beat work environment that works hard but has a gym/fitness facility and dining facility then you would want to portray that same type of personality when interacting with other clients or potential employees to give off a certain impression of that particular organization. Goffman indicates that this process of putting on a front is not only for the organization but for the individual themselves. What does it mean to present a front for yourself? In today’s world we can present ourselves as we like via social media avenues such as Facebook. I want people to see me as this type of person who likes certain types of people, food, activities, movies, products. Does presenting ourselves in a certain way alter who we are as individuals? If on a daily basis

we present ourselves one way when deep down inside we are a different person at one point do we lose sight of our true selves?

Riesman and the Other-Directed Person

Children are growing up in a mediated world. The influences from peers and the media help shape the child and help to define one's sense of self. "Under these newer patterns the peer group becomes much more important to the child, while the parents make him feel guilty not so much about violation of inner standards as about failure to be popular or otherwise to manage his relations with these other children" (Riesman et al. 1950: 37). If children are expected to 'fit in' with their peers and be popular they will begin to look to others to aid in defining their sense of self. What am I supposed to like? How am I supposed to act? Cues are taken from one's peers as to how to appropriately behave. Riesman refers to this shift of the individual as the other-directed person.

The other-directed person must be able to receive signals from far and near; the sources are many, the changes rapid. What can be internalized, then, is not a code of behavior but the elaborate equipment needed to attend to such messages and occasionally to participate in their circulation. As against guilt-shame controls, through of course these survive, one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse anxiety. (Riesman et al. 1950: 334)

Durkheim argues that we need social interaction in order to understand our place in the world. To learn what the rules and expectations are and to help us feel connected to our community and society. What is different about our current culture is that the media is heavily influencing our sense of solidarity. Individuals are becoming anxious by constantly looking to others and the media for guidance resulting in a pressure to stay up

to date with trends and expectations. Constant. Endless. “While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time, it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction and chief area of sensitivity” (Riesman et al. 1950: 38). Riesman rightly points to this change in an individual’s way of thinking. People are more concerned about the perceptions of others and more importantly how others perceive that individual. This growing concern of how others perceive us affects the development of the self.

Stjepan Mestrovic: “The Emotional Illusion of Authenticity” (1997: 83)

Stjepan Mestrovic argues that as a result of these changes we are now living in a post-emotional society. A place where emotions and feelings are artificially produced, packaged and sold by advertisers, corporations and governments. “A new hybrid of intellectualized, mechanical, mass-produced emotions has appeared on the world scene” (1997: 26). Mestrovic argues that Americans emotional lives are being manipulated on a highly organized scale to the point where freedom and choice is seen as a staple of our lives when in fact we are free to choose very little.

The contemporary consumer is not just a mass society automation, as Adorno claimed, but an agent convinced that he or she possesses some degree of freedom to choose group identities, and this belief makes the agent a target of manipulation by corporations who pitch advertisements in relation to specific subgroup versions of emotional reality. (Mestrovic 1997: 81)

An emotional reality. Has our constant connection with artificially constructed emotions by advertisers and marketing experts created a desire for real, authentic feeling? Has the

individual lost sight of real and authentic vs. artificial and false? The growth of technology and increased media saturation can arguably affect one's ability to understand authentic feeling. Where human interaction and community involvement once provided meaningfulness to an individual's life we now see an increased television consumption coupled with the growth of reality television. Emotional reality and understanding the depth of authenticity within reality television will be a recurring theme within this research.

Jean Baudrillard: "The World Betrays Itself by Appearances" (1996:1)

The world in which we live is changing at a drastic pace. This particular research aims at providing a glimpse of how this changing world and our definition of self is negatively affecting society and the individuals within it. In his work *The Perfect Crime*, Jean Baudrillard delves deeper into the world of appearances and the resulting effect on the self:

Doomed to our own image, our own identity, our own 'look,' we become our own object of care, desire and suffering, we have grown indifferent to everything else. And secretly desperate at that indifference, and envious of every form of passion, originality and destiny" (1996: 131).

Individuals care about other's perceptions of themselves resulting in our obsession with our own image. How we appear to others has become the focus for many resulting in a craving for that which is truly original, passionate and real. Today, we can fake a certain persona in the hopes of being attractive to others. Attractive, not only in the romantic sense, but in the sense that you are a likeable, amiable person that others want to be

around and essentially, be. We are now “unhappy consciousnesses extracting from this neurological mirror an identity which is itself wretched” (1996: 137) Baudrillard argues we are extracting an identity from a dead mirror, an identity that should be sought by many. What does this identity look like? Reality television may provide an insight into this ideal persona one that is desired by many and achieved by few. “Projecting ourselves into a fictive, random world for which there is no other motive than this violent abreaction to ourselves. Building ourselves a perfect virtual world so as to be able to opt out of a real one” (1996: 37). Why would we choose to opt out of our real world? What is driving us to escape into reality television?

Consumerism, Television and the Anxious, Fractured Individual

Modernity is no doubt absorbed by consumption and consumerism. “Modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices and, because it is non-foundational, at the same time offers little help as to which options should be selected” (Giddens 1991: 80). As individuals we are bombarded with endless options and possibilities yet we have no choice but to choose. Our lifestyle choices not only define how to act but who to be and this is at the very core of self-identity. Baudrillard states “consumption from this Durkheimian perspective is seen not as enjoyment or pleasure, but rather as something which is institutionalized, forced upon us, a duty [...] we must be trained, we must learn to consume” (1970:4). Others have discussed the importance of material objects and consumption patterns in defining one’s identity (Rose 1992, Andrejevic 2002, Pecora 2002, Philips 2005, Bullen 2009 & Tudor 2009). Anxiety becomes a characteristic of individuals as they are overwhelmed by the plurality of

choices, yet Giddens argues that daily rituals and routines help to cope. Durkheim and Baudrillard expand upon this idea of being overwhelmed and full of anxiety as a result of consumerism. Baudrillard states that there is a “catastrophic anxiety which is the deep effect of the market economy and generalized competition” (1970: 67). Constantly striving to have the best and newest material possession is repeatedly the focus of many. Durkheim originally made an important observation about consumerism and the pursuit of material wealth:

All man’s pleasure in acting, moving and exerting himself implies the sense that his efforts are not in vain and by walking he has advanced. However, one does not advance when one walks toward no goal, or—which is the same thing—when his goal is infinity. Since the distance between us and it is always the same, whatever road we take, we might as well have made the motions without progress from the spot. Even our glances behind and our feeling of pride at the distance covered can cause only deceptive satisfaction, since the remaining distance is not proportionally reduced. To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness. (Durkheim 1951: 248)

In a sense, the accumulation of material possessions is limitless. Therefore, when we aspire to obtain objects that satisfy us how is it that we are truly satisfied when there is no limit to the amount of possessions that we can acquire? As Durkheim goes on to explain “inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture” (1951: 247). One may be satisfied with their new car or house or purse but as soon as that object/possession is obtained do we not begin to dream of the next car, house, purse that we can someday acquire? This analysis will address how this false belief in limitless aspirations is doing more harm than good for our own health as well as the health of our relationships with

others.

Fatalism, or a resigned acceptance to the events in our lives, is a characteristic of modernity discussed by Durkheim. Is it any wonder that a feeling of powerlessness overwhelms individuals as a result of the multitude of choices and decisions we are faced with? What happens when our goals or objectives are not met? “The consumer experiences his distinctive behaviors as freedom, as aspiration as choice” (Baudrillard 1970: 61) but as we shall see through the examination of these reality television programs a belief in this false reality does not satisfy the inner soul. Instead, the individual is left confused and agitated by their surroundings, unsure of these emotions so they are encouraged to just focus on consumption and this belief in narcissistic tendencies. Angela McRobbie also discusses how “in the event of failure there is only the self to blame” in modern society (2002: 62). Unrealized expectations or goals set by an individual can have extremely detrimental effects on one’s self-esteem. The individual may withdraw as a result of shame or become completely narcissistic in order to shroud their shortcomings.

Baudrillard explains that “the true message the media of TV and radio deliver, the one which is decoded and ‘consumed’ deep down and unconsciously is not the manifest content of sounds and images, but the constraining pattern” (1970: 122). This constraining pattern is that of the consumer society, to believe, trust and ultimately accept the structure. Baudrillard goes on to state that “the closer one gets to true documentary [...] the greater does the real absence from the world grow” (1970: 122). What a powerful message to consider. With technological advances and the rise of

reality television, more time is spent away from human contact yet we feel connected by this very technology that separates us. Reality television is just a new form of experiencing the lives of others. The question remains as to how meaningful and truly valuable this interaction is.

Giddens believes that therapy today has replaced the morality religion once supplied. While there are many that still practice their faith, others are turning to therapy to help cope with the ills of our society. The media takes therapy one step further by encouraging the viewer to participate in self-therapy as a result of what they watch further separating them from meaningful human interaction. The therapeutic culture of the self is discussed by Nikolas Rose in his article “Governing the Enterprising Self” and viewers dependence on ‘experts’ as seen on TV that also serve as a mechanism through which the viewer can help themselves- democratizing therapy. Figure it out for yourself. Deborah Philips examines the relationship of expert knowledge in television programs focused on makeovers. TLC’s *What Not to Wear* is an excellent example of such a program that helps individuals who are not fashion savvy rid themselves of all their previous clothing in exchange for Stacy and Clinton’s (hosts of the program) advice and a \$5000 budget to shop in New York City. Philips rightly points out that shows such as this applaud narcissistic tendencies when stars emerge from such reality TV programs. Philips refers to these programs as “aspirational television” which “employ taste experts who market particular forms of style and confirm that investment in their cultural capital will result in profit” (Philips 2005: 226-7). Reliance on experts and the role of therapy will be discussed in detail later when we examine A&E’s program *Hoarders*.

Other studies have also focused on the importance of differences and the distinction between “us” and “them” and the role this plays in identity and consumerism (Hirsch 2000, Andrejevic 2002, Ong 2009, Pecora 2002, Philips 2005 & Bullen 2009). Since consumption is so intimately related to many television shows, and media in general, we begin to see stark contrasts between who is “in” and who is not. Unless you are buying the right products you may be labeled as “other” and excluded from the “in” group. I would take it one step further and advocate that it is not simply a matter of “us” vs. “them” but me/I vs. everyone else. “It is a network of anxious relations [...] it is no longer a question of ‘asserting oneself,’ of ‘proving oneself,’ but of relating to and gaining the approval of others, soliciting their judgment and their positive affinity” (Baudrillard 1970: 171). What is it about myself that makes me a unique individual? How will I be best received? These questions plague the minds of many individuals in our society whether they consciously recognize them or not. Vincent Pecora clearly articulates how our society has increasingly become one focused on surveillance resulting in an “orgy of capitalist self-promotion” which leads to narcissistic tendencies in individuals (2002: 354). In a capitalist society what one consumes defines their uniqueness. Therefore, for some, what we consume on television may help define our own unique individual nature.

This relationship between consumerism, television and the individual can be problematic when we refer to Durkheim’s concept of anomie. “The state of de-regulation, or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined,

precisely when they need more disciplining” (Durkheim 1951:253)². Consumerism allows for the possibility of accumulating an infinite amount of goods and possessions. When one is hungry, they usually stop eating when their body tells them “hey, I’m full.” Yes, overeating and ignoring that natural trigger is commonplace in our society. However, this same idea, of a satiation point is present in all living creatures. Animals know when they have had enough food. With consumerism there is no end point: “a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer” (Durkheim 1951:257). When there is no end in sight, individuals may become overwhelmed and be confused as to how to appropriately function. Goals, dreams, desires and pursuits are infinite there is nothing to place a limit on the amount of material possessions that have become so important to many. We shall be able to clearly see this concept of anomie in the analysis of the *Hoarders* episode and the disastrous effects it can have on the individual when they are no longer capable of checking themselves due to a lack of a satiation point.

Another important observation is that of the growth in surveillance and the effects it has on the individual. “The expansion of surveillance capabilities is the main medium of the control of social activity by social means” (Giddens 1991: 149). Mark Andrejevic and Vincent Pecora also examine the growth of surveillance. Fictional worlds are becoming indistinguishable from real ones, surveillance is seen as good and required for verification/acceptance in society, public and private spheres are blurred and

² The concept of anomie is commonly misinterpreted in many sociological texts and readings as being a state of normlessness. This definition is misleading as Durkheim never uses the term. Instead, one can see here that he uses the term de-regulation or without regulation. The word comes from Greek ἀνομία, namely the prefix a- "without", and nomos "law."

there has been a growth in the lack of concern for others. The more one uses technology the more they may become separated from meaningful interactions with other individuals. Instead, there is a surface level relationship, intent on seeking out acceptance and admiration simultaneously. “Narcissism is intrinsic to the culture of surveillance shaping reality TV” (Pecora 2002: 355) People have developed an interest and desire to expose themselves and jump at the chance to participate in reality television programs. Look at me, here I am, don’t you think I’m great?!? I need to know that you think I’m great! Mark Andrejevic believes this phenomenon is both “a fascination with voyeurism on the one hand and fame on the other—pathologies of a society in which the public sphere has been eclipsed by the private one” (2002: 253). How often does one find oneself bombarded with personalized advertisements as they surf the web? It was eerie at first seeing advertisements that directly related to my own interests and pursuits. Andrejevic states that “consumer control boils down to the ability to have preferences monitored in detail” (2002: 256). Do we accept this surveillance or feel powerless in its wake?

The Growth of Narcissism

The Greek story of Narcissus can be traced as far back as 8 AD. However, the clearest definition of the concept of narcissism, as we understand the term today, first resulted from Sigmund Freud’s work *On Narcissism*. Here, Freud clearly articulates that most individuals are born without an ego, yet children develop a love and need for admiration of their “self.” Most individuals then mature and are taught through their parents the importance of interacting with their social environment and retaining a

healthy level of narcissism. However, when individuals instead place an extreme focus on receiving attention and admiration for their “self” this is when unhealthy narcissism emerges. In a sense, individuals in our culture may be attempting to cope with the consumer structure of society through the mechanism of an extreme focus on the self and regressing back to childhood where we relied on others in order to feel needed and loved³.

Sam Vaknin’s work *Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited* provides the reader with a very clear understanding of narcissism and its devastating effects. Vaknin defines narcissism by nine (extremely important) criteria:

1. Exaggerates accomplishments, talents, skills, contacts and personality traits to the point of lying, feels grandiose and self-important
1. Obsessed with fantasies of unlimited success
2. firmly convinced that s/he is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high status people (or institutions)
3. requires excessive admiration, adoration, adulation, attention and affirmation (Narcissistic Supply)
4. feels entitled, has unreasonable expectations for special and favorable priority treatment
5. uses others to achieve his or her own ends
6. devoid of empathy, is unable or unwilling to identify with, acknowledge, or accept the feelings, needs, preferences, priorities, and choices of others
7. constantly envious of others and seeks to hurt or destroy the objects of his or her frustration
8. behaves arrogantly and haughtily, feels superior, omnipotent, omniscient, invincible, immune, above the law and omnipresent. Rages when frustrated, contradicted

³ See Chapter II: Understanding the False Self for detailed analysis of how narcissism and the emergence of the false self develops as a result of a consumer structured society.

or confronted by people s/he considers inferior to him or her and unworthy (2001: 32)

These traits of narcissism will be observed in all three of the reality television episodes that will be examined. Some might argue that anyone who agrees to be on reality television is a bit of a narcissist, however, the behaviors of the people present in these episodes are not entirely unusual and out-of-the-ordinary behavior for many people that one might encounter on a daily basis. Vaknin goes on to discuss how the false self emerges:

[N]arcissism is a defense mechanism intended to deflect hurt and trauma from the victim's 'true self' into a 'false self' which is construed by the narcissist to be omnipotent, invulnerable and omniscient. The Narcissist uses the false self to regulate his or her liable sense of self-worth by extracting from his environment Narcissistic Supply [admiration, adoration, adulation, attention and affirmation]. (2001: 33)

This idea of the false self will be the focus of this paper. Some research examines narcissism from an individual perspective; arguing that this disorder emerges within the individual. The field of psychiatry and psychology often take an individual approach attempting to 'cure' the individual of their personality disorder. My research, instead argues that narcissism and the development of the false self is a symptom of a societal disorder. I intend to argue that our society, with a focus on consumerism and being the best, encourages the development of the false self in order to succeed. For if one does not have extraordinary or unique traits, but they can fake it, then success is still possible.

Christopher Lasch: “Obsession with Appearances” (1978:61)

Americans are now living in a society surrounded by media searching for meaning and validation through the cues of others. In the late 1970s Christopher Lasch wrote that America was becoming a narcissistic society. Individuals were becoming obsession with celebrity and the growth of bureaucracies began to stifle the individual. There is an immense pressure to be more like the stars and celebrities. One is constantly bombarded with this pressure, through tabloid magazines, entertainment news reports, and the growth of reality television that often chronicles celebrities, all of which simultaneously encourages the modern individual to be frustrated and overwhelmed at the lack of ability to achieve this same status. However, if one is lacking faith in their inner self, becoming narcissistic can provide an outlet through which to gain that attention, admiration and adulation that celebrities are afforded. “The narcissist has many traits that make for success in bureaucratic institutions, which put a premium on the manipulation of interpersonal relations, discourage the formation of deep personal attachments, and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self-esteem” (Lasch 1978: 44). This is where a growing narcissistic society becomes problematic. If individuals today are exhibiting narcissistic traits, or are constantly shown narcissistic individuals on television then this must have an impact on culture and how individuals construct their sense of self.

If you are unable to achieve greatness due to the strangling effects of bureaucracies and consumerism then maybe if one begins to be narcissistic they will achieve that success. Bureaucracies allow individuals to easily manipulate the

relationships with others for their own personal gain. Currently, “impressions overshadow achievements,” and the narcissist is purely interested in how s/he comes across to others (Lasch 1978: 60). By manipulating the impressions of others’ around them, the narcissist can gain a sense of satisfaction that they would otherwise not receive. A society of manipulative, inauthentic individuals, only concerned with their own personal gain, will have disastrous consequences for society. Understanding how our society is becoming narcissistic, what causes it and through what avenues aids in understanding the formation of the false self today. ⁴

“The individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances” (Mills 1959: 45)

METHODS: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP OF REALITY

TELEVISION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FALSE SELF

This research examines four episodes of reality television. The episodes were chosen from four different reality television programs in the hopes of showing a procession of narcissism and the development of the false self through several different stages in an individual’s life. The Learning Channel’s (TLC) program of *Toddlers and*

⁴ Christopher Lasch focuses most of his discussion on the impact bureaucracies have in the formation of narcissism. While this is important to consider, this research also argues that narcissism can be encouraged through the home and the family.

Tiaras serves as an example of how narcissism and the encouragement of the development of the false self can begin at a very early age. Music Television's (MTV) program *Catfish* then provides insight into adolescence/young adulthood age group in relation to narcissism and the false self. TLC's program *Sister Wives* provides an in-depth look at the lives of a polygamous family. Finally, A&E's *Hoarders* will serve as an example of the ills of narcissism and the false self. Narcissism has been discussed for several decades now in relation to American society. Often whenever an author is critical of the narcissism epidemic, others are quick to defend the benefits. The DSM-V, the statistical reference guide for psychotherapists released in May 2013 no longer contains narcissism as a mental pathology. Upon speaking to several psychologists in regards to this change the answer is always the same: narcissism is difficult to diagnose and the prevalence of narcissism is so small that experts no longer see the need for its inclusion. The messages found within the four reality television episodes are absolutely indicative of narcissism. This is an issue that needs to be addressed because it is having devastating consequences on the lives and minds of modern individuals.

Toddlers and Tiaras follows the lives of infant/young girls and their families as they prepare and compete in beauty pageants across the country. *Catfish* documents the lives of young adults who are searching for individuals they have met and fallen in love with online. *Sister Wives* provides an in-depth look at the life of a public polygamous family in Utah. Finally, the program *Hoarders* is a look into a mental illness defined as "an obsessive need to acquire and keep things" and how it affects not only the lives of those suffering from the disorder but also the lives of those around them (Sharenow and

Berg 2010).

My hope is that this research will shed some light on the devastating effects of narcissism and how it can lead to the development of the false self. When one mentions any of these television programs or the phenomenon the programs are portraying an immediate reaction may be one of repulsion and disgust at the individual's behaviors and lifestyle choices. However, when one takes a closer look at these television programs they are portraying many important themes about our own society and the individuals within in. Obviously, there are deep implications here not only about our own society and its perceived ills but about the audience who takes the place of voyeur when examining these phenomena as well as all reality television. What is appealing to audience members about these programs? Some may argue that it is because of the behavior of the individuals within the programs. Out there, out of the ordinary, strange, unusual, not the norm. So what does this mean? We like seeing how the "weird" live? We enjoy watching the unusual and the strange? What if they portray a truth? A question to consider is whether or not these reality television programs should be viewed as cautionary tales. Don't be a hoarder. Don't create a fake profile online and deceive someone into loving you. Don't be a narcissist. A dissemination of the messages found within these programs and what they mean for the individual within society and their construction of self is the interest and focus of this research.

This research aims to discuss how a variety of theorists are relevant to this idea of the false self and how our society encourages it through an in-depth content analysis of these reality television programs. More recent literature will also address similar

issues that relate to reality television and the construction of the self. All of the episodes studied have been transcribed and content analysis will be the method utilized to analyze the messages found within the dialogue.

Reality television is produced and in many ways constructed behind the scenes from what the audience sees. Interviews are conducted by individuals that the audience never sees and encouragement to behave or act a certain way may be coming from the production staff as well. Is the audience, then, constructed by the production of these reality television shows? The entire economic aspect behind reality television from commercials and audience polling to focus groups before the show even airs are all aspects that should be taken into consideration when attempting to discern the messages found within reality television programs. The audience is the commodity for each of these different television networks. In order to make a profit, the show must have a large audience in order to obtain advertising sponsors. What gets the most attention, admiration, adulation and adoration (Narcissistic Supply) from the people watching television? The television networks need an audience that pays attention in order to survive. The question remains: are these messages of narcissism within the reality television programs and within the economic aspect of the production of these programs trickling down and encouraging narcissism within the modern individual?

This analysis aims to capture the essence of reality television and discover the understandings of meanings and actions for the individuals portrayed within the different programs. Reality television is a reflection of human behavior and merits further analysis in order to uncover trends of narcissism, consumerism and falseness within our society.

Content analysis will not be able to reflect audience reception of each of the different reality television programs. Further research will hopefully be able to shed light on the how individuals may internalize the messages found within reality television and how they may impact the construction of self. This research intends to shed light on the messages of narcissism, consumerism and falseness that are portrayed through several different reality television programs and how individuals may in turn use these messages to aid in the formation of their identity. Our culture is increasingly becoming dominated by reality television which is a dominating mirror of our culture's ideologies, behaviors and identities. Will our culture become so fixated on our own "realities," our own beauty, fame, fortune to the point that we lose ourselves? Will we follow the same demise as the Greek story of Narcissus? Some may believe that reality television is not a reflection of reality and that the audience is not observing aspects of our "selves." The threat and fear that we *are* however looking at our "selves" within what is portrayed in reality television is worthy of further examination. Reality television is a part of our culture today and the messages found within it need to be deciphered in order to better understand the impact it has on individuals.

Research Question

What are the messages found within a variety of reality television shows and are these messages indicative of narcissism and the encouragement of the false self within the modern individual? Several individuals have studied narcissism in American society. Reality television has also been addressed by recent literature as this particular phenomenon has only emerged in the last 25 years. This research adds to the current

discussion by combining several key theorists and ideas in relation to narcissism, reality television, the formation of the false self and consumerism in American society.

This analysis will focus on how this emergence of the false self is a symptom of society, not just an individual disorder. My purpose in this analysis is not to test a hypothesis or prove a theory. Rather, I intend to use detailed reality television programs as illustrations of various theoretical perspectives on narcissism and modernity.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING THE FALSE SELF

The previous overview of literature discusses the concept of the self, consumer society and unhealthy narcissism. What emerges when applying these theories to our experiences today is this idea of the false self. An extreme focus on the individual, concern with material possessions, limitless aspirations, obsession with success and notoriety all contribute to the development of a false self while losing sight of our true, distinct and unique individual nature. When one is unable to recognize their true self and the wonderful qualities they possess, the false self takes over, and shows that individual how easy it is to fake it and they better they fake it, more success, possessions and notoriety are sure to follow. Christopher Lasch warned of the dangers of narcissism in the late 1970s, today, with the growth of reality television, narcissism has a new avenue through which to be internalized in the minds of the modern individual. By examining the individuals within four reality television programs I hope to further explain this concept of the false self and how it relates to the world in which we live. First, one must understand the three main stages of the false self that are developed and maintained over time: adaptation, artifice and avoidance. This process through which the false self develops occurs as a result of a consumer structured society. Lasch wrote in the 1970s of how an increasingly bureaucratic environment (a symptom of a consumer structured society) can lead individuals to focus more upon themselves even to the point of damaging our social relationships with others.. This analysis of reality television aims to

shed light on our culture's new story narcissism that can be witnessed and experienced within reality television. The following description of how the false self develops should provide baseline insight into how our increasingly consumer focused society can, in turn, encourage falseness within the modern individual.

ADAPTATION

Modern individuals live in a consumer society. A society ruled by the pursuit of the accumulation of material goods. “[T]he humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects” (Baudrillard 1970: 25). The industrial revolution of the mid-19th century saw an increase in the exchange of goods and services. Individuals were freer to consume and purchase objects that surpassed their basic needs. Consumerism as we understand it and experience it today increased at a drastic rate following World War II with the introduction of credit. The Great Depression had ended in the U.S. and in other industrialized nations and in turn, more individuals were becoming economically secure. The economy remained stable and more regulations placed upon it were removed in the hopes of facilitating even more profit accumulation. What was once purely economic (the pursuit of profit) has now reached many avenues of our daily lives. Even that of religion. Durkheim once wrote of the importance religion held for individuals within a society. “Religious beliefs proper are always shared by a definite group that professes them and that practices the corresponding rites. [...] The individuals who comprise the

group feel joined to one another by the fact of common faith” (Durkheim 1995: 41). The social solidarity that religion once supplied for individuals in society has slowly shifted to a faith in the economy. That which was once profane has now become sacred for members of our society. As Durkheim once stated “[b]elief creates reality itself” (Durkheim 1983: 23). Our reality is the idea that consuming can bring the modern individual comfort, security and happiness. However, consuming often times does just the opposite; providing a state of discomfort, insecurity and unhappiness.

The modern individual must adapt in many ways to a world focused on consumerism. As Baudrillard warns “[a]ffluence does not exist, but it only has to make us believe it exists to be an effective myth” (Baudrillard 1970: 193). Americans today do believe. They believe in consumerism comparable to that of religious belief. “[Consumerism] is a class logic which imposes salvation by objects” (Baudrillard 1970:60). One can be saved by consuming. If all aspects of our society are now based on the pursuit of profit than this shall begin to affect the individual. Americans today seek salvation from their state of unhappiness through objects and things. The modern individual is overwhelmed, confused, agitated by the lack of fulfillment promised by a consumer society. Individuals are promised solace and comfort from consuming, as a result, individuals attempt to achieve this promise by consuming even more. There is a momentary satisfaction provided to the individual as a result of accumulating material possessions or through the purchase of exhilarating life experiences, however, there is no limit placed upon the amount of possessions or experiences one can obtain. The modern individual must submit to this never-ending goal and promise of fulfillment that will

never be met. Maybe, just maybe, if they have faith in consumerism, if they believe that it will one day provide the ultimate satisfaction than the structure of the consumer society will actually fulfill its task and promise.

Where do individuals develop a faith in consumerism? “Consumption is an active, collective behavior; it is something enforced, a morality, an institution. [...] The consumer society is also the society of learning to consume, of social training in consumption” (Baudrillard 1970: 81). One learns to consume from a young age. Think of a young child who is taught how to save their allowance in order to what? Learn the importance of saving what one earns? Or is there an alternative goal in mind: to save for a consumer object? Surely, this endless goal would produce a state of discomfort and suffering from never being satisfied with what one has. “Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. [...] The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and from negation” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 144). In a consumer society objects, amusements, things, entertainment are endlessly sought after by its members. When these objects fail to provide relief, comfort, security and happiness the individual may begin to feel helpless in this consumer world. Learning to consume in order to feel happy, yet happiness is but brief and momentary. A helpless state resulting from this suffering is commonly a consequence for many individuals of a consumer society. However, similar to religious beliefs: one cannot know happiness without suffering. Suffering is justified in the consumer society in order to push individuals to seek out

more entertainment, amusement and happiness in objects and things. The modern individual must now adapt to the consumer society.

By having the newest and greatest consumer object, the individual may feel as though they are unique and different. The individual can distract from their suffering by focusing their attention on the purchase of something unique. “[N]eed is never so much the need for a particular object as the ‘need’ for difference (the desire for the social meaning), then it will be clear that there can never be any achieved satisfaction, or therefore any definition of need” (Baudrillard 1970: 77-8). Baudrillard argues that the modern individual has adapted to the consumer structure and now recognizes the need to be different in order to achieve some level of satisfaction. It is this need for difference which now occupies the minds of individuals in a consumer society. An individual can be recognized and given attention for having the newest consumer object, creating a sense of distinction and exclusivity. However, “it is upon the loss of differences that the cult of difference is founded” (Baudrillard 1970: 89). This very need for exclusivity and uniqueness has resulted in the disappearance of difference. Individuals desire to be unique and special because with each passing day differences are disappearing. “The spread of American and indigenous fast food causes less and less diversity from one setting to another. In the process, the human craving for new and diverse experiences is being limited, if not progressively destroyed. It is being supplanted by the desire for uniformity and predictability” (Ritzer 2004: 147). Uniformity and predictability are unlikely desires for the modern, consumer individual, yet we are surrounded by it. When one goes to a McDonalds in College Station, TX or a McDonalds in New York City, that

individual expects to receive the same food and the same experience. This experience, after all, is what they are paying for.

This is the contradictory promise of a consumer society. Be different, but really be the same. Individuals in our society are encouraged to buy consumer goods in the hopes of defining who they are as a person. Recent research has discussed the importance and consequences of material objects and consumption patterns in defining one's identity.⁵ What are the right products to buy and more importantly how can the individual distinguish oneself? “[T]he conformism of the buyers and the effrontery of the producers who supply them prevail. The result is a constant reproduction of the same thing [...] What is new about the phase of mass culture compared with the late liberal stage is the exclusion of the new” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 134). A reproduction of that which has already existed: the ultimate consumer product.



Figure 1. ProHealth Toothpaste (Crest Pro-Health Toothpastes 2014).

⁵For more consumerism and identity see Bullen 2009, Pecora 2002, Philips 2005, Rose 1992 & Tudor 2009

An example of this cult of difference and exclusion of the new in today's world would be that of ProHealth Toothpaste (see Figure 1). For quite some time, I was intrigued, as a consumer, by this new, innovative, toothpaste that promised a concern and improvement of my dental health. Then, new varieties of the toothpaste were released: ProHealth Cavity Protection, ProHealth Enamel Shield and ProHealth Plaque Control. Well now, I was confused as to which product would be best for me. So I turned to the ingredients. All ProHealth toothpaste varieties, all ten of them, contain the exact same active ingredient: Stannous fluoride 0.454% (0.16% w/v fluoride ion). The promise of difference and exclusivity, but really the same. “[F]reedom to choose an ideology—since ideology always reflects economic coercion—everywhere proves to be freedom to choose what is always the same” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 166-7). This cult of difference is really an oxymoron. Much of what exists in the consumer society is not new and improved but the same with a shiny, new package to conceal that sameness.

Individuals are encouraged to focus on themselves even to the point of objectifying themselves in this consumer culture. There is constantly a dichotomy between the real and the false, illusion and reality: the illusion of difference. If the modern individual is surrounded by deceptive practices, promises and satisfaction, will they not eventually begin to reflect these same principles? The discussion which is to follow will focus on the how modern individuals adapt to the structure of our society and in the process of adapting one might create an artificial self. The modern individual may

see a benefit in the presentation of an artifice instead of their real, true self.

ARTIFICE

The modern individual must now balance the dichotomy of illusion vs. reality and the artificial vs. the false in both the social and individual existence. Durkheim warned that the economic aspect of society that threatened to impact all facets of daily life would have drastic effects on the individual. “The obstacle, for example, against which the victim of insatiable desires dashes may cause him to fall back upon himself and seek an outlet for his disappointed passions in an inner life” (Durkheim 1951: 288). Focusing on your appearance to others may be a way to cope with the drudgeries of daily life and the inability to achieve the goals of society of achieving economic wealth. “[B]ureaucratic institutions, which put a premium on the manipulation of interpersonal relations, discourage the formation of deep personal attachments, and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self-esteem” (Lasch 1978: 44) False friendliness and an upbeat personality are encouraged, if not required, in most workplaces.⁶ One cannot be sad, angry or irritable in the modern bureaucratic environment. Often, individuals are taught to use the company to achieve a certain position in the workplace and in turn, the company uses individuals. Loyalty to a

⁶ David Riesman also discusses the idea of false personalization in his book [The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character](#). Riesman articulates the changes occurring in the modern workplace and this emergence of impersonality alongside automation: “[t]his new sensitivity [...] makes it difficult for people to extricate themselves from chains of false personalization by wearing a completely alien work mask” (1951: 305).

company and vis versa, the company's loyalty to its employees are few and far between. Everyone is replaceable for the newer, younger more attractive commodity: the individual. "The actions of the body become more and more dead, unreal, false, mechanical" for the modern individual (Giddens 1991: 61). The mechanized aspect and repetitive nature of most jobs are taking its toll on the individual. Individuals witness others getting ahead, promoted and rewarded for stepping on others or using others for their own well-being. Loyalty and respect have diminished if not completely disappeared from most work places.

Social media, bureaucracies and increasing pressure to focus on the self is drastically impacting not only the individuals of our society but our personal relationships with others as well. Modern individuals are "chronically bored, restlessly in search of instantaneous intimacy—of emotional titillation without involvement and dependence" (Lasch 1978: 40). Technology has provided even more opportunities to have instantaneous gratification from others. Meaningful, long-lasting relationships may be difficult to maintain amidst our absorption in social media and brief communication. The modern individual has adapted to the promises of a consumer society to the point that they recognize the benefits of illusion, of an artifice. "Narcissism appears realistically to represent the best way of coping with the tensions and anxieties of modern life, and the prevailing social conditions therefore tend to bring out narcissistic traits that are present, in varying degrees, in everyone" (Lasch 1978: 50). Tension and anxiety are ever present in the modern world with the pressure to achieve economic success. Technology further complicates these feelings with a shift towards instant

gratification and brief interactions with others. Often times our interactions are purely for the sake of achieving an end and rarely are there interactions which contain the element of that relationship being the end in and of itself. What can you do for me? This “imperative of competition and upward social mobility and [...] imperative to maximalize their pleasures. Under so many opposing constraints, the individual comes apart” (Baudrillard 1970: 182). The pursuit of a limitless goal causes anxiety and tension for the individual. Narcissism is free to promise the individual with a mechanism through which to cope. Focus on yourself, better yourself, you are the only one that matters in the world that is so willing to overlook you.... unless of course you can project the right image. Then the world will lavish you with the attention, adulation, adoration and admiration (Narcissistic Supply) you so rightly deserve when there are so few who will provide you with this for just being your true self.

Doomed to our own image, our own identity, our own ‘look’, and having become our own object of care, desire and suffering, we have grown indifferent to everything else. And secretly desperate at that indifference, and envious of every form of passion, originality and destiny. (Baudrillard 1996: 131)

Baudrillard warns that a world of illusion and artificiality obsessed with the accumulation of material objects will result in the individual viewing themselves as an object. The individual as the ultimate object that can be altered, manufactured and presented in such a way as to receive not only the most attention but hopefully, economic success. “Narcissism emerges as the typical form of character structure in a society that has lost interest in the future” (Lasch 1978: 211). The pressure to achieve

pushes individuals to become neurotic, chronically anxious about their ability to achieve economic success. Narcissism allows the individual to focus on the creation of their self. Alter yourself in any way possible in order to better your social status. The creation of an artificial self can be beneficial to you if your true self is unsuccessful. The modern individual may resort to the creation of an artifice as a result of adapting to the structure of society; one that encourages focus on the self and the accumulation of material possessions.

Our world is surrounded by illusions. Individuals are airbrushed or they starve themselves to the brink of death in order to achieve a standard of beauty and perceived perfection. In many avenues, professions and social interactions there are similar standards of exceptionality that many individuals strive towards. This is a difficult balance to maintain: having the bar set high in order to encourage innovation and true talent yet allowing some level of fulfillment in one's endeavors. However, a limitless goal can have devastating effects upon the individual. An inexhaustible pressure placed upon the individuals to always be more, do more, create more, and achieve more. These consequences are the focus of this research. If an individual cannot achieve and obtain these infinite goals through the presentation of their true self then they may resort to creating an artificial self through what they observe around them. Individuals are surrounded by media outlets (television, radio, film, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) that present "successful" individuals. One may choose to adapt and alter their self in an artificial way in order to hopefully achieve similar success.

AVOIDANCE

If the modern individual has been forced to adapt to a consumer society by presenting an artificial self then when others recognize this artifice it will put the individual in the worst possible state. The individual will not only have to admit to the fact that they are presenting an artifice to others but will also be forced to admit that their faith in a consumer society and the promises of satisfaction are flawed, just like their false self. Instead, the individual that has recognized the benefits of presenting an artifice will attempt to protect that artificiality at all costs, i.e., they will avoid any challenges or confrontations concerning their true identity. Avoidance will be necessary in order to keep the artifice alive and well.

“[T]he whole process of consumption is governed by the production of artificially diversified models” (Baudrillard 1970: 88-9). Artificiality rules the consumer society: false representations of meaningful interactions, false enchantment in places to help cope with dehumanization and deceptive satisfaction with the promise of eternal happiness. “We have to beware of interpreting this gigantic enterprise of production of the artificial and the cosmetic, of pseudo-objects and pseudo-events, which is invading our daily existence, as a denaturing or falsifying of an ‘authentic’ content” (Baudrillard 1970: 126). The removal of meaning and authenticity is a tragic consequence of a consumer society. Having predictability, calculability and efficiency at every avenue encourages a false persona for many individuals in their daily interactions with others.

“We are surrounded by waves of fake spontaneity, ‘personalized’ language, orchestrated emotions and personal relations. ‘Keep smiling.’ (Baudrillard 1970: 161). Individuals in a consumer society must maintain this artificiality even at the cost of their own authenticity.⁷ If modern individuals now have faith in the illusion that the consumer society provides at what point do we begin to believe the illusion we put forth to others and deny the real?

Manuel Castells discusses how advances in technology are altering the landscape of consumerism.

[T]he ultimate subversion of the life-cycle is accomplished, and life becomes this false landscape punctuated by chosen moments of high and low experiences, in the endless boutique of customized feelings. So when death does happen it is simply an additional blip on the screen of distracted spectators. (Castells 1996: 481)

Customized feelings, pressure to have the latest and greatest technology results in confusion, anxiety and dissatisfaction. Emotions that invoke sadness or grief must be replaced with ones that invoke happiness and elation. “The peculiarity of the self is a monopoly commodity determined by society; it is falsely represented as natural”

⁷ Stjepan Mestrovic also addresses this idea of falseness in his book *Postemotional Society*: “in today’s post-emotional society, this ‘natural’ relationship between emotion and action has been permanently severed. Emotions serve no appreciable purpose as such, and the more useless one’s emotions are, the more one demonstrates to the peer group that one has attained the level of prestige that makes the owning of emotions a luxury that one can afford” (1997: 55).

(Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 154) Scripted interactions and false friendliness are 'natural.' Everyone must participate. Those are the conditions of a consumer society.

While the mechanism is to all appearances planned by those who serve up the data of experience, that is, by the culture industry, it is in fact forced upon the latter by the power of society, which remains irrational, however we may try to rationalize it; and this inescapable force is processed by commercial agencies so that they give an artificial impression of being in command. (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 125)

Who is truly in control in the consumer society? The driving force in consumerism is the economy which is free from regulation. The pursuit of profit is limitless and has run out of control. Artificiality is at the forefront of this runaway character of the economy.

Conformity can only be guaranteed under the guise of control and security, even when individuals feel the anxiety and insecurity that comes from an anomic state. Individuals attempt to adapt to this irrational structure of society by rationalizing its limitless goals and false promises of satisfaction. Individuals may attempt to present an artifice to achieve attention and ultimately success. Just as individuals have adapted to the structure of a consumer society, rationalizing irrational goals and pursuits; so too has the individual created an artifice. This artificial self is a product of living in a world full of artificiality, false promises, false presentations and unobtainable goals and pursuits.

When an individual has maintained a lie or artifice for some period of time it is a difficult psychological state for any individual when confronted with the truth.

The following analysis of four reality television episodes will shed the most light on this final stage of the false self. All of these reality television programs share the revelation of artificiality and the resulting avoidance that occurs on behalf of the individuals portrayed. This is the endless cycle that the formation of the false self creates. First an adaptation to a consumer environment, a belief and faith in the consumer structure to the point of denying the false promises. Then, amidst this illusory environment of false promises and artificiality the individual recognizes the benefits and rewards offered for successfully altering themselves and presenting an artifice to others. Lastly, all must continue the faith, our belief that the structure works so when that faith or those promises or even the artificiality is called into question all must avoid and deny the criticisms, the truth.

CHAPTER III

PROJECTING FALSENESS: *TODDLERS AND TIARAS*

The Learning Channel (TLC) is owned by Discovery Communications whose slogan is “the number-one nonfiction media company.” The show *Toddlers and Tiaras* first aired on January 27th, 2009 and is now on its third season. This particular program has been met with much controversy as to the behavior of the parents in placing their young impressionable children in such an environment as beauty pageants. The episode “National Gold Coast” is the 5th episode of the second season. (See Appendix 1 for complete transcription of the episode).

The episode opens with the pageant director in an interview discussing the pageant: “The California Gold Coast pageants is an originator of pageants. We have started over 35 years ago. When we did start we started with babies and children. A lot of the ‘teen’ and ‘miss’ pageants didn’t offer that.” The director then goes on to discuss how their pageant was portrayed in the film *Little Miss Sunshine* and how three prominent Hollywood actresses got their start in this pageant (Michelle Pfeiffer, Beverley Mitchell and Mariska Hargitay). Already we see the program place on emphasis on celebrities: equating the possibility that by competing in beauty pageants these young girls might one day be famous too. While the director is talking, the viewer is shown images of young girls performing on stage at the pageant. The viewer is then introduced to the three girls and their families that will be the focus of this episode: Alicia, Rylan Lee and Emily.

“My name is Alicia, I’m seven years old and I love pageants” (Sims 2009). Her Mom is then introduced: “I’m [Alicia’s Mom] and my seven year old daughter Alicia loves to have all eyes on her.” Mom grabs a crown from a display case and places it on her head. “This is the crown I won when I was in a pageant with Alicia.” The camera zooms out to reveal Alicia standing next to Mom with a crown on her head as well looking up at her Mom. As we shall see, all of the families portrayed in this reality television series are reliant upon thousands of dollars in order to compete in pageants. The children are constantly imitating their parents behaviors and reliant upon their “coaching” in order to compete.

“My name is Rylan Lee and I’m 4 years old and I want to win a crown at gold coast pageants” (Sims 2009). The pageant director informs us that Rylan Lee is a novice in the pageant world as she has only competed in six pageants. Rylan states in her



Figure 2 Rylan (Sims 2009).

interview: “I have twenty crowns and I love ‘em” (see Figure 2). When the viewer is introduced to Rylan’s mother she explains: “We actually saw a couple of pageant shows on TV and Rylan said ‘Mom, I want to do that.’” Elizabeth Bullen articulates that “screen texts are used to socialize the young into consumer society” (2009: 497). Rylan learned about beauty pageants through watching television and then desired to be in one herself. Rylan and Mom show the cameras all of Rylan’s trophies and Mom helps Rylan count the number of sashes she has. Rylan states “We don’t say I’m the best. We only say ‘I can try it, if we don’t win that’s ok. If we do win, we’re excited.” The viewer can not help but wonder if Rylan is speaking or if her Mom is speaking through her. “The actions of the body become more and more dead, unreal, false, [and] mechanical” for the modern individual (Giddens 1991: 61). Already, a four year old child is displaying elements of a detached body and self. The viewer may not believe the words Rylan speaks, instead picking up on the mechanical, almost robotic nature of the words.

“My name is Emily Salazar, I like to walk the stage.” (Sims 2009). Emily then informs the viewer that she is a daddy’s girl. We are introduced to Emily’s father: “my



Figure 3 Emily and Dad (Sims 2009).



Figure 4 “I Got a Better Smile” (Sims 2009).

name is Alex Salazar, I'm a pageant dad and I'm proud of it." Emily's Mom discusses how Emily is a daddy's girl and how Alex loves to be involved in the pageants and was very excited when he won an award for his involvement in the pageants (see Figure 3). Alex exclaims "Emily has about 165 trophies." Alex has a crown on his head as Emily and her parents show all her crowns and awards to the viewer. Emily exclaims "mine looks cute!" to which Alex responds "but I got a better smile" (see Figure 4). Emily's dad then asks Emily what her favorite award has been and Emily responds by rubbing her fingers together and states "money." Alex and Emily's Mom laugh. Already, the viewer cannot escape the exposure to consumerism, competition and the importance of coming out on top with the ultimate prize being money.

The viewer is then exposed to the three girls' practices and how they prepare for the pageants. Alicia's Mom explains "to prepare Alicia practices and even when there's not a pageant we practice." (Sims 2009). All of her brothers and her Dad act as judges while she is practicing so that Alicia will understand the importance of acknowledging all the judges when she is on stage (see Figure 5). Emily has dolls set up as her judges (see Figure 6). Both Mom and Dad work with Emily referring to their positions as "coaches." They usually begin practicing three weeks before a pageant with an increase in coaching the closer they get to the pageant. For Rylan, her Mom explains, "we just play pageant for about 15... 15-



Figure 5 Alicia Practicing (Sims 2009).



Figure 6 Emily Practices with “Judges” (Sims 2009).

20 minutes.” After short stint at practice, Rylan’s Mom asks calmly from the couch if Rylan would like to try her beauty walk. Rylan declares “no!” Rylan’s Mom asks nicely again and Rylan begins throwing a tantrum and pulling up the rug on the floor completely wrapping herself up in the rug. Dad steps in and tries to persuade Rylan to work a little bit longer on her routines and Rylan continues to roll around on the floor, hiding by the couch (see Figure 7). Mom explains to the camera that she is tired. Rylan mumbles something under her breath and Mom says “we don’t say stuff like that.” Rylan says “You’re a fool!” Then, Rylan’s Mom says “nope, let’s go to bed,” and then smiles at the camera as she escorts Rylan out of the room. Rylan yells “no” (see Figure 8)!!



Figure 7 Rylan Throwing a Fit (Sims 2009).



Figure 8 Rylan Screams “No” (Sims 2009)!!

The first commercial break occurs and the viewer is provided an opportunity to reflect upon the newly presented characters and their lives. Judgments can be made or very well may have already been.

The mass media routinely present modes of life to which, it is implied, everyone should aspire; the lifestyles of the affluent are, in one form or another, made open to view and portrayed as worthy of emulation [...] stories are developed in such a way as to create narrative coherence with which the reader or viewer can identify (Giddens 1991: 199).

The viewer in the first ten minutes of programming has been exposed to three young girls and their families, why they have chosen to participate in pageants, and how they prepare and practice for pageants. The viewer has been allotted the opportunity to assess the children as individuals and what types of personalities they have developed as well

as insight into the types of parents each girl has. Many may chose to watch such a program purely to critique these families and the decisions they make. Others may identify with the families or individuals because the viewer is apart of a similar family or ascribes to be like them. And yet others may simply be intrigued by the behavior of the girls and their families, or disgusted. A common reaction to this television program is that these mothers are vicariously living through their daughters. Sam Vaknin discusses the female narcissist and her behaviors. “[T]he smothered and spoiled child is dehumanized and instrumentalized. His parents love him not for what he really is but for what they wish and imagine him to be: the fulfillment of their dreams and frustrated wishes” (Vaknin 2001: 198). Both Alicia’s mom and Emily’s dad also presented the viewer with their own crowns that they had won at pageants. It is very possible that these parents are indeed narcissistic and possibly dreamed of being a beauty queen or having a relationship with one. Now, they are able to fulfill that dream by using their daughter as a mechanism in which to do so. Why so many individuals of our society are attracted to such programming remains unanswered. Perhaps, an in-depth look at what this episode reflects might provide some insight.

Following the commercial break Alicia’s Mom explains to the camera that “pageants have taught Alicia how to get what she wants and just be able to go after whatever it is and have the confidence to do it” (Sims 2009). Alicia’s mom has already instilled in her child the importance of getting whatever it is that Alicia wants and in order to do so she must have confidence, otherwise she will be unsuccessful in her endeavors. These are pretty powerful messages that Alicia is being exposed to at the age

of seven. Anthony Giddens clearly describes this as “confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity” (1991: 66). In a sense, Alicia’s mom is teaching Alicia that if she is comfortable with her ‘self’ she will be able to get whatever it is she wants. But what happens when she is confident in her “self” and she is unable to get what she wants, such as winning the pageant crown?

The viewer then witnesses the Salazar family spend 5 hours at the salon for Emily (see Figure 9). She has a manicure, pedicure, facial, massage and her hair done while her parents idly stand by, watching, at her side, asking on several occasions if Emily feels like a princess. Emily’s dad states “I honestly feel that it’s going to help her. It does like pamper her, it makes her feel like a princess so it gives her that self-confidence, so” (Sims 2009). Both Alicia’s parents and Emily’s feel that by pampering their children and placing them in pageants, the child will gain self-confidence. Emily’s dad, Alex, explains “I say she’s loved and *I express my love by buying her things* and she’s our only child so I guess you could say she’s spoiled because she’s daddy’s little girl.” Identity and one’s uniqueness can be determined by what they buy. The American myth (dream) has long informed its’ citizens that money will buy you happiness. Alex’s father feels that by buying things for his daughter he is expressing his love for her. Sam Vaknin states:

[O]verweening, smothering, spoiling, overvaluing, and idolizing the child are all forms of parental abuse. There is nothing more narcissistically-gratifying than the admiration and adulation (Narcissistic Supply) garnered by precocious child-prodigies. Narcissists who are the sad outcomes of excessive pampering and sheltering become addicted to it. (Vaknin 2001: 142)

Vaknin is indicating that the likelihood these young girls will grow up to be narcissistic is very strong. Might a young, perhaps ignorant viewer, begin to think about their parents as expressing love for them by what they buy? Is this already an acceptable behavior and belief for society? Vaknin warns that children may become addicted to this “pampering” and come to expect it. The message to the viewer is that parents can express their love by buying consumer goods for their children. Likewise, children viewers might internalize the message that when parents buy them things that means they love them. The individuals witnessed in this program have adapted the structure of a consumer society. Material goods can be an expression of your love for family members.

Meanwhile, while Emily is busy being pampered at the salon we witness Rylan Lee and her parents go to a fitting for pageant wear. Dad exclaims “Financially, I’d prefer not to know the cost of the dresses” (Sims 2009). The dress maker informs the audience in an interview that dresses start at \$650 and go up from there depending on the type of dress. Mom wants to have two dresses made.



Figure 9 Emily Goes to the Salon (Sims 2009).



Figure 10 Rylan is Measured (Sims 2009).

The dress-maker as she is measuring Rylan says “oh! Perfect girl. Keep that! Perfect shape” (see Figure 10). Sure, this may seem like a nice compliment to some but to a young, impressionable four year old little girl the dress maker’s words may have a deeper impact. The dress maker has essentially just informed Rylan that she has a “perfect” body and that she should keep it. What happens if Rylan doesn’t keep this “perfection?” Giddens explains that “shame depends on feelings of personal insufficiency, and these can compromise a basic element of an individual’s psychological make-up from an early age” (1991: 65). The viewer has now witnessed an encouragement to maintain some standard of “perfection.” If an individual is unable to naturally present an acceptable body image they can then alter themselves to fit that standard. The dresses that these little girls wear in beauty pageants are extravagant not only in their appearance but in their price. The modern individual is constantly faced with this exorbitance and pushed to obtain what is necessary to succeed. In this particular example one must spend lots of money in order to win the pageant.

Alicia also goes to a spa to have a manicure and pedicure but not to the extent of Emily's salon experience. Mom explains that "glitz to me is the *presentation of yourself* and your nails are done and your hair, your eyelashes, makeup. You're a whole package from head to toe" (Sims 2009). Essentially, Alicia is commodified into a package that is sold to the judges and the best and most appealing product will win. "The child is totally objectified" (Vaknin 2001: 187). This dichotomy of presenting your self but first you must modify it and add lots of artificiality to it is repeatedly witnessed in this program. Alicia goes on to tell the viewer: "I can't get color on my nails because the judges don't want color." Alicia is being molded into the most sellable package, the most appealing candidate for the judges regardless of how Alicia wants to really appear. Anthony Giddens expresses that "self-actualisation is packaged and distributed according to market criteria" (1991: 198). One constructs their sense of self by consumption and this is reflected in the way Alicia's Mom discusses Alicia having her appearance altered in order to be "glitz" for the pageant. Being 'glitz' is essentially expressed in the sense that the contestant who has the most of it will win. The lesson young Alicia and even viewers may be learning is that a false, artificial self is the most beneficial. Individuals are adapting to a consumer environment chalked full of illusions. The modern individual is encouraged to be illusory, artificial. For beauty pageants, the artifice is crucial. Consumer capitalism creates a society dominated by appearances which in turn leads the individual to search for the "unblemished, socially valued self" (Giddens 1991: 172). We are already witnessing the reflections of capitalist society in these young girls.

Rylan is then taken to her private dance lesson and her Mom explains that “it really helps with her pretty feet and standing for the pageants” (Sims 2009). Dad explains to the camera during the dance lesson that “I think she chooses me over Mom to play games with and stuff so it’s fun.” In reference to how he is more involved in the playing aspect in the relationship with his daughter than Mom. Rylan’s Mom explains that “my relationship with Rylan is great but she’s daddy’s little girl. They are inseparable and like two little kids.” There appears to be a slight tension between Rylan’s parents. They may just be stating their observations about their relationships with Rylan Lee, yet it may also be exposing a competition between the parents for Rylan’s affection and attention. Competition is an essential element of a capitalist society so would it be surprising to see its grasp in the relationships between parents and children?

On the day of the pageant the director informs the viewing audience that “pageants are a big business. You need a package in order to be in the pageant. The dress, the hair, the makeup, the spray tanning, it all helps to win the pageant” (Sims 2009). This aspect of the program is what may be most unsettling to the viewer. The notion that the best artificially constructed appearance of little girls is the most important aspect in being able to *win*. Unfortunately we are a part of a society obsessed with appearances. How we present ourselves to others, who we are, how we behave, what we buy... these features are all concerned with appearance. Anthony Giddens uses the metaphor of camouflage to relate how individuals will adapt and change their “self” in order to better fit into certain environments: “[the] individual has as many selves as there

are divergent contexts of interaction” (1991: 190). Since Giddens initial insight, individuals have adapted to different social interactions in an even more extreme sense. They do not alter their selves in different ways for different situations. The individual is now creating an artifice to be used in all social interactions. Some of the girls wear fake teeth referred to as “flippers.” In this particular episode none of the girls chose to wear them. These young girls are encouraged by parents, coaches and pageant directors to wear fake teeth, hair extensions/wigs, fake fingernails and even spray tans to make their skin darker. Already we witness the young girls in this program encouraged to present an artificial self but also the viewer may internalize the message that the little girl with the most thought-out, carefully constructed artificial presentation of self, wins.

The first category of the competition is beauty wear. There are 22 girls in Rylan’s division including Emily Salazar. Right before Rylan goes on stage her Mom asks her “how do you feel?” (Sims 2009). Rylan states “I think I’m gonna win.” To which Mom replies “good job.” In an interview with Emily’s mom she explains “we weren’t expecting this many people, but it’s good. It’s good competition. We like to see how she does with a big crowd.” Again, we are witnesses to the message that competition and winning is important. Healthy competition can encourage individuals to try harder and make improvements. However, when the façade of the competition is that the little girl with the best personality wins but in reality the one with the best artificially constructed appearance wins, the results can be detrimental. An individual may put even more focus and emphasis on creating an even better false self.

Following another commercial break, the scene opens with a little girl fully dressed in pageant wear sitting with her feet in the hotel sink full of soapy bubbles smiling at the camera with two ladies working on her hair and dress. It is apparent from I in-depth look into these three girls' lives and others at the pageant that these little girls are indeed treated like princesses. "Basic trust is established in a child as part of the experiencing of a world that has coherence, continuity and dependability" (Giddens 1991: 66). Little girls are dependent on their parents and other consistent and significant individuals within their lives to show them how to behave and act within our society. They are dependent upon what these individuals are teaching them. So what happens when these little girls are no longer treated as royalty and if they are unable to achieve their goals that their parents lead them to believe are obtainable so long as they are confident and *themselves*? As Giddens warns: "shame is directly related to narcissism" (1991: 68). These young girls are taught to create an artifice because that is what wins yet they are told that practice and your personality is what will ultimately win the competition. If a little girl creates an artifice and practices yet still does not win, what will result? Giddens argues that shame is the result and can lead to even more narcissism. The narcissist focuses on the self and, most importantly, the creation of a false self.

Next, Alicia's age group competes in beauty wear. In her interview Alicia states "I like it when I go up there and show who I am" (Sims 2009). Competition encourages individualism, but at what point does individualism become a "preoccupation with the self" (Giddens 1991: 170)? At such a young age, it may be difficult for these young girls

to recognize the impact their constructed “package” might have in regards to how they come to define their sense of self. The pageant director/judge voice then announces that “for [the] swimsuit [competition] they should be upbeat, fun, spunky, showing lots of sparkling personality too.” Rylan is standing at the stairs that lead onto the stage. Rylan is stepping from left to right in nervous anticipation and/or excitement that she is about to go on stage. Rylan’s Dad exclaims “I love watching her up on stage. I’m just really excited and cheer her on as much as I can, you know? Let her know there is one person out there that cares she’s up there.” This seems a bit contradictory to what they are participating in: a competition where there is ultimately only one winner and a hundred and forty-nine losers.

Rylan exits the stage after her swimwear routine, Rylan’s Mom tells her “you did so good” twice in a row and Rylan acts as though she is trying to get away from Mom (Sims 2009). Mom asks for a high five and Rylan is already walking away from her as Mom says: “there’s daddy.” Rylan walks over to Dad who tells her good job and she gives Dad a high five, four times. The viewer is again exposed to the tension between the parents and their possible struggle for Rylan’s attention. “All individuals actively, although by no means always in a conscious way, selectively incorporate many elements of mediated experience into their day-to-day conduct” (Giddens 1991: 188). Rylan apparently became involved in pageants when she saw them on television and said ‘Mom, I want to do that.’ What about the one little girl who wins the top, most sought after, prize at the pageant? So far, the viewer has witnessed exorbitant amounts of money being spent in order for the little girls to be successful in the pageant. May

individuals who internalize the messages of this program may begin to believe that an artificially constructed self is necessary in order to be successful in our consumer society.

Emily is next. While Emily is on stage the camera cuts to Rylan who is watching Emily with a very intense, disapproving and worried look. The camera goes back to Emily as she exits the stage and the audience begins clapping. The camera once again goes to Rylan but from a wider angle so that the audience can see her standing next to her kneeling father with her mother a good 10 feet back behind them. Rylan is clapping for Emily. One judge explains:

I think every judge is different but what I have come to learn in the last few years of judging is the more simple the better. They're all very glitzy. They're all made up. They all have hair pieces on, they all have their little teeth in, but if you get that child that's that natural beauty without all the artifice that child is going to get my highest vote (Sims 2009).

This is surprising considering the judge is supposed to be judging the little girls based on exactly what she is not looking for: 'the artifice.' Personality is constantly brought to the viewer's attention as being essential for each contestant. "For fourteen years I've been doing pageants and I have been the judge and it's just that factor. When they get on stage are they emanating that kind of confidence, radiance, personality and that's what I'm looking for." Another judge states "I look for a complete package, glitzy, the hair, the dress, the makeup." And yet another judge states "there are so many beautiful girls, it's very hard, so I think it's coming down to personality." All of the judges, in one way

or another have this focus on personality, yet the contestants never participate in an interview. Instead, they simply parade around on stage in their artificially made up appearance. The pageant director exclaims: “for swimsuit they should be upbeat, fun, spunky, showing lots of sparkling personality too.” How much personality can one really show while posing, blowing kisses and waving? This is a clear example of the endorsement of a false self. Yes, the parents play a role in “the package” that their child is placed in; however, the rules of the game are that they need to be in a package under this façade of personality. All of these little girls’ appearances are completely fake, yet no one chooses to recognize this fact, instead personality is thought of by many as the deciding factor, not the fakeness.

Rylan wins Most Photogenic award and Character Center-fold award. Emily Salazar wins Miss Personality award but she is not back from her room yet to claim her medal. Rylan wins the Sweetheart Queen award and the Beautiful Face award. Rylan then wins 3rd runner up for her division. While on stage Rylan immediately looks down at her trophy and touches the top of it with her finger (see Figure 11). She then immediately looks to her left and right at the other trophies placed on stage for the 2nd and 1st runner up and Gold Coast Queen overall division winner. Rylan is no longer smiling but standing posed with her arms in a low V position. Emily Salazar ends up winning the Gold Coast Queen for her division. Rylan leans forward to look at Emily receiving her award and all the other awards that she has missed.



Figure 11 Rylan with Trophy (Sims 2009).

Emily is clearly out of breath as she is handed all her trophies and medals for the awards she won but had not yet received because she missed the beginning of the awards ceremony. Emily's Dad has a voiceover as the camera focuses on him in the audience whipping a tear away: "to me it's like a heart race. It takes my breath away. I couldn't be more proud of her" (Sims 2009). Again, we see Rylan leaning out and forward on stage to look to her right at Emily. It is clear that Rylan is very upset that she has lost and immediately begins to compare her shortcomings to the 'comings' of others. Anthony Giddens clearly articulates the devastating effects that Rylan is experiencing as shame. Again, "shame occurs when a goal is not reached and indicates a short-coming" (Giddens 1991: 68). It is extremely difficult for any of the girls competing at the pageant to feel satisfaction when ultimately there is only one winner. Even the girls that win the title for their division struggle to find happiness because they know it is not the best prize at the pageant.

Then in the dressing room we see Rylan trying to come to terms with how she feels about not winning the highest award for her division:

Rylan: “Mommy, daddy?”

Rylan’s dad: Yeah.”

Rylan: “Why was Emily Salazar better than me?”

Rylan’s dad: “Well, she just had a better day.”

Rylan: “Why?”

Dad shrugs and turns up his hands.

Rylan: “But I wanted it.”

Rylan’s Dad: “I know, but, it’s like we said, sometimes we win ‘em and sometimes we don’t, so you just got to practice a little bit harder” (Sims 2009).

Dad holds up his hand for a high five and Rylan pushes into his hand with one finger putting all of her weight behind that little finger as she looks away from her dad and down at the floor. Rylan’s dad exclaims “hey! That’s not the attitude!” Well what attitude should little Rylan have? The lesson that these little girls learn is that even if one works hard and has all the attributes required to fulfill a role, does not necessarily result in the achievement and fulfillment of that goal. The structure of the consumer society is infiltrating the minds of individuals to the point that people are adapting to false promises and unrealized goals. Even when an artifice is created does not guarantee success, however, the message that it can help you achieve success is persistent.

In the end both Alicia and Emily are eligible to win the High Point Supreme title, the highest award in the pageant but neither one does (see Figure 12). The pageant director exclaims, “lots of happy winners and some not so happy winners, but overall it’s been a great day.”



Figure 12 Alicia on Stage (Sims 2009).



Figure 13 Alicia Disappointed (Sims 2009).

Alicia's Mom tries to comfort Alicia immediately after she has learned she did not win High Point Supreme: "We're proud of you, ok? You can't win everything, can you" (Sims 2009)? Alicia nods her head yes (see Figure 13). Alicia's Mom smiles as though she is amused by her daughter's response and says "no, no you can't, because somebody else has to win too." Alicia nods her head no. Mom, still amused, says "yes." This may be amusing for the Mom to witness her daughter attempting to come to terms with why she can't always win. As she exclaimed at the beginning of the show however, she allows her daughter to participate in pageants because she hopes that if Alicia is comfortable with her 'self' she will be able to get whatever it is she wants. Unfortunately, Alicia had to learn the hard lesson that this formula does not work. Hard-work and confidence do not always equal success and the result of coming to terms with this is very unnerving. Durkheim discusses an individual who is presented with

unlimited aspirations: “he aspires to everything and is satisfied with nothing” (Durkheim 1951: 271). Even though Alicia won for her division she was not satisfied because she did not win the overall prize. In Alicia’s interview she exclaims “the saddest moment of the day today is when I didn’t win the 500 dollars [prize for the overall winner of the competition].” Is it surprising that these young girls are not satisfied with winning the highest prize in their division? The message these young girls have internalized is that you must win the highest title. The momentary satisfaction the division title holds is shortly forgotten when the highest title comes to the forefront. Consumerism promises the individual satisfaction, likewise to what these young girls are experiencing, the satisfaction is only momentary. Individuals are doomed to a state of deceptive satisfaction. Alicia’s dad exclaims “for a seven year old it’s a little tough, you know? When they get the rug pulled out from underneath you, so a little tough for her.” How is one supposed to be confident in a self that is constructed and not the deep down true self?

Some might view the experiences of these three little girls as educational and good character-building activities. However, I would argue that instead it is fostering an environment that encourages the development of a false self. Where the individual is determined to define themselves as unique and special by what they consume and how they present themselves and appear to others. “The obstacle, for example, against which the victim of insatiable desires dashes may cause him to fall back upon himself and seek an outlet for his disappointed passions in an inner life” (Durkheim 1951: 288). Similarly Vaknin explains “[o]ne of the abused and traumatized child’s coping strategies is to

withdraw inwards, to seek gratification from a secure, reliable and permanently available source: from one's self" (2001: 150) Reliance on self-promotion and constantly comparing one's self to others and feeling as if one is in a constant state of competition does not produce healthy individuals. "If we put forward this anarchic competition as an ideal we should adhere to—one that should even be put into practice more radically than it is today—then we should be confusing sickness with a condition of good health" (Durkheim 1957: 11). Individuals in a consumer society must first adapt to the structure and in turn create an artificial self. Rely only on yourself; construct yourself in such a way as to receive the most attention and admiration. Then you can be successful. That is the promise that individuals have faith in, however, this is not the message we should be spreading. Instead, trust is made vulnerable and one may become anxious in order to avoid the shame that is associated with not being able to fulfill one's aspirations and desires in life. A false self may take over in an individual such as these young girls in order to cope with the hurt and trauma of not living up to ideals that they are being taught to aspire to at such young age.

CHAPTER III

CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEVING THE LIFE: *HOARDERS*

Arts and Entertainment (A&E) is jointly owned by Hearst Corporation, the Disney Company and NBC Universal . The show *Hoarders* first aired on August 17th, 2009 and was the most watched season premiere in A&E history with 2.5 million viewers. *Hoarders* is now in its second season and TLC has its own version of *Hoarders* known as *Hoarding: Buried Alive*. This particular episode aired in the second season on January 14th, 2010 and features the stories of two hoarders: Jim and Deborah. (See Appendix 2 for complete transcription of the episode).

Focus on material possessions as a source of prestige, power and notoriety is stressed in so many avenues of life as witnessed in the examination of *Toddlers and Tiaras*. Now, we will witness the possible outcomes of such encouragement that of self-interest, disregard of others, and falsely believing that objects provide more meaning and value than humans.

“My name is Deborah, I’m 49 year old and I work as a sales consultant in a ladies boutique. My mom tended to do all of the cleaning and I was really not forced to do all that much so... don’t have a lot of discipline in that area.” In the same breath that Deborah is introducing herself she is providing the viewer with an excuse for her

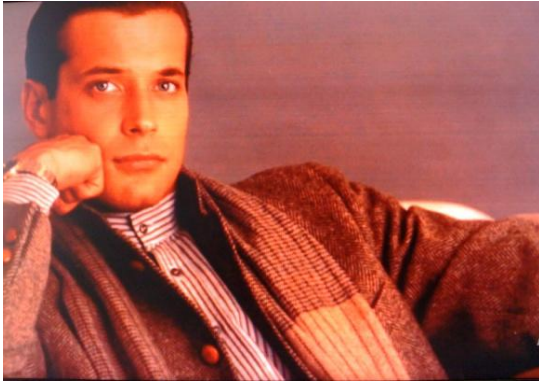


Figure 14 Ron, Deborah's Husband (Sharenow and Berg 2010).



Figure 15 Deborah (Sharenow and Berg 2010).

behavior. “The narcissist is a partial adult. He seeks to avoid adulthood.” (Vaknin 2001: 141). A narcissistic individual makes excuses for their behavior and refuses to accept the responsibilities of adulthood. “My hoarding problem started when I had kids. I was just so immersed in having my child and I just wanted to be with him every single second, but then I let everything else go” (Sharenow & Berg 2010). Sam Vaknin exclaims “[narcissists] may have once been rich, famous, powerful, brilliant, or sexually irresistible, but they no longer are” (Vaknin 2001: 49). Why the two photos above are shown to the viewer is not exactly clear except for the possibility that Deborah and her husband Ron feel that they were once beautiful attractive individuals and either they or the producers want the world to know it (see Figure 14 and 15).

In between interviews with the people portrayed, the show provides white text against a black backdrop to keep the audience up to date with what is occurring on the show: “*Deborah's hoarding led to a very serious encounter with Child Protective*

Services.” Deborah states, “since that day, I see a police car- I get panicky, if someone comes to the door- I get panicky.” As a result of Deborah’s encounter with protective services, due to her hoarding problem, she is suffering from constant anxiety that someday her children will be taken away from her again. “The worst thing that could ever happen to me in my life would be to lose my children because they are everything to me, everything, so why do I do this?” The audience then learns that Ron, Deborah’s husband, attempted suicide and he suffers from alcoholism, which he attributes to Deborah’s hoarding. Ron may very well be a narcissist as well, refusing to help his wife over the years with this hoarding problem, and then attributing the state of *their* home to his alcoholism. Ron and Deborah have adapted to the structure of consumerism in a drastic way. They have successfully accumulated a massive amount of material possessions in the pursuit of satisfaction. These are the priorities that have been encouraged from a young age for the individual today. Ron and Deborah followed this message and now have what is known as a compulsive hoarding disorder. Deborah has an obsessive need to keep and acquire material possessions, often times over-valuing their perceived importance. This mental illness was first published in the fifth edition of the DSM. This is ironic considering this edition of the DSM was the first to remove narcissism as a mental disorder. Deborah has placed an extreme amount of value in the things that she possesses. She has adapted in an extreme way to the structure of a consumer society: accumulate material possessions and you will achieve satisfaction.

Ron: I’ve had enough. I’ve had enough of everything. I drank a half gallon of straight vodka and that would have done it but Deborah said that she had a weird feeling at

work that day and she came home real early.

Deborah: I just all of the sudden got this strange feeling that I had to go home. I came in the back door and I found him laying on the kitchen floor with a note. I couldn't even totally concentrate on saving my husband because all I could see: the ambulance and the police coming in and seeing the house, and I thought I'm about to lose my husband and my children. (Sharenow & Berg 2010)

If you pay attention to the dialogue here it is astounding. First, Ron state "I've" had enough, not past tense, but present. He had had enough of the hoarding and it appears that he still is. Then, the fact the Deborah was more concerned with herself and what would happen to her as a result of her husband potentially committing suicide in their home, instead of the fact that her husband is lying there dying and in need of medical attention is astonishing. Deborah is not even aware of her own narcissism and this focus upon herself. "Narcissists, however, remain dependent on others for their self-esteem and self-confidence [as opposed to] one's sense of inner worth" (Vaknin 2001: 142). Deborah was more concerned with the fact that she might lose her source of narcissistic supply (attention, admiration, adoration and adulation) than the actual loss of her husband. Not only has Deborah adapted to the structure of society and its promises but she has now created an environment full of objects that she believes hold the utmost value.

Jim, is a 66 year old resident of Indiana and a beekeeper. "I don't see myself as piling up stuff, here, there, and everywhere, but, uh, the evidence is all around me, isn't it" (Sharenow & Berg 2010)? Heather, Jim's daughter, will not allow her infant daughter to go visit her grandfather at his home. "*Jim is an atypical hoarder. He doesn't actively*

acquire things by shopping. He passively acquires things from his many activities and friends.” His daughter Heather states: “I’m sure he can tell a story about every single thing in there or have a reason for him keeping it. I think that’s the problem, everyone justifies why they have stuff.” Jim then discusses a shoe horn that he got from his father’s dresser: “it’s a trivial little item, but it has a lot of connections for me.” Again, we are presented with evidence that what we consume defines who we are as individuals. This is indicative of a symptom of a consumer society: possessions hold just as much value as people, at times, even more value. Jim states “I have a justified fear of not having money and I responded to that but hanging on to what I had. I just sort of feel like I’m, *I’m vulnerable.*” Jim is adapting to the fear and anxiety that comes with living in consumerism. Individuals are promised satisfaction and happiness by accumulating material possessions. Failure to feel happy and satisfied is never addressed or blamed on some other aspect of the individuals’ life. Jim, in order to combat his anxiety surrounding money, can now not let go of any of his material possessions. He has adapted to the structure presented before him. As stated early, Durkheim’s concept of anomie clearly applies to this runaway character of our capitalist society: “[i]nextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture” (1951: 247). We learn that Jim travels for much of his work and this aids in his dilemma: “one of the ironies of my life is I can escape. I get in my truck and off I go. I close the door and this house kind of disappears.” As Anthony Giddens argues “confrontation with the real problem themselves is psychologically problematic” (1991: 27). Jim is now being confronted with the fact that he has created a false environment and even a false self in reaction to

the structure of society. He has created an artifice to help him cope with the drudgeries of consumerism and a way that is still fulfilling the obligations placed upon the individual within today's world. Jim is unable to face his behaviors and why they are on the extreme end of the spectrum and shortly he will begin to avoid facing this adaptation and artifice.

"I'm tired of being ashamed. I'm tired of being a prisoner." Deborah confesses to the camera her feelings. "The narcissistic personality has only a shadowy understanding of the needs of others, and feelings of grandiosity jostle with sentiments of emptiness and inauthenticity" (Giddens 1991: 172) Both Deborah and Jim struggle to confront the artifice that have surrounded their lives with; this artifice that promised happiness, satisfaction and success but never came. Shame and narcissism are closely related as shame can result when one's expectations about how they are supposed to behave or how things are supposed to turn out in their life are not met. Deborah has feelings of shame and of being a prisoner as a result of her disorder. "I'm tired of being ashamed. I'm tired of being a prisoner to my home. It effects everything in my life" How often do other individuals in our society, who aren't suffering from a hoarding disorder, feel as though they are a prisoner to their possessions? Throughout the episode and interviews with Deborah she appears totally ignorant to the needs of her husband and children. "If we follow no rule except that of a clear self-interest, in the occupations that take up nearly the whole of our time, how should we acquire a taste for any disinterestedness, or selflessness or sacrifice?" (Durkheim 1957: 12). Deborah refuses to acknowledge the needs of the rest of her family and has been completely selfish in her endeavors to

accumulate all of these possessions. Vaknin explains how narcissism and hoarding may be closely related.

When a person persists in a dysfunctional, maladaptive or plain useless behavior despite grave repercussions to himself and others, we say that his acts are compulsive. The narcissist is compulsive in his pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. This linkage between narcissism and obsessive-compulsive disorders sheds light on the mechanisms of the narcissistic psyche. (Vaknin 2001: 196)

Compulsive hoarding, as a new mental disorder, may have emerged as a result of an internalized message to always consume. Other individuals are necessary in order to provide attention, admiration, adulation and adoration for the false self that has been erupted. This artificial self needs reassurance and attention in order to continue functioning and to continue consuming. This artificial, false self is a façade for the emptiness that is inside the individual. This emptiness has built up from the inability to feel long-term satisfaction from society. Jim states that he can escape the home he has created for himself, while others in our society may turn to drugs or alcohol to help themselves cope with the amoral character of our capitalist society that encourages this infinite pursuit of material goods.

Suzanne, a clinical psychologist, comes to Deborah's home and asks "so how do you feel about me coming in" (Sharenow & Berg 2010)? Deborah replies "I am very embarrassed and nervous." Suzanne then states "I'm not here to judge. I'm just here to look and to help. Let's take a look." Deborah explains "This looks exactly like how the inside of my head and stomach feel." Deborah's husband, Ron, states "sometimes she

just feels so tired all the time that she just wants to lay in bed and watch TV.” It appears that Deborah does not want to face her dilemma and at times withdraws completely from the world she has created around her in order to avoid dealing with her behaviors. Suzanne states “there seems to be a lack of intimacy in the lives of the mother and father.” Deborah’s two sons cannot sleep in their own room because of the amount of stuff piled up on the bed and floor. Ron sleeps in his own room, the oldest boy sleeps on the couch and the youngest boy sleeps with his mother. “The narcissist does his damndest to avoid intimacy” (Vaknin 2001: 203). Instead, Deborah puts all her focus on the things that she owns and as a result of this accumulation of items she closes herself off from the rest of her family, refusing to recognize their needs and interests. Deborah explains “right now I isolate myself. We don’t have conversations anymore. I just am too weighed down by all of this.” Deborah does not have people over to her home because she is fearful of having her children taken away but also because she has chosen to isolate herself not only from other people but from her family as well. “[T]he humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects” (Baudrillard 1970: 25). Instead, Deborah somehow feels that the things she has acquired are meaningful and significant more so than interactions with other individuals. She may not be consciously aware of this decision she has made but it is clear that she has placed the possessions in her life as her number one priority.

Similarly Jim articulates this same isolation: “I’m not telling people about this. I have a lot of embarrassment. I have a lot of fear. It’s terrible” (Sharenow & Berg 2010).

“The consumer object isolates” and for those like Jim this isolation is coupled with fear and embarrassment (Baudrillard 1970: 85). Be unique. Be special. Be different. These are the messages internalized through many avenues today. Consuming, even though it may make you appear unique, is in reality, making you the same as everyone else. The episode informs us that Jim’s daughter, Heather, will not allow his granddaughter into visit his home because it is unsanitary and because there is a missing loaded gun somewhere in the house. Jim states “I respond to it [the stuff in his house] by leaving, by ignoring it.” The audience is then introduced to the “expert” who is going to help Jim overcome his disorder. “My name is Geralin Thomas and I’m a certified personal organizer, specializing in chronic disorganization.” Mark Andrejevic, Deborah Philips and Anthony Giddens have already presented us with the importance of therapy in the construction of the self and as a contributing factor to the development of narcissism. “In therapy the individual is encouraged to become the centre-point of reflection and concern” (Giddens 1991: 172). The very mechanism, therapy, which so many individuals seek for refuge and guidance, can instead result in the encouragement of the false self. Jim may have internalized a message that his true self was not successful and admired by others. By hoarding, he created an alternate way to receive attention and to avoid the false promise of satisfaction.

Geralin proceeds to examine Jim’s home and asks him why he chooses to leave things as he finds them when she opens up a kitchen cabinet to discover cobwebs and mice droppings. Jim has a cat and he explains that he thought it would help him deter the mice. Geralin states “do you ever think that you make excuses for your behaviors”

(Sharenow & Berg 2010)? Jim laughs in agreement with Geralin. She continues: “the average person when they open this up would think ‘oh, I’ve got a wreck in here I’m gonna take ten minutes and clean it.’ What is your thought? Close it and keep moving?” Jim replies “I don’t have time to deal with this now.” For Jim, he states “I intend to do it, therefore I have done it.” Jim, like Deborah, is unwilling to face his behaviors and choices because he is afraid of what he might discover, so he continues to hoard. Jim must continue to avoid the artificial self he has created. He must avoid the environment he has surrounded himself in as well; the environment that serves as a daily reminder to the unfulfilled promise of his material possessions.

Four ‘1-800-Got Junk?’ trucks pull up in front of Deborah’s home. “My mind and my emotions feel as cluttered and as nasty as the house” (Sharenow & Berg 2010). The audience is then introduced to Dorothy: “I’m a professional organizing expert specializing in hoarding.” The crew, Dorothy and the family begin working their way through the clutter, boxing things up and throwing items away. *“Not long into the cleaning process, Deborah hits an emotional roadblock.”* A small dish gets broken and it had belonged to Deborah’s mother. *“Deborah’s mom passed away less than one year ago. She has yet to deal with the loss.”* Deborah explains how the loss of her mother has affected her: “It’s sort of stopped me from what I need to do in everyday life.” As Deborah begins to cry while holding the dish, the organizer asks what Deborah would like to do with the item and Deborah replies “I feel like I’m throwing my mom away.” Previous research has explained how individuals may define their lives and identities in terms of the things they consume. “They give material form to a particular narrative of

self-identity” (Giddens 1991: 81). The things you consume help define your personality, who you are as an individual. Deborah has given significance to all the material possessions in her life, even to the point of viewing objects as representations of people. Individuals like Deborah and Jim are adapting to the message that consumer goods are of the utmost importance. Consumer goods can define who you are as a person and even provide you with uniqueness and exceptionality. Consume more and maybe one will receive more attention and admiration. Objects for Deborah have even begun to replace her relationships with other people. Accumulating more and more goods is the focus and intent for her daily life to the point of valuing the maintenance of these objects more than other people.

Jim experiences similar feelings concerning the objects he hoards but attributes the objects to memories rather than people in particular. The organizer exclaims “he is so worried about forgetting things that he hangs on to things because he doesn’t want to forget about them” (Sharenow & Berg 2010). Jim provides the audience with insight “my life is in memories of things.” As Jim begins to reflect on his behavior the organizer attempts to interrupt him “Mhmm...” Jim continues on, “things are memory triggers for me and it’s a very powerful thing.” The items that Jim has collected over the years are like gold to him and that’s why he cannot bring himself to let things go. “Wealth, on the other hand, by the power it bestows, deceives us into believing that we depend on ourselves only” (Durkheim 1951: 254). Jim has withdrawn into his house and his possessions attributing significant meaning to each and every thing. The organizer interjects, “if we were to let things go, do you think you could still remember them

without the things?” To which Jim replies “my memory is terrible” Giddens discusses that a “[l]ack of coherence in ideals, or the difficulty of finding worthwhile ideals to pursue, may be as important in relation to shame anxiety as circumstances in which goals are too demanding to be attained” (1991: 69). Durkheim also warned that having goals in society that are too demanding can cause fatalism, or a resigned acceptance to the events in our lives. Limitless goals that can never truly be attained can engender a feeling of powerlessness at our inability to feel satisfaction while at the same time overwhelming. Individuals adapt to the demanding pursuit of profit and may create a false self in order to help cope with the powerlessness and anxiety that results from this boundless pursuit. Jim truly believes that if he rids himself of the multitude of things that he has he will no longer be able to remember his life. We then witness Jim describe in detail the importance of bricks he has been saving as they were bricks from his high school that was torn down. He describes the details of the building and his experiences there and the organizer exclaims that it appears Jim has a great memory to which Jim responds with laughter, unable to believe or come to terms with the fact that he does indeed have a good memory and that he has been convincing himself otherwise.



Figure 16 Ron and Deborah Outside (Sharenow and Berg 2010).



Figure 17 Front of Deborah's Home (Sharenow and Berg 2010).

Deborah is outside the home smoking a cigarette and Ron is with her drinking a soda (see Figure 16). Both are watching while the cleaning crew pile up furniture in the front yard (see Figure 17). The organizer is upset by the parents' lack of involvement in the clearing process as their two boys are eagerly helping. Deborah comes in the house to see the cleared dining room and gets very excited. The organizer tells her that the boys did all of it without even being asked. The organizer informs her that it is Deborah and Ron's turn to do some work. "See, all we had to do was ask. If someone doesn't take charge it doesn't happen, so the parents have to actually be the ones to take charge not the children" (Sharenow & Berg 2010). Deborah has participated in avoidance for years now so it is no surprise she is still avoiding her behaviors even when presented with an opportunity to alter her behavior. Deborah has internalized the adaption to consumer society. Objects are her life to the point of denying the real and avoiding the choice to change.

Sam, the youngest child of Deborah appears to have been most affected by his



Figure 18 Sam Upset in His Room (Sharenow and Berg 2010).

mother's behavior. Several times throughout the episode he retreats to isolation and at other times is overly enthusiastic about the cleaning process.

Deborah later tells Sam at the encouragement of the psychologist and organizer “Sam, it is not your job to take care of your Mom and Dad. It is Mom and Dad’s job to take care of you” (Sharenow & Berg 2010). The camera then reveals Deborah in an interview exclaiming “my loved ones have had to adapt because of all of this.” We witnessed in the analysis of *Toddlers and Tiaras* that individuals may camouflage themselves and adapt to different environments encouraging the development of the false self. In an interview Sam explains “sometimes I do feel that I have to grow up faster than other kids because I have to deal with things.” In her interview Deborah states “I don’t think the children even know what they’ve had to adapt to because it’s all they’ve ever known.” However, Sam is clearly aware that something is very different within his home and within his family otherwise he would not react the way that he does. Near the end of the

episode Suzanne is sitting outside with Sam on the curb. *As the sorting continues, Sam become very upset when he realizes the crew will be leaving soon.*

Suzanne: Tell me again, because everybody's what?

Sam(crying): Everybody's fun and nice.

Suzanne: Everybody's fun and nice?

Sam: and I'm gonna miss everybody.

Suzanne (interview): Why would a child reach out to people that he just met for a few days here and be so sad because they are leaving? ” (Sharenow & Berg 2010)

Unfortunately, this is most likely the result of limited interaction with other people.

Instead, his mom has collected “meaningful” things to fulfill her life and has completely disregarded her family. But things cannot provide the same emotion and comfort and support that people can. Suzanne accurately states “he's reaching for some kind of real connection.” This is a consequence of our society and represents this idea of the false self. We are led to believe in this capitalist society through multiple avenues that material possessions hold a significant weight and importance in our lives. *Hoarders* provides an extreme example of what can happen when we focus our lives upon the things we possess and worse yet attribute these possessions to meaning, significance and our sheer existence as human beings.

The audience is taken back to Indiana and Jim's process of clearing through his possessions. Jim explains why his office looks the way it does: “apparently the piles of paper was like building a little fort. My feeling financially insecure led me to be insecure



Figure 19 Jim Breaks Down (Sharenow and Berg 2010).

about a lot of things” (Sharenow & Berg 2010). Jim begins to recall his Mother as a bookkeeper in 1958 making five thousand dollars a year which wasn’t enough to live on. His uncle would help them out because he also worked for the firm. Jim remembers, as a little boy, sneaking in and looking at the ledger at his Mother’s job, seeing her account and it piling up: “five, ten, fifteen, twenty (in reference to thousands of dollars)...” Jim breaks down... “at the end of the year he [Uncle] would always find a way to declare a dividend to clear that account.” Jim is now crying. “There is not enough memories.” The organizer asks “do you think you maybe hang on to all that stuff for that reason? Because there aren’t enough memories?” To which Jim replies “I don’t know, maybe.” Giddens explains that “human beings react against social circumstances which they find oppressive” (1991: 175). Individuals adapt by creating an environment surrounded by material possessions that can provide meaning. For Jim, it embodied memories and Deborah relationships with other people. This focus and obsession with consumer goods

forces individuals to adapt in any way possible. Some, like Jim and Deborah, adapt in extreme ways. An artificial self is created as a coping mechanism or as a way to achieve success and when confronted with the dichotomy of the artifice and the real individuals will avoid facing the truth. Keep the faith in the artifice going and avoid what may be truly meaningful in life. Jim views memory loss and more importantly financial insecurity as oppressive so he keeps everything in the hopes that he will be able to remember in order to help cope with the plurality of choices presented to him in the consumer society. A loss of care and concern as a result of feelings of powerlessness may encourage the individual to focus on the self and self-promotion, or in Jim and Deborah's case the hoarding of material possessions.

The episode ends with the audience being exposed to Jim's granddaughter coming over to his house for the first time and being asked to babysit. Deborah is going to continue attending therapy in order to work through her anxiety issues but there is still a large amount of clutter in the house. Her boys however, now have their own rooms and have had friends over for the first time.

CHAPTER V

THE EASE OF FALSENESS: *SISTER WIVES*

The Learning Channel (TLC) aired a new program, *Sister Wives*, on September 26th, 2010 which provides an insider's look into the lives of a polygamous family in Utah. This particular program was also met with much controversy as the act of polygamy is illegal in the United States. However, the family wanted to provide viewers with the *positive* aspects of polygamy. "Narcissists are addicted to being famous. This, by far, is their predominant drive [...] the narcissist equally enjoys all types of attention and likes as much to be feared as to be loved" (Vaknin 2001: 64). The Brown family was not so much concerned about the possibility of a criminal investigation as exposing their wonderful lives. This chapter will examine how the false self can creep into an individual's life with such ease that that individual may be completely unaware of the lies they tell themselves.

Kody, the father in this family, is an advertising executive and he begins the episode while driving a nice luxury vehicle.

I like marriage, uh, and I'm a repeat offender, so... I have adopted the faith that embraces that lifestyle, uh, in fact, it recommends it. And uh, I like to reward good behavior so if you're good with one marriage they figure you'll be good with two. I hope they think I'll be good with four. (smiles big) Let's go ahead and go home so you can meet my family. They're special and you'll like them and um, I'm excited about introducing you to them. (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010)

Right of the bat the viewer is exposed to many important aspects of Kody that relate to the idea of the false self. “A person’s identity is not found in behavior, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*” (Giddens 1991: 54). While the above statement is not entirely correct Giddens rightly points out the importance of narrative in communicating one’s identity. This episode was full of long narratives providing insight into the identities of each of the wives and father. However, as we have seen, and will continue to see when examining this episode, identity is influenced by others reactions. “While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time, it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction and chief area of sensitivity” (Riesman et al. 1951: 38). Kody goes on to explain “20 years ago I married Mary and then 17 years ago I married Janelle and then 16 years ago I married



Figure 20 Kody and His Three Wives (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

Christine. I just fell in love and then I fell in love again and then I fell in love again.”

Kody did not have any influence in his life that would stop him from marrying as many women as he wanted (see Figure 20). Even though polygamy is illegal in the U.S. prosecution is usually only the result of child abuse or child trafficking. “If there is nothing to control them they will not be able to control themselves” (Durkheim 1957: 11). On top of that, Kody converted to a faith when he was twenty years old that encouraged the pursuit of multiple wives.



Figure 21 Layout of the House (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

The family is shown at home with several of the family members gathered in the kitchen (see Figure 21). Three of the older girls are standing by Janelle, the second wife.

One of the daughters: “We’re sisters.”

Kody (from across the kitchen): “Sisters from the same mister. She’s a sister from the same mister and he’s a brother from another mother.” (laughter)
Same daughter: “Polyg talk.” (laughter)
Kody: “She’s got a mouthful; she said its polyg talk.”
Janelle: “It’s polyg talk or polyg food and that’s how most of us are known: polygs... I dunno, my name is Janelle.”
Oldest boy: “Somebody referred to us as polyg-lets”
(Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

Janelle’s very profound statement of “my name is Janelle” says a lot about identity and the view of the self. It appears as though it is difficult to maintain one’s own identity in such a family when there are multiple wives and twelve children. As Baudrillard states “[p]eople, then, are incapable of understanding themselves, of knowing what they are and what they want” (Baudrillard 1970: 169). Janelle maybe stating ‘hey, I’m an individual too,’ not just one piece of the larger puzzle.

Meri, the first wife, has one child with Kody (see Figure 22). She explains that they have three separate bedrooms and three separate sexual relationships and that they “don’t go weird.”

When he is ornery with another one he gets weird with me and I don’t want that, you know, so it’s very important for him to have a good relationship and the sexual nature of it is definitely part of that good relationship and when he is off with somebody else I just don’t think about that part of it you know why would I want to do that to myself...
(Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).



Figure 22 Meri (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

Here we see Meri refusing to think about the sexual relationship of her sister wives with her husband. Why would she not want to acknowledge this? It clearly bothers her that her husband is sleeping with other women, of course she knows about these women, but it is still difficult for her to accept. Meri, at one time, may have been aware of her true self, but Vaknin explains that the false self overshadows the true self. The more the false self takes over, the less likely one is able to recognize their own lies, even when they lie to themselves. Meri goes on to explain:

I came from a culture and it's not abnormal to get married when you are 19/20 years old. I was raised in a polygamous family. By the time I met Kody we were talking about marriage and stuff at that point he and I eventually knew that we would both take another wife or wives into the family [...] If you're looking at this lifestyle just as you know, what can I do to help you or what can you do to help me, it works out totally well [...] "It's not something like I'm sitting there thinking: ok I'm, I'm ready to, take another wife, let's go find somebody. It's more of a situation of when uh, the, uh, uh, right person comes along (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

Throughout the episode Meri attempts to justify the lifestyle that her family lives. The family wanted to participate in this reality television program to present the viewer with the positive aspects of a polygamous lifestyle. The family may be attempting to present their lifestyle in comparison to that of a traditional family of mainstream Mormonism found within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Surprisingly there are many parallels between their family and non-polygamous families in our society.

Anthony Giddens discusses how an individual determines the choices they will make in life: “the selection or creation of lifestyles is influenced by group pressures and the visibility of role models, as well as by socioeconomic circumstances” (Giddens 82).

Meri grew up in a polygamous lifestyle and may have been accepting of her husband’s choice to marry other women because that is all Meri had ever known. Even, if a part of her did not want that sort of relationship, she had been influenced and encouraged to continue in it because that was how she was socialized religiously. There are many parallels between what Meri and the other wives may be experiencing in terms of cultural oppression and the socialization other individuals experience in terms of consumerism and narcissism. Consume material goods in the pursuit of being deemed unique, special and ultimately successful. Material goods are a measure of your success. Likewise, the accumulation of multiple wives or having multiple sexual relationships can also be a result of the limitless pursuit of wealth. Should individuals not also pursue the multiple sexual relationships and marriage partners? Why be satisfied with just one when you can have many?

During the group interview with all of the sister wives and Kody, Christine, the third wife states:

Christine: Yeah, you have to know, that Janelle and I might have never married Kody, we never would have married him on our own. It took Mary pulling some strings and Kody by himself would have never done it, he had to have Mary's back too.

Kody: Meri bonded with Janelle and Christine before it was a serious thought in my mind. Meri's the bait.

Janelle: No, she's in mergers and acquisitions, is what he says.

(Laughter from everyone) (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010)

Whether these statements are true, the viewer cannot help but wonder whether or not there was some manipulation and convincing on Kody's part to get Meri to accept the addition of the new wives. Referring back to narcissistic traits laid out by Vaknin, the narcissist "uses others to achieve his or her own ends" (Vaknin 2001: 32). The only person in this family that is receiving the most benefit is Kody. He is the one that gets to sleep with three women while each wife is confined to being with her husband every third night and is only allotted one date a week. Janelle's comment about mergers and acquisitions is funny to all of the parents but it is presenting the viewer with a very dark aspect of our society, how consumerism begins to seep into our very relationships with other people. Throughout the episode the wives will attempt to justify their *lifestyle* that they are convinced is a positive one.



Figure 23 Janelle (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

The viewer is then exposed to Janelle, the second wife, who has six children with Kody (see Figure 23). During her interview one is exposed to many interesting aspects of their family life.

When I finally decided it really didn't seem so strange it was not... like this big... let me think about this, it wasn't a huge jump for me for some reason [...] I've always been a career person, I've always worked. I would prefer to be working rather than be home with the kids [...] On my days home, all I have to do is drive the kids everywhere and I'm doing this and I'm doing that and I'm seeing to the homework and everything and you know what? I like working more, so let Christine do that. Christine likes to do that. I can say I'm going to a movie, will you watch my kids? And they have somebody to watch them. I don't have to do everything. I have time for everything I like to do, not just household stuff (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

Janelle works ten to twelve hour days, and as she says she prefers it that way. The dialogue makes it seem as if her children are a burden to her and she would rather have

Christine, the third wife, care for them. Her reasoning for entering into a plural marriage is very narcissistic. She enjoys the fact that she gets to work and do what she enjoys the most, while someone else is raising her children, and then on her days off she does not want to care for her children she would rather do things that interest her. Again, the powerful words of Durkheim come to mind. “If we follow no rule, except that of a clear self-interest, in the occupations that take up nearly the whole of our time, how should we acquire a taste for any disinterestedness, selflessness or sacrifice” (Durkheim 1957: 12)? Focus on your profession and bringing in an income and happiness will surely follow.

Freedom and autonomy are repeatedly discussed by the wives in relation to the lifestyle this family provides. As Janelle states, “this home is actually built by a polygamist and this is probably typical of what you’ll find in most polygamist families: separate living spaces but interconnected and so the family functions as a whole but we all have our own autonomy” (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010). This is an interesting concept to think about. Freedom and autonomy are clearly valued in this family and they therefore have separate living spaces. Meri goes on to explain “you know what? I hope our kids do what they want to do in their life, whether its live our lifestyle or have no religion at all, as long as they are strong and firm in what they want to do and what they want to believe and that they are not following somebody else.” How free are these sister wives? Did Meri feel that she was free to make her own choices and decisions regarding polygamy? Meri would most likely say absolutely. The polygamous lifestyle encourages wives to overcome their jealousy issues. Similarly Baudrillard states “the consumer experiences his distinctive behaviors as freedom, as

aspiration, as choice” (1970: 61). Sure, Meri is not consuming wives and children but we have already seen through *Toddler and Tiaras* and *Hoarders* that people become objectified in a consumer society. Focus on yourself. Create an artifice if reality is too difficult to accept. During the parents interview on the couch Meri exclaims:

Meri: having the lifestyle and only once every third night,
frees up a lot of time for us...
Janelle interjects: oh, it's great!
Meri: to go do what we need to do. (Gibbons, Hayes,
Poole & Streb 2010)

By being a part of this polygamous family there is some level of encouragement to be narcissistic. Their religion encourages the wives to overcome jealousy, to stifle that emotion, and instead to focus on the freedom one is accorded. Since Kody is the ultimate narcissist in this situation, the wives are allowed the “freedom” to pursue their own self-interest and may even be encouraged to take it to the unhealthy level of narcissism as a coping mechanism to their cultural oppression, resulting in the emergence of the false self.

The final wife, Christine, is then introduced the viewer (see Figure 24). Christine has five children and is pregnant with her sixth.

I never wanted to just be married to a man, I always wanted sister-wives, uh, I just liked the idea of the companionship. I liked the idea of the freedom that it got me. There's too many things that I want to do and want to be, um, free for, and I just like the idea of having someone around. I just like the idea of sister-wives, a lot. Um, I, yeah, I honestly wanted sister-wives more than a husband, for a good time of my life. I wanted the whole family, I

didn't just want Kody. I wanted everything (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

Already, we see Christine justify her marriage and why she would enter into a polygamous one, understandably, since it can be argued that most families in the U.S. would disapprove of such a relationship. However, there is more to her statements than



Figure 24 Christine (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

just justifying polygamy. Christine states that she “didn’t just want Kody” she “wanted everything.” In the previous chapters on reality television we saw the uncontrolled, runaway character of economic life as discussed by Durkheim and the dangers that can result. Durkheim states the individual apart of such a society “aspires to everything and is satisfied with nothing” (1951: 271). Christine’s narcissism and selfish mindset

becomes even clearer to the viewer when she continues discussing how she came into the marriage.

And then a third wife comes along and they actually say if you are having problems, in, like, when you are having two wives and having problems, marry a third, because it'll even it out. So I only ever wanted to be a third. I never wanted to be a first at all because I didn't want to be married to a guy by myself and then I didn't want to be a second, because I feel like they are the wedge in the relationship and I didn't want to be the wedge. I only ever wanted to be third, because it sounded the easiest (big smile). (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010)

Christine has already made it clear that she wanted everything and worse yet what she wanted was the best position in the marriage according to her, that of the third wife.

“Conspicuous existence is a form of conspicuous consumption, in which the consumed commodity is narcissistic supply.” (Vaknin 2001: 66). It is very possible that Christine came into this relationship as a narcissist seeking out narcissistic supply (attention, admiration, adoration and adulation) however, the above statements can be thoughts that she has developed over the years as a result of being married to a narcissist in a polygamous family. Christine is then shown interacting with several of the children, because she is “the ‘domestic one.’” (smiles) and designated care-giver of all the children. “Savanah is technically Janelle’s, but we’ve raised all the kids all together (shrugging her shoulders) and so if someone tries to tell me that Savanah’s not my child, I adamantly disagree. (smiles)” (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010). There are many times when Christine is talking that she ends her comments with what appears to be a forced, fake smile. Vaknin explains “[a] child, after all, is the ultimate source of

Narcissistic Supply” (Vaknin 2001: 208). For Christine, she probably loves the fact that she is in charge of all the children because they provide the most attention, adoration, and admiration (Narcissistic Supply).

This idea of forced emotions and fakeness is seen in an interaction between Meri and Christine during the parent’s interview on the couch. Meri states “they say you have to work on being nurturing. You [Christine], even if it hasn’t come by naturally, you do a really good job at it.” (shrugs shoulders) To which Christine responds “thanks!” while shrugging her shoulders (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010). There is something very interesting about their body language when this compliment is given and received. It is as if they have never given or received compliments before and it is so strange and foreign to them that their body language clearly articulates the uncomfortable nature of the situation and possible falseness of the compliment.

Near the end of the episode the discussion of a potential fourth wife comes to a forefront. Janelle states “we were beginning to feel like there was someone else. I was beginning to feel like there was someone. Like I would comment to Christine, gosh we sure need another one, it’s getting kinda boring, you know” (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010)? How on earth could it possibly be getting boring when you have twelve children, three wives and a husband? As witnessed in the analysis of *Toddlers and Tiaras* and *Hoarders* consumer society presents the individual with infinite possibilities which can be detrimental and unnerving. Potentially, there is no limit to the number of wives that Kody could obtain. This environment of several adults searching for narcissistic supply could only result in the addition of a fourth wife or more. “Since man

is, nonetheless, never satisfied, the same story begins over and over again, with the sterile self-evidence of old fables” (Baudrillard 1970: 69). This quote by Baudrillard clearly parallels that of Durkheim’s concept of anomie. How are we to be satisfied when the possibilities are limitless?

The discussions revolving around the potential addition of a fourth wife bring to the surface many feelings and emotions for each of the wives. Meri states “I’m not gonna lie. There are jealousy issues, you know? There are, those are there, those are natural, and you know, hopefully that’s something that I can overcome” (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010). Meri is essentially stating that she hopes her false self can take over so that her true self cannot be hurt and traumatized by Kody’s decision to add another wife. Christine states “I like three wives a lot and I’m kinda more hesitant adding another wife. I like it easy and so I kinda like just having three.” Christine appears to like just having three, because we have already witnessed the importance she feels her third wife position brings her. Sure, people are hesitant when change is introduced, however, Christine’s narcissistic conduct is now being threatened and ultimately there is now a fourth wife to take away some of her narcissistic supply. Meri goes on to state “I like my time with Kody and having sister wives makes it so that I do have less time with Kody. Jealousy is something that I want to overcome.” Unfortunately for Meri, she has been living with jealousy for twenty years now. She has likely created a false self as a coping mechanism in order to avoid the emotions that exist deep within her, emotions of jealousy and pain. It is with the possibility of even more time being taken away from her that these emotions emerge from deep down inside her

where she has been placing them due to the false self always being at the forefront. Kody says “because wives are comfortable with another wife in this lifestyle they are not comfortable with a girlfriend.” Kody is oblivious to the feelings and emotions of his wife and does not really give them the credit they deserve for the situation they are living in. As much as the wives speak of freedom and autonomy, Kody, is the only true free one in this equation, not the wives. He is free to do as he pleases and merely has to convince his wives that his decisions are the right ones. Christine concludes the episode with a statement from her interview:

I don't want to be a boat rocker, and I don't want my boat rocked. So no, I'm a little hesitant to accept another wife, but if it happens, she just has to be absolutely amazing. (brief big smile- fake) Otherwise it might be a little difficult (raises one eyebrow) (Gibbons, Hayes, Poole & Streb 2010).

“We are surrounded by waves of fake spontaneity, ‘personalized’ language, orchestrated emotions and personal relations. ‘Keep Smiling’” (Baudrillard 1970: 161). Throughout the episode the viewer witnesses Christine’s constant forced and fake smiles when discussing various aspects of their polygamous lifestyle. Referring back to Vaknin’s characteristics of narcissists: they prefer to surround themselves with other special and unique individuals only. Christine will only be accepting of the fourth wife if she is “absolutely amazing.”

These wives may have very well entered into this polygamous marriage on their own accord. However, the way the wives have spoken about their marriage and relationship does not quite add up. “[N]arcissism becomes intensified as a reaction to the

feelings of powerlessness thus engendered” (Giddens 1991: 173). It may be possible that over the years something inside each of these women has been broken to such a point that they have generated this false façade in order to help them cope with their cultural situation. Also, they are not alone in the repression of their feelings because there are two other wives that may be dealing with the same emotions. “The narcissism of the individual in consumer society is not an enjoyment of singularity; it is a refraction of collective features” (Baudrillard 1970: 95). Two of the wives were socialized into a polygamous lifestyle so they already had that influence working upon them and then Kody, in his selfish pursuits, was able to convince them that their marriage was a great one. Over the years, the wives most likely began to convince themselves as well. The false self is prevalent in so many different aspects of our society and is even visible in places like that of the polygamous Brown family.

CHAPTER VI

AVOIDING REALITY: *CATFISH THE TV SHOW*

The reality television show *Catfish: The TV Show* first aired November 12th, 2012 about individuals who meet and fall in love online but have not met in person. The “catfish” is often referred to as someone who has created a false, or misleading profile on social media sites like Facebook or other Internet sites in order to make themselves more appealing. This particular episode entitled “Jen & Skylar” is the 6th episode of the second season and originally aired on July 30th, 2013. This particular reality television program will provide a clear example of the disastrous effects the false self can have on other individuals. Nev and Max, the hosts of the program, receive emails from individuals who are attempting to determine if the people they are talking with online are who they really say they are or if they are presenting a fake identity. The following analysis of this particular reality television episode will shed light on the consequences the creation of a false self can have for others.

The episode begins with Max and Nev reading an email from Jen, who is an 18 year old senior in high school in Iowa who has fallen for a 22 year old college junior in San Francisco, California. When Nev and Max read the email of Jen’s story she explains:

Nev (reading Jen’s email outloud): I do have some concerns that he’s hiding something from me even though I feel like I am completely open with him. I’ve been online since I was ten years old.

Max and Nev (in unison): Wow.

Nev: In middle school I was bullied and found that people online did not judge me. Skylar is the one person that I would like to bring into my real world.

(...)

Nev: So since middle school you've been actively socializing online?

Jen: Because people in real life don't like to talk to me. So I'm like I'm going to be who I am online. I'm not going to make a fake personality because I want people to like me for me. (Mussman 2013).

Already, we have seen an example of adapting to the current structure of our society. Jen was bullied in school for being her true self and the Internet provided an opportunity for her to interact with other individuals who did not judge her or make her feel bad about her true self. While social media and the Internet can provide opportunities for individuals like Jen to truly express who they are as a person it can also provide opportunities for individuals who are projecting a false self to inflict harm on others



Figure 25 Max, Jen and Nev (Mussman 2013).

through their selfish pursuits of attention and admiration. Some individuals may choose to be false in real life with their interactions with others as well as the interactions with others online.

Jen goes on to explain her feelings for Skylar and how they met through an online game site and that she would like Max and Nev's help to actually meet him in person (see Figure 25). According to Jen, she and Skylar talk on the phone and text each other almost every day but have never video chatted and he has only sent her two pictures of himself. He also claims to not have a Facebook profile. They decide to help Jen in finding out more information about Skylar and conduct research on Skylar's phone number, his name, the photos he provided and whether or not he is enrolled at the University he claims to attend. The research does not produce many answers as to whether or not Skylar's identity is actually truthful so Nev decides to call and talk with Skylar to see if he would be interested in meeting face-to-face (see Figure 26 and 27).



Figure 26 Nev calls Skylar (Mussman 2013).

Nev: We're a little concerned that maybe you're not being totally honest with her. And we obviously did a little research just to see if we could find anything out about you and the only thing we did find was uh, that there isn't currently anybody named Skylar Hazen registered at San Francisco State University.



Figure 27 Nev Speaking to Skylar about Meeting Jen (Mussman 2013).

Skylar: I mean, I do go to San Francisco State and everything. I just don't... if I want to meet her like I mean I feel like I could make it a point to meet her when I feel like. This is like the worst time ever for this to happen.
Nev: I mean look, sometimes, you don't get to choose exactly when and how things happen. (Mussman 2013).

Already we see Skylar attempting to avoid the confrontation with whether or not he is being honest about his identity. Skylar also immediately points out that this is a terrible time for him to meet her and *he* wants to decide when and if they'll meet. This behavior

is indicative of a narcissist who refuses to face his true identity and constantly focuses only on what is beneficial for himself. If Skylar does indeed have true feelings for Jen and has now been afforded the opportunity to meet her, then why avoid meeting her? Skylar asks to think about whether or not they can come out to San Francisco to meet him. The next day Nev calls him back to find out what Skylar has decided: “yeah. I mean, if she really wants to come. I think it would be best for her to come here” Nev retorts by stating “I need you to convince me a little bit more that like you are taking this as seriously as we are, and as seriously as she is” (Mussman 2013). Skylar seems extremely apprehensive in revealing his identity to the show and Jen. Max, Nev and Jen fly to San Francisco to meet Skylar face-to-face. When they arrive at his address the man that appears is not the one from the photos (see Figure 28).



Figure 28 Skylar Comes Downstairs to Meet Jen (Mussman 2013).

Nev: and uh, we brought her from Iowa, just like we said we would. What comes as a bit of a shock for Jen and also us is that you're not the guy that we saw in the pictures and your name is also not Skylar.

Bryan: Yeah, I basically um, pretended to be Skylar. Because I never wanted it to reach that point where she would know who I am.

Max: So let me just get this straight. Do you have true feelings for Jennifer?

Bryan: I don't have any like emotional feelings towards her. I would never be able to have like a romantic relationship with her.

Max: Then why the f*ck are we here?

Bryan: Well, she's actually not the only girl I spoke to. And I felt like out of all the girls this is like the perfect time, the perfect girl to finally come clean to and end, like Skylar.

Nev: What are you ever hoping to gain from all these half true friendships that you have online? What's the point?

Bryan: I wanted to like brush up my game it's just something I do. (Mussman 2013)

Bryan (aka Skylar) had been lying about his true identity to Jen. He states that he “never wanted it to reach that point where she would know who I am.” Bryan and Jen were texting, talking on the phone or communicating online almost every day, yet this level of intimacy was not sufficient for Bryan to reveal his true identity. On top of creating an artificial self that presented emotional, romantic feelings towards Jen, he has basically exclaimed that he used Jen for his own selfish pursuits of practicing his interaction with the opposite sex. Vaknin expressed that narcissists will use others for their own selfish pursuits and needs in order to obtain the drug that is so essential to their existence (Narcissistic Supply). Bryan (aka Skylar) had been lying about his identity to multiple women not just Jen. An extreme focus on the self and encouragement to use others for

your own personal gain, to feel better about yourself, can be witnessed here in Bryan's description of why he lied about his identity.

Bryan: Because I feel like its good for her to finally know the truth and...

Max: You could have told her that on the phone though, right?

Bryan: Yeah, but in a way I wanted to end Skylar and I feel like by telling Jen who I am that ends Skylar.

Max: Right but that's... all about you. That's you taking care of your business and not really caring how its effecting someone else. Its kind of selfish.

(...Max then asks Bryan if he is sorry for what he's done)

Bryan: I don't know if I'm sorry, but, its... it is what it is. I was giving her a gift of... being in that... that relationship.

Max: You were giving her a gift?

Bryan: Yeah, I mean, she was happy. I knew I was leading her on but I knew it would never be permanent. (Mussman 2013)

Bryan here exclaims that it is "good for her" to know the truth. The narcissist is confident in all of his abilities and here Bryan essentially states that by humiliating Jen through publicly presenting his false self she is better. He goes on to exclaim that this whole fake relationship was a "gift" for her. "The narcissist fervently believes in his own infallibility, brilliance, omnipotence, heroism, and perfection. He doesn't dare confront the truth and admit it even to himself" (Vaknin 2001: 22). Bryan seems to believe that his fabricated self, as well as the relationship he fabricated with Jen, was beneficial to both him and her because he got practice how to interact with women and she received the satisfaction of someone providing her with a seemingly genuine, loving relationship. As a narcissist, Bryan received his Narcissistic Supply (attention, admiration, adoration) by his interaction with Jen and other women online. In turn, he believed they were also

receiving a benefit of attention and adoration that comes from a genuine relationship. Bryan seems to be completely oblivious to the fact that a fake relationship is not the same thing as a real one. He is avoiding the truth and the hurt he has caused. Bryan also appears to be more interested in the public announcement of his lies than the hurt it is causing Jen. Bryan, in his body language and dialogue, appears proud of his behavior and leads the viewer to believe he has actually done something meaningful and good. Being on the show itself is just another avenue through which Bryan can receive attention, even if it is negative.

Following a commercial break, Jen decides to confront Bryan about his intentions for maintaining an artificial relationship with her (see Figure 29 and 30).



Figure 29 Max, Jen and Nev Confronting Bryan (Mussman 2013).

Jen: Why did you even come down?
Bryan: I wanted to come clean to you face-to-face.

Jen: But did you want to come clean to me or did you just want to feel better about yourself?
Bryan: I wanted to come clean to you because I felt like... I felt like you were special. You have a cool personality. You're different than any of those other girls.
Nev: So you picked the coolest girl to reveal how much of an a**hole you were.
Bryan: It's more of a d*ck move to lie.
Jen: But are you even admitting the fact that you're a d*ck, or are you just saying it because all these people are looking at you?
Bryan: No, I feel like it's the best thing to come clean to you.
Jen: I don't even know if I believe that.
(screen shot of text message: "you mean the world to me")
Jen: Did you consider the fact that I did like you?



Figure 30 Jen Talking to Bryan (Mussman 2013).

Bryan: No, I didn't. I wasn't as concerned about your feelings.
(...)
Max: What you've done is cruel. Do you get that?
Bryan: (shakes head no) No. (Mussman 2013).

The above conversation has revealed to Bryan his false self and still he denies its existence. Bryan continues to avoid his behavior and actions as a result of his artificial self. Jen asks him if he was even concerned about her feelings and he flatly says no. Bryan is receiving attention from Jen, Nev, Max, the film crew and the over 2 million viewers watching the program: an ideal situation for a narcissist.

There is almost nothing that the narcissist refrains from doing, almost no borders that he hesitates to cross to achieve renown. To him, there is no such thing as "bad publicity" – what matters is to be in the public eye.
(Vaknin 2001: 127)

Vaknin explains that the narcissist who projects this false self, often at the expense of others, is hurting his victims for a reason. He wants them to feel the same pain and disgust that he feels deep down inside regarding his true self. Bryan cannot even accept that what he's done is cruel. Bryan avoids the fact that he is indeed flawed by refusing to accept any negative aspects of his behavior towards others.

The next day Max and Nev ask to meet with Bryan again to discuss what he's done and hopefully ensure that he realizes his behavior is wrong. Nev clarifies that Bryan went online in order to improve upon "his female communication skills"

Bryan: But it wasn't like I sought out to go online, it happened online just naturally and I realized "ok, maybe this is something I can do without getting too close to the person" hoping that they wouldn't get too close to me without realizing like, the repercussions it would have to the other person. I mean I'm certainly not cold-hearted, but I was kind of hurt in the past by like a girl and I felt kind of uncomfortable trusting, building a trust.

Max: What happened in your past, previous relationship that scarred you so much from trusting?

Bryan: Just someone kind of leading me on, pretending to like me. Not only leading me on like physically but like she knew that I was invested emotionally, then I realized she was doing this to other guys too. (Mussman 2013)



Figure 31 Max and Nev Talk to Bryan about His Actions (Mussman 2013).

Bryan confesses that essentially the same thing that he did to Jen was done to him by someone else. This is one of the most devastating effects of the creation of the false self. Once they inflict their damage on others that person is in turn likely to do the same. The damaged individual has now been socialized to believe this behavior is acceptable or normal, creating a vicious cycle of artificiality and trauma.

What is unusual about the narcissist's sadistic behaviours – premeditated acts of tormenting others while enjoying their anguished reactions – is that they are goal orientated. [...] The narcissist [...] haunts and hunts his victims for a

reason – he wants them to reflect his inner state. (Vaknin 2001: 52)

Bryan repeated the same trauma he experienced from a previous relationship. Most, healthy individuals, would not repeat the same pattern of trauma and pain they have experienced, however the more one is exposed to this behavior the higher the likelihood they will in turn come to accept it is normal. Bryan continues to avoid the true nature of his actions when he states his intention was never to get too close to the women he met online and was hoping they wouldn't get too close to him either. This is the furthest from what actually transpired. Jen was emotionally invested and did get close to him. They texted and spoke on the phone frequently and spoke to each other as if they were in an emotional relationship. Bryan continued to say "I'm not cold-hearted" and the intention was not there yet it appears very clear from his previous statements that he felt he was giving Jen and other women the "gift" of feeling as though they were in a real relationship.

Once an individual has adapted to a consumer society of false promises and created an artificial self in order to cope with the banality of life, or the traumas experienced from unlimited goals and pursuits, they begin to believe in the artifice they have created just as they believe in the promises of a consumer society. When others attempt to criticize the danger of the false self or the problems with a consumer society, avoidance and denial of reality are a common occurrence. Think of a small child who has been caught in a lie, this basic, human instinct still exists in many individuals, especially in those who have constructed an artificial self. Accepting that their behavior

is indeed flawed would lead to the eradication of their carefully constructed self that they have erected in response to a consumer society and their blemished true self. Pressure to maintain the “right” image and appearance to others is necessary and to maintain this image one must believe in it whole-heartedly and deny any condemnations.

In February of 2013, Hollywood.com, released a report stating that *Catfish: The TV Show* is actually ‘catfishing’ America. The online source reports that online casting calls for people who want the shows’ help in meeting their online love interest, more often than not come from the person who is faking their identity and wants the show to profile them and their false identity. 5 of 6 stars of the first season reported to Hollywood.com that it was actually the person who was faking their identity that contacted the show not the person who was truthful with their identity. Hollywood.com is likely not an extremely reliable source but the possibility that the show is completely fabricated is not that shocking. The article claims that the producers complete all the research before actually determining whether or not to profile the couple in an episode. If the show’s premise is lying to the audience this would essentially be another reflection of the development of the false self in our modern society. The show would be presenting to the audience that they have no idea whether or not the person’s identity is indeed false and Nev and Max are doing all the research to find out if this person really is who they say they are. In reality they already know that the person’s identity is real or not and present false emotions and sympathy towards the individual who has to come to terms with the fact that the individual they have fallen for online is artificial. The reality program would likely never reveal the truth because as we have witnessed thus far the

false self must avoid the exposure of their true self. The artificial self must be maintained. Reality television has developed as an adaptation to a consumer world that has an extreme focus on appearances and illusions in the hopes of garnishing the most attention and profit (or success). We are surrounded by illusions and appearances and likely reality television is not free from this artificiality.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS: REFLECTIONS ON THE FALSE SELF, CONSUMERISM AND REALITY TELEVISION

The previous chapters have provided insight into four different reality television programs to illustrate the emergence of the false self in the modern world. Individuals have a faith in the capitalist structure of society that now touches all aspects of life. Religion once supplied individuals with rules, regulations, morals, values and most importantly a structure that could shape and guide their life. Emile Durkheim first wrote of this importance in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Our modern world has morphed into an environment of limitless aspirations, goals and pursuits causing a state of unrest and insecurity for the individual. Durkheim foreshadowed that “religion seems destined to transform itself rather than disappear” (1995: 432). Even religious organizations have an extreme focus on profit and consumerism.



Figure 32 Joel Osteen (Barrier 2013).

What religious ceremony will attract the most consumers? A false, mechanized charisma that attracts memberships in the tens of thousands? Ultimately we are concerned with the profit that comes with individuals consuming the religion rather than purely internalizing the message religion can offer in and of itself. Corporate churches are now present with memberships in the tens of thousands. Pastors like Joel Osteen, of the Lakewood Church in Houston, TX, have a net worth of 40 million dollars (see Figure 32). Religion, which once encouraged humbleness and charity, now preaches individualism and the pursuit of material wealth. God wants you to be wealthy; He wants all people to be wealthy. Loyalty and authenticity are slowly diminishing in our society. We live in a world of excess, entitlement issues and falseness. Are individuals humbled today? The experience of modesty and subservience were at one point necessary for individuals in order to be respectful of others and grateful for their status in life. Currently, individuals are socialized to believe that they are entitled to anything and everything. This was once only witnessed in the elite social class but not it consumes the minds of many. The mass media routinely presents the theme of freedom that individuals in America are privy to. In the last two decades, especially following the attacks on September 11th, 2001, freedom and our liberty is constantly brought to the forefront. Simultaneously, reality television and social media have been on the rise along with this sense of entitlement for many individuals. Even Annette Lareau⁸ in her study on race and social class in the

⁸ See Lareau, Annette. (2003) *Unequal Childhoods: Race, Class and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

American education system pointed to this sense of entitlement that even young elementary aged children are cultivating.

At some point this focus on autonomy can lead to entitlement and narcissism for the individual. Reality television regularly presents individuals who achieve greatness through deliberate disregard for how their actions impact others. In many instances, their behavior is rewarded merely through providing them the attention that comes with a media audience. Vaknin points out that the narcissist “direct[s] their love at other people’s impressions of them” [...b]ut the most important characteristic of the narcissist’s projected image is its lovability” (Vaknin 2001: 195). There is so much focus on appearances and the way we present ourselves to others that we have begun to lose sight of our true self. There is little quality to our relationships because we care less about the people in our lives and more about how they think of us: “the other-directed person is, in a sense, at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of a rapid, if sometimes superficial intimacy with and response to everyone” (Riesman et al. 1951: 334). There is a focus on being the best, the coolest, the brightest, the most popular and less on how our actions affect others and how the decisions we make may have lasting repercussions.

We have shifted from a face-to-face environment for social interaction to that of mediated experiences and cyber interaction. Primary groups, as discussed in sociology, provide the individual with expressive needs (intimacy, companionship and emotional support), whereas secondary groups, provide the individual with instrumental needs (task-oriented, means to an end). Primary groups are long-lasting, typically consisting of family and one’s closest friends whereas secondary groups are rather short-lived and

could be likened to a study group or classmates in a semester long course. Primary groups can now be sustained and formed in an online setting. What happens when a primary group is formed or sustained in an online setting? If an intimate relationship is formed online, yet founded on artificiality, the results can be disastrous.

Advertising is a clear example of how *appearances* matter. Twenty minutes of every hour long program is devoted to commercials and advertisements for products. There are thousands of market researchers spending weeks figuring out what appeals to you. Which actor would you like most? An actor wearing a blue shirt makes viewers feel sad while a yellow shirt makes viewers feel happy. What issues are affecting you? Well, look, we can solve those problems with this awesome product!! We are encouraged to be smarter than the market researchers- more self-reflection and too much caring about others perceptions of our “selves.” How am I best received? What makes people like me the most? I should act this way even though deep down inside I would prefer to do ‘x’.

“When one is no longer checked, one becomes unable to check one’s self” (Durkheim 1951: 271). Yes, one must check themselves and be checked by others, or else deviance and immoral acts can occur. However, an individual can “check” themselves too much, be too concerned about how the *appear* to others. This allows an open door for falseness and inauthenticity to shine through in order to be successful or well-liked by others.

In your profession, perhaps, you may be encouraged to be different and unique in order to succeed and receive a promotion. What are you doing that makes you distinct, new and awesome? If the answer is nothing, then forget getting ahead, you will remain stagnant and be denied the potential for growth and success, you may even be fired.

Again, without limits, regulations, obtainable goals, individuals will be constantly restless and in search of a deeper, internal satisfaction that daily life cannot provide.

Individuals are constantly bombarded with messages from the media and other avenues of daily life that encourage one to focus on consumer goods, appearances, fame, fortune and success at all costs. These messages are impacting individuals today.

The media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encouraging the common man to identify himself with the stars and hate the 'herd' [...] making it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence. (Lasch 1978: 21)

An extreme focus on being the greatest, best, most admired, most esteemed, most successful individual does not result in a happy existence. Unconditional love, respect, loyalty and trustworthiness as well as a raw, flawed, real human interaction is what is needed today. We are humans and we are not perfect. We need to wake up and recognize the reality we are creating for ourselves. Reality television may be produced, altered, falsified or scripted. However, that does not remove the message that is transmitted to viewers. These messages are still reflecting beliefs, behaviors and trends within our current existence. That is why this analysis is crucial to understanding the changes that are occurring within the modern individual.

Reality television may even be a way to cope with the banality of our current existence. The more the structure of our society becomes consumed by the pursuit of profit at *all* costs, with blatant disregard for human feeling and emotion, the more individuals will see themselves as objects. If we continue to objectify everything then at

some point individualism will reach such an extreme that the essential ingredients of compassion and empathy within human relationships and social interaction will continue to diminish.

The tired pupil is the one who passively goes along with what the teacher says. The tired worker or bureaucrat is the one who has had all responsibility taken from him in his work. Political ‘indifference,’ [...] is the indifference of the individual deprived of any decision-making powers and left only with the sop of universal suffrage.
(Baudrillard 1970: 183)

There are people everywhere that experience a lack of autonomy and freedom in their jobs and are instead forced to fulfill the wishes, dreams and desires of their narcissistic co-workers and bosses. This indifference is already a societal symptom of extreme individualism and artificiality. Too much emphasis on success, fortune and fame that is only obtainable by a few yet presented as obtainable for many.

Avoid disagreement, project fakeness. Do you find yourself complaining less these days on issues or events that really bother you? For me, I find myself at odds with bureaucracies and strict, rigid, employees who refuse to break the rules and see that my situation is not a bad one, its real! For example, in order to have a degree plan approved by the office of graduate studies, I learned, during my third year of graduate school, that I was missing my undergraduate transcript. I was shocked by this revelation because how exactly was I accepted and attending graduate school if my university did not have proof of my undergraduate degree? Turns out, the university had received an “in progress transcript” and not a completed proof of graduation. So I ordered a transcript,

hand delivered it to the admissions office so that they could enter the information into the computer system so that the office of graduate studies would have proof of my undergraduate degree. However, when I presented the admissions person with my transcript she immediately informed me that she could not accept the transcript. I asked why? She informed me that the envelope had been opened and therefore she could not accept it. I was immediately upset by this as I was on a deadline for the office of graduate studies to receive this appropriate paperwork so that ultimately I could indeed graduate with my master's degree. I began to explain to this admissions person that I was unaware of this rule and there is no way that I could have altered this transcript nor would I. The admissions person proceeded to inform me that this information is in all of our literature and there is nothing she can do. The envelope must be sealed. I paused for a moment trying to figure out if it was worth me arguing with this lady... and I simply submitted to this admissions person and walked away. My thought process was that my arguing would not do any good because bureaucracies do not leave any room for leeway, understanding, and change. In a sense, over time, I have learned helplessness, and that my complaining and fighting will not do any good. Resigned acceptance. Admitted Defeat. It's sad and maybe even pathetic, but I saw no other option but to give in and give up. How many others on a daily basis experience a similar situation? Strict adherence to rules and patterns of behavior that have "always been done this way" eventually causes the individual to feel as though change is impossible. We have attempted to erect a social order to make infinite pursuits more controlled through bureaucracies. We have attempted to create efficient, rational, predictable systems

amidst a limitless foundation. This creates even more opportunity for distress for the individual for when you attempt to make an irrational system rational you are creating even more opportunity for distress, anxiety and frustration because the core of the entire structure is flawed.

Another aspect of our society that encourages the false self is the ease of accessibility. It is possible for individuals to have multiple partners and sexual encounters. The limitless pursuit of wealth seen in the economy can also be in our relationships with others. If there is nothing to stop you, no moral regulation, or authority to tell you it is better for you and your partner's emotions to *not* sleep with another person, then what is there to stop you from pursuing that pleasure? If a man or woman realizes that they can fake their love and devotion to their partner and that in turn allows them to sleep with others, then why not fake it? When the false self is in charge we are unable to recognize what would be truly beneficial for our own mental and physical health. Instead we chose to adapt and go along with what others might want in order to be more liked or appreciated. Producers in reality television programs may encourage the "characters," who are in fact real people, to exemplify certain aspects of their personality on the show, even if that is not the "real" them and how they normally behave.

[T]he sign that the world is becoming opaque, that our acts are getting out of our control and, at that point, we have no perspective on ourselves. Without that guarantee, no identity is possible any longer: I become another to myself; I am alienated. (Baudrillard 1970: 188)

Individuals adapt by creating a false self. One that can shield them from shame, hurt and feelings that prevent economic success. Pay attention to others for cues as to how to best behave and present yourself in the hopes of being the most successful, most admired individual. Pay attention to what you see on reality television. The interpretation of the texts of these reality television shows is ambivalent, however, might we be looking at a reflection of ourselves in consuming reality television? As an audience, are we alienated from social interaction by consuming reality television? Reality television, again, may be a coping mechanism in order to adapt to a consumer society's lack of moral regulation and limitless goals and this may in turn result in an alienated audience that could lead to devastating effects not only for the individual but for our relationships with others as well.

There has always been a curiosity about how 'the other half lives' and certain fascination with celebrities. "It is always the excessiveness of their lives, the potential for outrageous expenditure that is exalted" (Baudrillard 1970:46). In a consumer society where possibilities are limitless, being bombarded with celebrities and their lifestyles is like showing an addict his drug of choice and saying 'you can look, but don't touch!' "The psychological and social pressures of mobility of status and competition at all levels (income, prestige, culture, etc.) are becoming burdensome for everyone" (Baudrillard 1970: 40). Designer everything. Design your house. Design your car. Design your baby. Will the future allow the possibility to alter the genetic makeup of human beings so that they reflect what has been deemed socially desirable and beautiful? Durkheim's concept of anomie as a result of the dangerous, runaway, amoral character

of economic life is devastating for so many individuals in our society that just cannot come to terms with these limitless aspirations.

We have become immune to the illusions that surround us whether they are products, television or individuals and brush this falsity off as being only a few bad apples or the unusual behavior of a few. However, it is not, instead it is a reflection of the overarching nature of our society. “These dispositions are so inbred that society has grown to accept them and is accustomed to think them normal” (Durkheim 1951: 257). Constantly seeking out a narcissistic supply, to surround ourselves, with better and more important people, which will exemplify our own status by merely hanging out with them is commonplace. Relationships no longer have a true value, instead there is this focus on presenting an artifice of what is deemed desirable by others.

Or think of the Facebook phenomenon. Facebook is all about appearances and glorifying one’s self. Do you have the best pictures of yourself? Do you have the most friends? Are more people commenting on your status updates? How many people are commenting on your posts and posting things on your wall? How many ‘likes’ are you receiving in a day? Whether or not an individual chooses to focus on these dimensions of Facebook is not what is important. What is important is the fact that it is the structure of Facebook: to be more liked, admired, esteemed, followed, envied, ultimately equating an individual’s sense of self to how successful they are in that medium. We aren’t even truly interacting with other individuals. The interaction is detached and removed from real, meaningful interactions with other human beings. “The person as a determining instance disappears and is replaced by personalization” (Baudrillard 1970: 170).

Facebook is the perfect example of our obsession with appearances and projections of ourselves. But worse yet, it is an opportunity to present a false self, in order to become more popular, more liked, to have more friends, more attention.

Look at the Academy Awards for Best Actor and Actress. What types of roles are actors playing that win them this coveted award? They are portraying unique and extraordinary individuals. What our society encourages: to be unique and extraordinary and if you do not possess these magnificent qualities then fake it. Because you can succeed either way, but you have to be unique and distinct or else you will go nowhere.

I am not saying that people who do extraordinary, wonderful, unique and memorable things do not deserve to be exemplified and appreciated by many. However, I am saying that when someone fakes greatness, that is when we have a problem. When we are encouraged to fake it when we don't physically possess those skills or attributes, then it is a problem. When the focus is put on material possessions in defining who we are as individuals, we have a problem. When we are encouraged to go with the flow and do as we are told because if you do not you will lose your job, or your friends, or anything, then we have a problem. If, instead, we are encouraged to recognize the traits that we truly possess as unique and genuine and great then we do not have a problem. If, instead, we value our relationships with others for the genuine security, happiness, comfort and love they can provide rather than selfish pursuits then we do not have a problem. We have genuine recognition for true greatness and unique individuals. We are all unique and special and that needs to be recognized. "Belief creates reality itself" (Durkheim 1983: 23). We are not unique and special when we put on fake hair, teeth,

makeup, and above all a fake personality in order to be viewed as such. We are not exceptional or worthy of emulation when we deny our true feelings and casually go along with an irrational consumer structure that promises satisfaction through infinite desires. Replacing meaningful interactions and human relationships with material objects to the point of obsession with those objects is focusing on this artificial belief that money can buy happiness. Denying your true feelings can cause an individual to present a false self to others in order to avoid those true feelings that cause hurt and suffering. Be true to yourself, do not look to others to define who you are as a person. Do not commit to or surround yourself with someone who does not value you for your true self and your true feelings. You are a unique and extraordinary individual, so please, do not fake it.

There is now a new sociological problem that should be considered that of disenchantment, re-enchantment and fake enchantment in the modern world. Modernity is surrounded by illusions. Some might argue that these illusions are reflections of a disenchanted world (Baudrillard). Others, might take a more positive approach and state that these illusions in a consumer society, whether it be in advertising, or online, in the workplace or the media are all attempts to re-enchant a disenchanted world. Bureaucracies, rigid social structures and a focus on consuming can be exhausting and draining for the modern individual. The Internet and media and reality television can provide solace and comfort and even satisfaction for the modern individual. However, a third idea is that this re-enchantment is actual fake enchantment. We are not truly experiencing comfort and security from these illusory experiences, instead only further

propelling an environment of artificiality in both social interactions and individuals' presentation of self. This is the question that remains are we attempting to re-enchant a disenchanted world or are we participating in fake enchantment?

Conclusion

Hoarding is viewed as a mental disorder. However, this disorder could also be a reflection of a societal disorder; a society that advocates narcissism with a focus on consumption. Anxiety as a result of having too many choices is a clear consequence of such societal characteristics. Hoarding may reflect an inability to cope with the plurality of choices presented to individuals and the inability to come to terms with one's sense of self. A focus on individualism and the advocating of narcissistic tendencies pushes individuals to a state of anxiety and shame leaving room for the false self to take over. Consumption helps define the individual so by consuming as much as possible one becomes a super-individual, as unique and original as possible, completely different from all others. Sound a bit narcissistic? Viewing material possessions as definitive in one's life can only lead to such behavior as hoarding.

In *Toddlers and Tiaras*, viewers and the audience may be perturbed by the nature of the parents who seemingly push their daughters into beauty competitions before they are able to clearly understand what they are participating in. However, this program provides insight into the exact same characteristics of our society that result in the hoarding disorder: narcissism, consumerism and the encouragement of the false self. "Narcissists tend to breed narcissists" (Vaknin 2001: 208). Spoiling a child can lead to

unrealistic expectations about what the world should provide that individual once they are grown up. Encouraging young girls to present an artificial appearance to others that ultimately determines whether or not they are “successful” at the beauty pageant yet telling them that they are being judged on their personality is ludicrous and yet another illusion. This is a harsh message to learn and internalize at such a young age.

Similarly, in *Sister Wives*, individuals may seek out narcissistic supply from many avenues, even those closest to them: the family. Selfish pursuits and interests can be devastating not only for that individual who is not exposed to the value of human interaction and relationships but worse yet, may encourage this same behavior in their offspring. The limitless pursuit of wealth has even entered into the realm of family where you can potentially have as many wives as you please disregarding or even refusing to acknowledge the emotional toll this can take on them. The narcissistic husband is able to pursue limitless pleasure and satisfaction from his multiple wives yet they are free to suffer and repress feelings of jealousy and inadequacy.

Lastly, *Catfish: The TV Show*, portrays the opportunities individuals now have available to them through social media and the Internet to portray their false self to others in the pursuit of attention, admiration and success. We now have avenues through which we can mask our true identity in order to pursue this attention while unashamedly damaging other individuals emotionally.

The question still remains how audiences truly view such programs as *Hoarders*, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Sister Wives*, and *Catfish: The TV Show*. Do they view these behaviors and lifestyles as deviations from normal behavior, mere pathologies or

exclusions? Further research might examine the reception of audience members to such episodes of reality television. For the time being, it seems that our individualistic society may simply be enjoying the role of voyeur, entertained by these seemingly odd behaviors of unusual and different members of our society. “Normal” people do not behave and think in these ways... right? Unfortunately, we do indeed behave in very similar ways to all of the people in these television shows. Sure, our behavior and thought process may not be as extreme as those portrayed but we cannot avoid the nature of our society’s ideology. People may not even be aware of the push to be narcissistic, focused on our own biographies and self-promotion, but it is necessary in so many avenues of our daily lives, and if we do not possess these skills and qualities we are encouraged to just fake it. Individuals may routinely immerse themselves in watching reality television in order to help cope with the learned helplessness that comes from the realization that our social structure is flawed. It may attribute to why many Americans spend countless hours in front of the television, separating themselves from this anomic society, or worse yet, immersing themselves in it and the messages that continue to portray the benefits of limitless pursuits, fame, fortune, success and notoriety that are achieved through artificiality.

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APPENDIX 1

TODDLERS AND TIARAS TRANSCRIPT

Pageant Director: “The California Gold Coast pageants is an originator of pageants we have started over 35 years ago. When we did start we started with babies and children. A lot of the teen and miss pageants didn’t offer that. California Gold Coast pageants were featured in Little Miss Sunshine and it was quite excitement for the whole pageant world at that time. Many girls have been picked up by an agent and have gone on into the movie business: Michelle Pfeifer, Beverly Mitchell and Mariska Hargitay. You’ll see nothing but glitz and glamour from Hollywood.”

(as director of pageant is speaking camera shoots to various young girls in pageant wear on stage)

Corona, California

“My name is Alicia, I’m seven years old and I love pageants.”

Mom: “I’m April and my seven year old daughter Alicia loves to have all eyes on her.”
(Mom grabs crown from display case and places it on her head) This is the crown I won when I was in a pageant with Alicia. (camera zooms out to Alicia standing next to Mom with a crown on her head as well)

Alicia had a kidney disorder and she stopped growing so Alicia’s mom explains why they got involved in pageants: “We thought the pageants would be a good way for her to start having more confidence.”

(camera pans across all of Alicia’s trophies and crowns.)

Alicia has participated in 12-13 pageants.

San Clemente, California

“My name is Rylan Lee and I’m 4 years old and I want to win a crown at gold coast pageants.” (camera shows shrine devoted to her trophies and crowns located in her bedroom)

Momma, how many sashes do I have?

Mom counts: “You have one, two, three, four, five, six.”

“I’m Ingrid Lee and my four year old daughter Rylan is a rookie in the pageant world. She has done 6 pageants and has won 5 of them.”

Rylan counts her crowns but she can only count to ten so mom helps her and says if you add another ten you have twenty.

Rylan: “I have twenty crowns and I love ‘em.”

Rylan’s Mom: Which one’s your favorite?

Rylan: “All of ‘em.”

Rylan's Mom: "We actually saw a couple of pageant shows on TV and Rylan said 'Mom, I want to do that.'

Rylan: "We don't say I'm the best. We only say 'I can try it, if we don't win that's ok. If we do win, we're excited.'"

Oxnard, California

"My name is Emily Salazar, I like to walk the stage."

"My daddy is the biggest fan"

"My name is Alex Salazar, I'm a pageant dad and I'm proud of it." Emily's Mom discusses how she is a daddy's girl and how Alex loves to be involved in the pageants and was very excited when he won an award for his involvement in the pageants. "Emily has about 165 trophies."

Emily: "Mine looks cute."

Alex: "But I got a better smile."

Alex: "What was your favorite prize?"

Emily: "Money." (as she rubs her thumb back and forth on her fingers signifying money)

Alicia's practice-

Mom: "To prepare Alicia practices and even when there's not a pageant we practice."

All the brothers and her Dad act as judges while she is practicing so that Alicia will understand the importance at acknowledging all the judges when she is on stage.

Alicia's older brother: Being a judge, I'm more there for moral support rather than anything because my Mom you know, when she gets into it she's like 'alright, you gotta do this, this, this, and this. So, I kinda break it up and you know, make it not so hard on her.'"

Emily's practice-

Emily has dolls set up as her judges. Both Mom and Dad work with Emily referring to their positions as "coaches." Usually begin practicing 3 weeks before a pageant with an increase in coaching the closer they get to the pageant.

Rylan's practice-

Mom "We just play pageant for about 15... 15-20 minutes." After Mom asks calmly from the couch if Rylan would like to try her beauty walk Rylan declares "No!" Rylan's Mom asks nicely again and Rylan begins throwing a tantrum and pulling up the rug on the floor completely wrapping herself up in the wrap to the point that she is completely covered. Dad steps in and tries to persuade Rylan to work a little bit longer on her routines and Rylan continues to roll around on the floor, hiding by the couch. Mom explains to the camera that she is tired. Rylan mumbles something under her breath and Mom says "We don't say stuff like that." Rylan says "You're a fool." And Rylan's Mom says "Nope, let's go to bed. (all while smiling) Rylan yells: "No!!!"

[Commercial break]

Alicia describes all the animals she has at home and how much she loves them.

Mom: "Pageants have taught Alicia how to get what she wants and just be able to go after whatever it is and have the confidence to do it."

Emily and her parents walking into salon. Alex: "Today, we're taking Emily to the salon." Dad thinks the treatments at the salon give her self-confidence.

Dad: "I honestly do feel that it's going to help her. It does like pamper her, it makes her feel like a princess so it gives her that self-confidence, so."

Rylan goes to get fitted for her pageant wear.

Dress maker: "When someone is looking for a pageant dress we meet with the parents and the child so I can see what her personality, hair coloring, eyes and personality is, that does have a play in it."

Dad: "Financially I'd prefer not to know the cost of the dresses."

Dress maker exclaims that a dresses start at \$650 and go up from there depending on the type of dress. Mom wants to have two dresses made. The dress-maker as she is measuring Rylan says "Oh! Perfect girl. Keep that! Perfect shape."

Emily has been in the spa now for 3 hours. Alex says: "I say she's loved and I express my love by buying her things and she's our only child so I guess you could say she's spoiled because she's daddy's little girl."

Alicia also goes to a spa to have a manicure and pedicure but not to the extent of Emily's salon experience. Mom: "Glitz to me is the presentation of yourself and your nails are done and your hair, your eyelashes, makeup. You're a whole package from head to toe." Alicia: "I can't get color on my nails because the judges don't want color."

Emily: "I get a massage because I'm a princess." Very difficult to understand Emily throughout the episode because she speaks like a baby. Captions are constantly being provided courtesy of TLC.

Rylan at private dance lesson. Mom: "It really helps with her pretty feet and standing for the pageants."

Dad: "I kinda get into the playing thing more with her. I think she chooses me over Mom to play games with and stuff like that so it's fun." In reference to how he is more involved in the playing thing with her.

Mom: "My relationship with Rylan is great but she's daddy's little girl. They are inseparable and they are like two little kids."

Emily was at the salon for 5 hours.

Ontario, California- Pageant location

Pageant Director: “Pageants are a big business. You need a package in order to be in the pageant. The dress, the hair, the makeup, the spray tanning, it all helps to win the pageant.”

Emily’s dad: “I had said from the get-go when she was younger, I would never put makeup on her, but I said I’d never do it and we did start putting her makeup on.”
While, Rylan’s Mom does not use a flipper, hair pieces, or fake eyelashes. “Her natural look makes her glitz.”

Alicia: “I wear fake eyelashes, but it’s pretty cool and feels weird when you first put it on but after that it just feels like your regular eyes.” Alicia does not wear a flipper and she has two missing teeth.

Rylan is having a tantrum in the dressing room.

Rylan: No! No!

Mom: Rylan, come here, come get up.

Rylan: No!! Noooooooooo!

Mom: Rylan you are going to be completely out of it if you don’t put your dress back on.

Rylan: Noooooo! (crying voice even though she isn’t crying)

Her mom is pleading with her, laughingly, to please let her help put her dress on. Mom attributes Riley’s behavior to the overcrowded dressing room, “It was just a little overwhelming.” Rylan then gets pinched by accident when Dad tries to help put her dress on and Rylan begins crying loudly. They take her around the corner and Mom is obviously at her wits end telling Rylan she “Listen to me, you cannot do this... oh my god, I am seriously...” [Cuts to interview] “She is a trooper.”

Pageant Director informs the audience that there are over 150 contestants in the pageant.

The pageant begins with “Beauty Wear” for 0-2 age group. This age group consists of babies being brought out by a parent and includes a baby that is only 3 days old.

“Beauty Wear” competition for ages 4-5 follows.

Judge: “For 14 years I’ve been doing pageants and I have been the judge and it’s just that factor. When they get on stage are they emanating that kind of confidence, radiance, personality and that’s what I’m looking for.”

Rylan’s Mom: “How do you feel?”

Rylan: “I think I’m gonna win.”

Rylan’s Mom: “Good job.”

There are 22 girls competing in Rylan's age division including Emily Salazar. The pageant emcee announces that Rylan's favorite people are her Mom and Dad and her goal in life is to become an actress.

Emily's Mom: We weren't expecting this many people, but it's good. It's good competition. We like to see how she does with a big crowd.

Emily walks on stage.

Emily's Dad: "Beauty for me is inner. I'm not a superficial person, no. Emily feels confident, she's confident and it does show."

Emcee announces the words that describe Emily... "I'm lovable, she says." (laughter from judges and audience)

Emily's Dad: "I think she did awesome. I think she nailed it and I couldn't be more prouder."

After commercial break, scene opens with a little girl fully dressed in pageant wear sitting with her feet in the hotel sink full of soapy bubbles smiling at the camera with 2 ladies working on her hair and dress.

Beauty Wear competition ages 7-8

Alicia takes the stage.

Alicia's dad interview: "A glitz pageant to me is one wear they go for the tanning, the makeup and the fake hair and the teeth... I guess the flappers, is that what they're called? I like it when little girls show the fact that they're missing teeth 'cause they're growing up."

Emcee announces that Alicia's goal in life is to become a veterinarian.

Alicia interview: "I like it when I go up there and show who I am."

Alicia's Mom: "We are preparing Alicia for bathing suit wear and she just ran through her routines and she forgot something. I'll try to remind her and we'll wait and see what she does on stage!"

Bathing Beauty Competition, Ages 4-5, known as "The Tiny Miss" division

Pageant Director: "For swimsuit they should be upbeat, fun, spunky, showing lots of sparkling personality too."

Standing at the stairs that lead onto the stage. Rylan is stepping from left to right in nervous anticipation and/or excitement that she is about to go on stage.

Rylan's Dad: "I love watching her up on stage. I'm just really excited and cheer her on as much as I can, you know? Let her know there is one person out there that cares she's up there."

Rylan exits the stage, Rylan's Mom tells her "You did so good" twice in a row and Rylan acts as though she is trying to get away from Mom. Mom asks for a high five and Rylan is already walking away from her as Mom says: "There's daddy." Rylan walks over to Dad who tells her good job and she gives Dad a high five. Four times.

Throughout the pageant the girls on stage are constantly looking out into the audience for queues from their Mom's as to how to do head nods, flipping their shoulders, pushing out their hips, winks and kisses, etc. So how exactly are the judges judging on personality? These little girls don't even speak!

Emily goes on stage for swimwear. Emily's dad is yelling from the audience. "When I started yelling I saw that the judges didn't turn and give me a look so I felt that it was ok for me to be yelling where I was at, so... usually when they give me a look I move to the back but I felt comfortable with where I was at."

When Emily is on stage the camera cuts to Rylan who is watching Emily with a very intense disapproving and worried look. The camera goes back to Emily as she exits the stage and the audience begins clapping. The camera once again goes to Rylan but from a wider angle so that the audience can see her standing next to her kneeling father with her mother a good 10 feet back behind them. Rylan is clapping for Emily.

Male Judge: "It's Emily Salazar, totally stand out. I mean she got on stage and total personality. Complete package for me."

Off stage Emily's mom greets her telling her how good she did. Emily is happy and gives her a hug. Emily then repeatedly points in her Mom's face while saying "I told you." Obviously imitating a behavior she has observed mom or some other figure do, for it is clearly a grown up gesture.

Emily: "Dad, I want to get that big trophy."

Dad: "Whichever one you get, right? What are you gonna be? Happy. Let's go."

Bathing Beauty Competition, Ages 7-8

Another judge: "I think every judge is different but what I have come to learn in the last few years of judging is the more simple the better. They're all very glitzy. They're all made up. They all have hair pieces on, they all have their little teeth in, but if you get that child that's that natural beauty without all the artifice that child is going to get my highest vote."

Alicia's Mom: "I can tell Alicia is really enjoying herself because she keeps standing up in line and asking is it my turn? Is it my turn? She loves to be out on stage and she just can't wait until it's her turn."

Pageant Director: "After they compete we have the crowning ceremony. In each division we have a winner that's announced after each group and then we have an overall high point supreme winner that wins the cash award."

Award ceremony for "Tiny Miss" division, ages 4-5

Male Judge: "I look for a complete package, glitzy, the hair, the dress, the makeup."

Judge: "There are so many beautiful girls, it's very hard, so I think it's coming down to personality."

Rylan wins beautiful face award. Emily is called for Personality Plus award and does not come on stage. Emcee "Let's see where is Emily Salazar? Is she in the room?" Camera switches to Emily's hotel room with Emily asking what is next and Emily's mom explaining that they are late. Emily asks where her dad is and Emily's Mom says "Probably looking for you right now." Camera switches back to the ballroom with Emily's dad standing rubbing his palms together looking very nervous. Camera goes back to Emily and Mom walking down the hallway.

Emily "Did I got first place?"

Emily's Mom: "I don't know we'll have to see what they give us."

Emcee: "Emily? Ok, we're going to skip over Emily."

Rylan wins most photogenic award and character center-fold award. Emily Salazar wins Miss Personality award but she is still not back from her room yet. Rylan wins the Sweetheart Queen award. Rylan then wins 3rd runner up for her division. While on stage Rylan immediately looks down at her trophy that is almost as tall as her and touches the top of it with her finger. She then immediately looks to her left and right and the other trophies placed on stage for the 2nd and 1st runner up and Gold Coast Queen overall division winner. Rylan is no longer smiling but standing posed with her arms in a low V position. Emily Salazar ends up winning the Gold Coast Queen for her division. Rylan leans forward to look at Emily receiving her award and all the other awards that she has missed. Emily is clearly out of breath as she is handed all her trophies and medals yet still smiling big.

Emily's Dad voiceover as the camera focuses on him in the audience whipping a tear away: "To me it's like a heart race. It takes my breath away. I couldn't be more proud of her." Again, we see Rylan leaning out and forward on stage to look to her right at Emily.

Then in the dressing room we see Rylan "Mommy, daddy?"

Rylan's dad: Yeah."

Rylan: "Why was Emily Salazar better than me?"

Rylan's dad: "Well, she just had a better day."

Rylan: "Why?"

Dad shrugs and turns up his hands.

Rylan: "But I wanted it."

Rylan's Dad: "I know, but, it's like we said sometimes we win 'em and sometimes we don't, so you just got to practice a little bit harder."

Dad holds up his hand for a high five and Rylan pushes into his hand with one finger putting all of her weight behind that little finger as she looks away from her dad and down at the floor.

Rylan's dad: "Hey! That's not the attitude!"

As the family packs up to go home. Rylan's Mom discusses how Rylan won't be eligible for the High Point Supreme position because she did not get the highest score in her division. As the camera shows the family packing up their car outside the hotel. Rylan exclaims in a pouty voice: "No! I don't wanna go!"

Rylan's Mom and Dad both say: "You don't want to go?"

Rylan's Dad: "I know you are having too much fun."

Rylan again with more force: "I don't wanna go!!"

Rylan's Mom: "I know you don't wanna go."

The Little Miss division results are next.

Alicia wins the prettiest hair award and the Miss Personality award. Alicia also wins the character center-fold award and the Gold Coast charmer award. Alicia wins the bathing beauty award as well. Alicia brings both fists up to her shoulders and mouths "Yes!" after receiving all her awards.

Alicia in her interview: "I'm a little bit nervous... but I... want... to... win! I hope I really do (as she covers her face with her hands) really do!" Alicia wins the Queen title for her division.

Waiting to see who has won the High Point Supreme award which is the highest overall score in the competition we see Alicia applying lip gloss and Alicia's mom sitting in the audience with a crown on her head. Is this a crown she brought from home or is she wearing her daughter's newly appointed crown? The camera then zooms in to Emily and her Mom behind Alicia's mom. Emily's mom is applying lip gloss to Emily. Top winner will receive \$500 cash or a \$1000 savings bond.

Emily's Dad: "Whatever you get ok? Whatever you get, smile."

Emily's Dad interview: "It's a lot of tough competition for high point and we'll be surprised if she does get it."

All the potential winners are asked to come on stage. Emily is standing with her arms in a low V position smiling while Alicia is standing nervously with her hands placed on top of one another in front of her, not smiling.

Neither girl wins.

Alicia's Dad to Mom: "Aww, that poor thing. She really wanted it."

Pageant Director: "Lots of happy winners and some not so happy winners, but overall it's been a great day."

Emily interview sitting in Mom's lap: "I had fun at the pageant. I want to do a lot more pageants."

Emily's Dad: "I kinda knew it was gonna go the other way. She was awesome and we couldn't ask for more from her." Emily is already planning to go to several more pageants this year including one in three weeks.

Alicia interview: "I wanted that crown. (half smile, forced)"

Alicia's Mom to Alicia immediately after she has learned she did not win High Point Supreme: "We're proud of you, ok? You can't win everything, can you?"

Alicia nods her head yes.

Alicia's Mom: (smiles) "No, no you can't because somebody else has to win too."

Alicia nods her head no.

Alicia's Mom: "Yes."

Alicia interview: "The saddest moment of the day today is when I didn't win the 500 dollars."

Alicia's dad: "For a seven year old it's a little tough, you know? When they get the rug pulled out from underneath you, so a little tough for her."

Alicia's mom discusses how they will be going to the state finals for Gold Coast and how they are going to continue competing in pageants.

APPENDIX 2

HOARDERS SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS

(Italicized quotations are white text that appeared against a black background occasionally in between camera shots.)

Hoarders: Deborah and Jim

“Compulsive Hoarding is a mental disorder marked by an obsessive need to acquire and keep things, even if the items are worthless, hazardous, or unsanitary.”

“More than 3 million people are compulsive hoarders. These are 2 of their stories.” That’s one percent of the U.S. population.

Deborah, Tennessee, 49 years old, sales consultant in a ladies boutique.

“My name is Deborah, I’m 49 years old and I work as a sales consultant in a ladies boutique. My mom tended to do all of the cleaning and I was really not forced to do all that much... so, don’t have a lot of discipline in that area.”

Ron, 50, flight attendant, met, love at first sight, married...

“My name is Ron, I am 50 years old, I am Deborah’s husband.”

Deborah: “He was a flight attendant for 23 years and we met when I was living in New York and I was his waitress.”

Ron: “I met her and I was just floored. She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.”

Deborah: “It was pretty much love at first sight.”

“Ron and Deborah married and had two sons, Lewis and Sam.”

“My hoarding problem started when I had kids. I was just so immersed in having my child and I just wanted to be with him every single second, but then I let everything else go.”

(flashes of their home)

Ron: “Just gradually over the years, accumulated so much stuff that it’s gotten to a point where we just can’t stand it anymore.

Deborah: What bothers me even worse than the clutter, the fact that I let it get filthy on top of that... (sigh) something’s missing, something’s wrong.

“Deborah’s hoarding led to a very serious encounter with Child Protective Services.”

Ron: “They were threatening to take both the kids away because they said that kids shouldn’t live in that environment.”

Deborah: “Luckily, she said that if you can get a lot done in 24 hours we will let you have your children back and we stayed up all night long and when she came back in she approved them coming back home.

Ron: “Just the threat of it still... it’s something that stays with you.

Deborah: “Since that day, I see a police car I get panicky, if someone comes to the door I get panicky.”

Lewis: "I'm Lewis, I'm fourteen and I'm Deborah's oldest son. Yeah, she says that's the reason why she doesn't like people coming into the house because she's afraid they'll tell someone and then we might be taken away again. She's been scared of that like her whole life."

Sam: "I'm Sam and I'm eleven. Sometimes I get kinda mad about how we don't have a good house that's clean."

"The family constantly lives with the treat of Child Protective Services coming back."

Lewis: "It would make me so freaked out if the authorities came and tried to take me away."

Sam: "Sometimes I think about it that if we can get help then maybe we would be able to stop it from happening."

Deborah: "That's the biggest fear and the worst thing that could ever happen to me in my life would be to lose my children because they are everything to me, everything, so why do I do this?"

"As Deborah's hoarding escalated, the family suffered another blow when Ron attempted suicide."

Ron: "I've had enough. I've had enough of everything. I drank a half a gallon of straight vodka and that would have done it but Deborah said that she had a weird feeling at work that day and she came home real early."

Deborah: "I just all of the sudden got this strange feeling that I had to go home. I came in the back door and I found him laying on the kitchen floor with a note. I couldn't even totally concentrate on saving my husband because all I could see the ambulance and the police coming in and seeing the house. And I thought I'm about to lose my husband and my children."

Jim, South Bend, Indiana, 66 years old, bee keeper.

"My name is Jim, I am 66 years old and I am a bee keeper. I don't see myself as piling up stuff, here, there, and everywhere, but, uh, the evidence is all around me, isn't it?"
(flashes of Jim's home)

Heather, 38, Jim's daughter

"I'm Heather and I'm 38. Jim is my dad. It can't feel good to live like that and to get up in the morning and have just crap everywhere, and debris and dirt and yuck. It's gotta effect him in some ways. It can't be a healthy environment."

Jim: "I suppose the thing that focuses this is my granddaughter, Porsha."

Heather: "He loves her, his eyes just light up and me, I hardly get a hug he is so into her."

"Even the treat of his granddaughter never coming into his home is still not enough motivation for Jim to clean."

“Jim is an atypical hoarder. He doesn’t actively acquire things by shopping. He passively acquire things from his many activities and friends.”

Heather: “I’m sure he can tell a story about every single thing in there or have a reason for him keeping it. I think that’s the problem, everyone justifies why they have stuff.” Jim discusses a shoe horn that he got from his father’s dresser “It’s a trivial little item but it has a lot of connections for me.”

“I have a justified fear of not having money and I responded to that but hanging on to what I had. I just sort of feel like I’m, I’m vulnerable. If I just tight walk through this convoluted space and the piles in the office don’t fall over and kill me. Maybe everything will be alright.”

“As a beekeeper, Jim travels for much of his work.”

“One of the ironies of my life is I can escape. I get in my truck and off I go. I close the door and this house kind of disappears.”

Deborah

“I’m tired of being ashamed. I’m tired of being a prisoner to my home. It effects every thing in my life.” Prisoner to material possessions.

“Deborah’s hoarding resulted in Child Protective Services removing her two sons from the home once before. The threat of it happening again is always present.”

Ron: “That would be the last thing we would want to happen, to lose those boys.

“Ron’s suicide attempt is also a source of constant stress for the family.”

Sam: “He was depressed and especially about the house. (photo of Ron and two boys) He tried to kill himself and that makes me really sad. I don’t think he’ll do it again but I want to prevent it just in case.”

“The combination of depression, alcoholism and hoarding have created a downward spiral for Ron and Deborah.”

(images of the house)

Ron voiceover: “Over the years, hoarding, I think it’s really bothered my depression and alcoholism.”

Deborah: “I do not blame my problem on him, but just like my hoarding effects his depression. I think the alcoholism and the suicide attempt it affected my problem. Vicious cycle.”

Ron: “It’s no way to live.”

“With all of these problems reaching a crisis point, Deborah has finally agreed to clean up her house.”

Suzanne, clinical psychologist comes to Deborah's home. "So how do you feel about me coming in and looking around?"

Deborah: "I am very embarrassed and nervous."

Suzanne: "Well, I'm not here to judge. I'm just here to look and to help. Let's take a look."

(Deborah shows Suzanne around the home)

Suzanne: Well, you have lots of stuff."

Deborah: "Too much stuff."

Suzanne interview: "Deborah, most definitely is a hoarder, she knows that it's a problem, she is afraid of her own problem. She feels like it is destroying her its destroying her family."

(back to home)

Deborah "This looks exactly like how the inside of my head and stomach feel."

Suzanne interview: and she just feels so helpless to do anything about it.

Ron "Sometimes she just feels so tired all the time that she just wants to lay in bed and watch TV and doesn't even want to attempt to do anything else."

Son: "The last time I slept in my bedroom I was probably about 5 years old."

Older son: "I always sleep on the couch in the living room because our room is like the laundry room."

Son: "I have to sleep in my Mom's bed."

The Dad has his own room and he never goes upstairs where Deborah's room is located.
Ron: "Deborah's private space is upstairs, I hardly ever go up there. There's not room to go up there."

Suzanne: "There seems to be a lack of intimacy in the lives of the mother and father."

Deborah: "Right now I isolate myself. We don't have conversations anymore. I'm just am too weighed down by all of this."

Suzanne interview: "When the mother says the house is swallowing me up, that is a very significant statement."

Deborah: "If I don't deal with this now I am liable to go to bed, pull the covers over my head and never get out again."

Jim

"I'm not telling people about this. I have a lot of embarrassment. I have a lot of fear. It's terrible."

“Jim’s daughter won’t allow his granddaughter into his home because it is unsanitary. There’s also a missing loaded gun somewhere amidst the clutter.”

“And I respond to it by leaving, by ignoring it.”

“Jim’s daughter is also threatening to report him to Adult Protective Services if he doesn’t change his way of living. He’s agreed to work with a professional organizer and crew capable of cleaning the home.

Geralyn: “My name is Geralyn Thomas and I’m a certified professional organizer, specializing in chronic disorganization.” *Society is no longer providing a glue and organizational structure that adheres all of us together. Community involvement and connection is out the window. Individuality and fix yourself mentality is in. If you aren’t unique enough to be apart of us then hoard yourself up in your home and collect material possessions to make you feel better.*

“I think Jim is in a lot of pain. He is very in touch with his emotions, so maybe that will play into the clean up process. ”

Jim talks about his daughter buying him a cat. Jim thought it would help deter the mice, but it hasn’t.

Geralyn: “Do you ever think that you make excuses for your behaviors?”

Jim: “Oh, sure. (laughs)

Jim interview: “I know it’s a mess, but I guess I have a high threshold for disorder.”

(Jim and Geralyn are examining one of Jim’s kitchen cabinets)

Geralyn: “The average person when they open this up would think ‘Oh, I’ve got a wreck in here I’m gonna take ten minutes and clean it. What is your thought? Close it and keep moving?”

Jim: “I don’t have time to deal with this now.”

Geralyn: “Because that will take you how long in your mind?”

Jim: “I don’t know. Apparently, hours.”

Geralyn: Hours? Hours??

(Jim laughs)

Jim: You know the other thing is I do a thing with my mind which is I intend to do it, therefore I have done it.”

(commercial break)

Deborah

4 1-800-Got Junk? trucks pull up in front of Deborah’s home. “My mind and my emotions feel as cluttered and as nasty as the house.”

“Deborah’s hoarding resulted in her two sons being removed from the home once before. Now the family must clean up the house to avoid it happening again.”

“I’m Dorothy. I’m a professional organizing expert specializing in hoarding. Our goal here is for everyone to have the space that they need.”

“Not long into the cleaning process, Deborah hits an emotional roadblock.” A small dish gets broken and it had belonged to Deborah’s mother. *“Deborah’s mom passed away less than one year ago. She has yet to deal with the loss.”*

Deborah (crying): “She’s gone. It’s still pretty new and it hasn’t totally sunk in yet.”

Suzanne: “What would she say to you?”

Deborah: “She would say, Deborah, throw that thing away.”

Deborah interview: “It was always my dream, because she had stopped coming over here, to get the house clean and then she would walk back in here, and now she’s gone and she will not see it.”

Deborah: “I hoping that once the house is cleared I can just grieve because just like everything else it’s sort of stopped me from doing what I need to do in everyday life.” (Dorothy asks Deborah to go put the broken dish in a box on the porch.)

Deborah: “It feels like I’m throwing my mom away.”

Deborah talking to Suzanne: “I think I just realized I really wasn’t... I’d been withdrawn. I was not living.”

“After seeing his mom so upset, Sam has his own breakdown.”

“Unable to continue Sam hides in his bedroom.”

Sam(crying): I miss my granny. I’m just thinking of her because I miss her. I didn’t want to be in the way and in here it’s kind of quieter.”

Jim

“In response to his daughter’s concerns about his safety, Jim has agreed to work with an organizer and crew capable of cleaning the home.”

Organizer: “I haven’t seen Heather work, so I’m not sure if she is going to agitate her father or if it’s going to be a good combination having them together working.

Dispute of Jim’s book ensues between him and Heather and the organizer.

Organizer: “You’re body language is telling me that you’re closing down on me.” (Jim has crossed his arms.)

“Jim refuses to give up his books, but promises to build a bookcase for them.”

“After sorting for most of the day, the loaded handgun has yet to be found.”

Organizer: “He is so worried about forgetting things. He hangs on to things because He doesn’t want to forget about them.”

Jim: “My life is in memories of things.

Organizer: Mhmm... (attempts to interrupt)

Jim: “Things are memory triggers for me and it’s a very powerful thing.”

Organizer: “If we were to let things go, do you think you could still remember them without the things?”

Jim: “My memory is terrible.”

“After Jim’s 25th high school reunion, he collected several bricks from the building which was being demolished.”

Organizer states “The minutia of his memory is incredible.” In reference to Jim’s discussion of the importance of the bricks and everything he remembers about the school.

“You have a great memory. You are remembering details that are amazing.”

Jim starts to disagree but then he starts laughing.

Deborah

“With the threat of Child Protective Services returning to remove the children, the family is desperate to clean up the house.”

“Still upset, Sam is hiding in his bedroom.”

“Pushing thoughts of his grandmother aside, Sam helps his brother, Lewis, continue with the cleanup.”

(camera shot of Sam and Lewis moving items in the house)

“So far, the kids have been doing the bulk of the work.”

(camera shot of Deborah, smoking a cigarette outside and Ron drinking a Diet Coke, while watching the cleaning crew pile up furniture in the front yard.)

Organizer: “Ron was sort of holding back seeing what was going on and waiting to see what he was going to be told to do and Deborah was just kind of avoiding it.”

(Deborah comes in the house to see the cleared dining room and gets very excited.

Organizer tells her that the boys did all of it without even being asked. Organizer informs her that its Deborah and Ron’s turn to do some work.)

Organizer: “See, all we had to do was ask. If someone doesn’t take charge it doesn’t happen, so the parents have to actually be the one’s to take charge not the children.”

“Deborah and Ron get down to business, but Sam is still concerned with the progress.”

Sam has been working very hard throughout the whole house. Taking charge, asking what's next and appearing very motivated to clear everything out.

Suzanne: "Is it Sam's job to protect you guys?"

Deborah: "No. Absolutely not."

Dorothy: "It sure looks like it."

Deborah: "Sam, it is not your job to take care of your Mom and Dad. It is Mom and Dad's job to take care of you."

interview with Deborah: "My loved one's have had to adapt because of all of this.

Suzanne: "Sam, they don't need you to protect them in that way anymore."

Sam interview: "Sometimes I do feel that I have to grow up faster than other kids because I have to deal with things."

Deborah interview: "I don't think the children even know what they've had to adapt to because it's all they've ever known."

Jim

"Jim's daughter feels his home is a dangerous environment for his granddaughter. If he doesn't change his way of living she will report him to Adult Protective Services."

Jim: "Surrounding myself, apparently with piles of paper was like building a little fort. Feeling financially insecure led me to be insecure about a lot of things."

"Jim's financial insecurities have been lifelong."

Jim: "My mother worked for five thousand dollars a year in 1958 as a bookkeeper for the lumber yard, ok? So that wasn't coming close to supporting us. My uncle Wayne who kind of took over the business and ran the business although my mother worked there, let us have money to live on. (Jim is beginning to get emotional) to continue the kind of life that we had when my father was alive and I would go there and flip through the accounting, the ledger sheets and find the one for my mother and the balance was building up, 10, 12, 15, 20 (Jim breaks down) and... and, at the end of the year he would always find a way to declare a dividend to clear that account."

Geralyn's interview: "Jim's just a very sentimental person and these things just take him back to the time when his father was alive, memories about his mother.

Jim: "There is not enough memories."

Geralyn: "Do you think you maybe hang on to all that stuff for that reason? Because there aren't enough memories?"

Jim: "I don't know, maybe."

"We found money! \$480 dollars and an un-cashed check."

Heather interview: "We like parts of our life so we cling to stuff that represents that for us."

Geralyn: "Your whole life can't be a keepsake box."

Heather interview: But you don't need to hang onto every single slip of paper that has something to do with the past. I don't think that's very healthy.

Jim: I'm kind of overwhelmed. I've been plowing through papers in the office, four drawers empty...

Geralyn: and...

Jim: The huge skyscraper of banana boxes is no longer in sight.

"During the cleanup, everyone has been on the lookout for Jim's missing loaded gun."
(missing gun is found in Jim's closet)

"Geralyn decides it's a good time to lock up all of Jim's guns."

"After a successful cleanup, Jim's daughter brings his granddaughter over for her first visit."

Geralyn: "He needs to continue to work with a therapist in order to figure out what's really causing this behavior and then just move on in his life and enjoy all his friends and family."

Jim: "I hope that my girls can see that a large part of my motivation here is the desire to live as full a life with them as I can."

Deborah

Deborah: "It's going to take me a long time to get over the disgust I feel with myself."

Psychologist: "She has a lot of war and anxiety that she is not going to succeed and be a failure in this process."

Deborah: "As bad as I thought it was, it's really about a hundred times worse."

The family must clean up their home to prevent Child Protective Services from removing Sam and Lewis again.

The house has been cleared out and is getting cleaned, but the pressure is on to sort through a mountain of boxes in the yard.

As the sorting continues, Sam becomes very upset when he realizes the crew will be leaving soon.

Suzanne: Tell me again, because everybody's what?

Sam (crying): Everybody's fun and nice.

Suzanne: Everybody's fun and nice.

Sam: and I'm gonna miss everybody.

Suzanne: "Why would a child reach out to people that he just met for a few days here and be so sad because they are leaving?" Unfortunately, this is most likely the result of limited interaction with other people. Instead, his mom has collected things to fulfill her life and the life of her family. But things cannot provide the same emotion and comfort and support that people can.

Suzanne: "He is reaching for some kind of real connection."

Sam: The best part about it was getting to meet everybody. And getting the house clean but getting to meet everybody. (holding back tears with his chin quivering)

With aftercare funds provided, Deborah is arranging mental health therapy for the entire family.

Sam has had two sleepovers and a slumber party is planned for Lewis on his birthday.

Jim had his home exterminated to eliminate the rodent problem. He is working with a professional organizer and is looking forward to beginning therapy.

His granddaughter has been to his home for several visits and Jim was even asked to babysit.

APPENDIX 3

SISTER WIVES SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS

(Family dancing at what looks to be a wedding celebration)

Dad voiceover:

“My name is Kody Brown and you’ve gotta meet my family. I’m a polygamist but we’re not the polygamists you think you know. I have three awesome wives: Meri, Janelle and Christine and I have 12 wonderful children. My family in on the verge of a huge change because love should be multiplied not divided.”

Sister Wives

(view of a city with mountains in the background)

“Welcome to Utah” sign

Kody driving in a what appears to be a luxury 2-door vehicle: “I like marriage, uh, and I’m a repeat offender, so... I have adopted the faith that embraces that lifestyle, uh, in fact, it recommends it. And uh, I like to reward good behavior so if you’re good with one marriage they figure you’ll be good with two. I hope they think I’ll be good with four. (smiles big) Let’s go ahead and go home so you can meet my family. They’re special and you’ll like them and um, I’m excited about introducing you to them.”

(view of large home)

Kody then proceeds to take the viewer through the home introducing us to the various children and wives that come across his path, including the third wife who is pregnant with the thirteenth child.

Camera shot of Kody sitting amongst his three wives on a corner couch.

Kody: “20 years ago I married Mary and then 17 years ago I married Janelle and then 16 years ago I married Christine. I just fell in love and then I fell in love again and then I fell in love again.”

Camera shot of an older photograph with Kody and the three wives.

There is now a large family portrait generated by TLC featuring each of the three families, separated by wife, but still one unit. Meri and her daughter are brought forward.

Kody voiceover: “Meri and I had one child and she’s fourteen now.

Janelle and her six children are brought forward.

Kody voiceover: “Janelle and I have six kids from 5 years old to 15.

Christine and her five children are brought into focus.

Kody voiceover: “Christine and I have 5 kids from 6-14 years old with one more on the way.

Christine: “We have three separate apartments in one big house but they are all

connected on the inside. I have the bottom right side. Meri has the top and then Janelle has the whole left side.

Janelle: "This home is actually built by a polygamist and this is probably typical of what you'll find in most polygamist families: separate living spaces but interconnected and so the family functions as a whole but we all have our own autonomy."

(back to parents sitting on the couch)

Kody: "We've always been one family so the children have always been siblings to one another."

Janelle: "All three of us were married before any of the kids were born. I married Kody and then three months later Janelle had Logan so when we tell you that really the kids are all ours its cause we've raised all of the kids."

Meri: "I mean we've all been there."

Janelle: "all of us"

Meri: "For all of us."

Janelle: "They don't comprehend anything different."

Meri: "Yeah."

Janelle , Meri and Christine and Kody and 8 kids in a kitchen.

Kody: "Should we have dinner?"

Kody voiceover: "I'd say about three times a week we have dinner together as a whole family. We are a fundamentalist Mormon family not an LDS [Latter-Day Saints] or a Mormon family. They quit practicing polygamy 120 years ago, big difference between us and them, similar to the Catholics and Protestants."

Kody interview: "I grew up in a ranch in Northern Wyoming where it was as cold as you can imagine. I wasn't raised in polygamy, I didn't grow up in it. When I was about 20 my dad converted to a faith that embraced polygamy so when I was 21 I started going to this church. I meet Meri, she was the babe. (laughs) When I was dating Meri it was very easy to already, I mean it was an expectation. Her dad had five wives and her dad and I discussed the lifestyle and the faith all the time and I eventually convert and I few months later I marry her."

(while he is speaking there are pictures of Kody and Meri when they were young and dating and then marriage photos)

"I'm in advertising sales and it uh, gives me a little bit of freedom for family. Sometimes I work 60 hours and other times I'm able to take an extra long weekend and its really important to have that kind of freedom. At the same time, I've been very afraid of ever having an employer being able to understand where I'm coming from or simply out of just my own personal fear of their um, potential prejudice against my lifestyle."

(family at home 3 older girls standing next to one another)

One of the girls: "We're sisters."

Kody (from across the kitchen): "Sisters from the same mister. She's a sister from the same mister and he's a brother from another mother." (laughter)

Same daughter: "Polyg talk." (laughter)

Kody: "She's got a mouthful, she said it's polyg talk."

Janelle: "It's polyg talk or polyg food and that's how most of us are known: polygs... I dunno, my name is Janelle."

Oldest boy: "Somebody refered to us as polyg-lets."

(parents on the couch)

Meri: "You know what? I hope our kids do what they want to do in their life, whether its live our lifestyle or have no religion at all as long as they are strong and firm in what they want to do and what they want to believe and that they are not following somebody else."

Janelle: "The biggest thing is if we raise productive, contributing members of society who are moral and ethical, that's our final goal, whatever their path is."

(back to family interaction in the kitchen)

Janelle to 3 daughters as she is cutting fruit speaks to three daughters using the knife to emphasize her point: "You're not getting married until you go to college and you get yourself and education."

Daughter: "I'm going to beauty school."

Janelle: "I don't care what it is but you are getting some sort of education."

Daughter: "Yes, ma'am."

(two daughters salute)

(back to couch interview)

Janelle: "Ultimately I want them to marry who they love, not marry because they have to or..."

Kody: "I believe in marrying for love." (nodding head)

Janelle: "Or choose, or choose who, God forbid that someone chooses their marriage for them, ugh (disgust face)."

Kody: "With my family schedule and then just trying to have personal time with each wife, I'd say about three nights a week, I'm away from the house with a wife, just so that each one of them have an opportunity to bond a little bit. And sometimes its not so much really a date it might just be out to, you know for a short drive or something so that I'm able to connect with them a little bit. I finally had to start keeping a record (shows Kody going through his blackberry) of you know, where I'm at just making sure everybody gets the same amount of time because sooner or later someone is going to complain: I don't feel that I'm getting a fair amount of time or a fair shake here."

Meri: "Having the lifestyle and only once every third night, frees up a lot of time for us..."

Janelle: "Oh it's great!"

Meri: "to go do what we need to do."

Christine: “Like if I’m not getting my needs met I will just look at him (puts hands up as if she were grabbing someone’s face) Ok, I need to go on a date. Do you understand, I need a date.”

Kody: “And she says ok I’ll be ready for our date in 45 minutes, go get ready, say hi to the other wives, we’re going out tonight.”

(shot of Kody arriving home and Christine meeting him at his car door and they embrace)

(back to couch interview)

Christine: “We do have sex it’s true.”

(everyone laughs)

Meri: “Let’s clarify who the we is in this though.”

Christine: “Individually, though, there is three separate marriages, three separate sexual relationships as well.”

Janelle: “And they never cross.”

Meri: “Christine and Janelle and I each have our own bedrooms and Kody is welcome in each of those bedrooms, alone... that’s that’s just how it is, we don’t go weird. “

Kody: “You are probably wondering where I sleep. I just rotate on a schedule. I just go through rotations so that I can stay with each one of my wives the same amount of time so everybody has time with me.”

Meri: “But it’s important I think, for each of the three of us, to have him have a good relationship with the others. (some sort of discussion about the scheduling is being discussed between Meri and Kody in the presence of their daughter, Kody sighs heavily) When he is ornery with another one he gets weird with me and I don’t want that, you know, so it’s very important for him to have a good relationship AND the sexual nature of it is definitely part of that good relationship and when he is off with somebody else I just don’t think about that part of it you know why would I want to do that to myself...”

Christine: “Nooooo. “

Janelle: “you know? They do that, I do that and that’s ok.”

Christine: “And we know that that’s required in each relationship so I know that some people think how do you feel when he’s off with another woman, sleeping with her and you know they’re having sex, it’s like well gosh darn it they better. (throws her hands up)”

(commercial break)

Meri: “The morning of Kody’s big announcement I went to wake Mariah up for school and it took a couple of attempts.”

(shows Meri trying to wake up her daughter and jumping on her daughter’s bed)

Meri begins to tell the viewer about how she and Kody met. From the time they met to the date they got married was 6 months. She was 19 and Kody was 22.

Meri: “I came from a culture and it’s not abnormal to get married when you are 19/20 years old. I was raised in a polygamous family. By the time I met Kody we were talking about marriage and stuff at that point he and I eventually knew that we would both take another wife or wives into the family.”

(back to interview on the couch)

Meri: "I always expected that I would have a bunch of kids and that just hasn't been in the works for me."

(cody looks down)

I was very lucky and blessed that I got the one that I did and it's actually been great that we do have the lifestyle cause Mariah does have siblings which she wants 'cause she still tells me, I've got brothers and sisters but it'd be really cool for you to have another one.

(Kody is still looking down- as if he feels that he has failed in some way to provide Meri with more children) You know if that ever happens, great, but it just, you know, it hasn't, and I'm ok with that now. There's a lot of years when I wasn't ok with that.

(Kody and Meri look at each other)"

(camera shot of house) Two of the children have loose teeth and Meri is proclaimed the tooth-puller in the family. Meri proceeds to pull the teeth of the children out.

(Meri's interview on the couch)

Meri: "If you're looking at this lifestyle just as you know, what can I do to help you or what can you do to help me, it works out totally well."

(back to couch interview)

Meri: "The three of us moms, as we work together, it just makes each of us better, in what we do."

Kody: "Meri has been a real blessing because she was a force in actually wanting us to be in the principle of plural marriage and polygamy."

Meri's interview:

"It's not something like I'm sitting there thinking: ok I'm, I'm ready to, take another wife, let's go find somebody. It's more of a situation of when uh, the, uh, uh, right person comes along."

(Back to couch interview)

Christine: "Yeah, you have to know, that Janelle and I might have never married Kody, we never would have married him on our own. It took Mary pulling some strings and Kody by himself would have never done it, he had to have Mary's back too."

Kody: "Meri bonded with Janelle and Christine before it was a serious thought in my mind. Meri's the bait."

Janelle: "No, she's in mergers and acquisitions, is what he says."

(laughter from everyone)

Kody interview: "Whenever we do something, like yard work I've always tried to get everybody all the children involved."

(interview with Meri only)

Meri: "With the different personality types of the three of us Moms and then all the different personality types of the twelve children there is bound to be somebody who is

gonna click more.”

Meri: “Having the support system of each other as we work together, it just makes each of us better. It’s definitely a benefit to this lifestyle to have somebody there and in place if anything were to happen. So my sister was in a polygamous relationship, she was the second wife. My sister ended up getting cancer and she, um, ended up passing away, eleven months after she found out that she had cancer. And, um, her sister wife was just there for her all the time to support her and you know, take care of the kids and do whatever it is that she needed them to do. You know, my sister already had a mom in place to take care of her kids for her (begins to cry) so, that’s definitely a benefit to this lifestyle, because if you know. I know that if anything were to happen to me, you know, I know that there would never be any question that Janelle and Christine would be there to step up and raise my daughter just like I want her to be raised you know with the freedom that she deserves and the you know, whatever she wants to do, so that’s definitely a plus to this lifestyle.”

(commercial break)

Janelle’s story. Janelle mentions as Meri did that there is some sort of announcement occurring this evening.

“I work really long days so I’m gone from usually about 6:15 to until about 7 o’clock or so. It’s nice cause Christine will usually make dinner and I don’t have to worry about that when I come home.”

“My name is Janelle and I’m the second wife of the family. I have six children. Kody will generally always get up no matter where he is in the house and say bye to me. At first I just took it for granted but now I kind of appreciate that he does that. (shot of Kody in the morning, looking as though he just woke up saying good morning to the camera). If I don’t see him before I leave he usually calls me on the way to work and says “Oh, you didn’t wait for me to come see you, so, so that’s nice.”

(cody enters)

Kody: “Hi.”

Janelle: “Hi, honey.”

Kody: “How’s it going?”

Janelle: “Good.”

(Janelle interview)

Janelle: “I grew up in the mainstream Mormon church and they don’t practice polygamy. I had no idea there was such a thing as polygamous. (laughing) I mean I live here in an area where there is a lot. I had no idea. None. I met Meri’s family when I was 19. I actually met Kody a few years after that so they were like my little novel polygamous friends for a long time. ‘I have these friends and they’re polygamous.’ I think I was 22 when I finally thought, wow, Kody is a great guy, you know what I mean? Maybe I am ok with this plural marriage thing, you know? When I finally decided it really didn’t seem so strange it was not... like this big... let me think about this, it wasn’t a huge jump for me for some reason.”

(Gabe, the oldest child, and Janelle and Kody’s son, wakes up early to feed the kids of

Janelle and Kody. Kody and Janelle talk about how responsible he is and how he has always preferred to be a responsible child)

“I’ve always been a career person, I’ve always worked. I would prefer to be working rather than be home with the kids because in a family this big, one bread-winner is not enough. Whoever said babies are expensive, try having as many teenagers as we do, holy cow, we have to all work. (laughs) I do miss my kids. (shot of Janelle outside her job talking to one of her children on the phone) Now, that they are getting older and they text me and we communicate via the phone and stuff that’s nicer. I love it because I get my children and we do all the really fun things together and I get to be the mom but I don’t have to do the cooking or the chauffeuring . On my days home, all I have to do is drive the kids everywhere and I’m doing this and I’m doing that and I’m seeing to the homework and everything and you know what? I like working more, so let Christine do that. Christine likes to do that. I can say I’m going to a movie, will you watch my kids? And they have somebody to watch them. I don’t have to do everything. I have time for everything I like to do, not just household stuff. Kody has got a big announcement tonight so we’ll see how this goes. I’m excited about it and I think the kids will be excited about it. So. It’ll be good after sitting all day long, to go do the yard. I prefer outside work infinitely more to housework. So put me outside anytime versus cleaning the house. (smiles)”

(camera switches to the family outside doing yardwork together)

Kody: “I wanna do something ultra-dramatic like drop a tree today.”

Janelle: “It takes a lot of work you know, to get used to each other because you get out of the relationship what you put in and that’s a hard lesson to learn and maybe ours is a little bit multiplied because I have to work at a relationship with Christine and I work at a relationship with Meri and I work at a relationship with Kody. It gives me a great sense of security to see him taking care of the needs of my sister wives. It’s actually reaffirming to see him taking the time and the care with them because then I’ll know he’ll do it with me.”

(commercial break)

Christine: “My name is Christine and I am the third wife in the family. I have 5 children. Kody, Meri and I were actually friends for years before we got married. I really loved him tons and he kind of loved me and we went back and forth but it took years for us to get together and really realize we really did want to be married. I always knew that I would live a polygamous lifestyle that’s probably just because I was raised in it, so I wasn’t ever interested in single guys if they’d ask my dad about me I would just turn them down cause I didn’t want them.”

(Christine ironing) I’m ironing because I’m the ‘domestic one.’ (smiles)

Kody enters then exits.

Christine laughs. "He's lost every morning."

(Kody and Christine in their bedroom)

Kody: "I keep my clothes everywhere so, I kinda live in this whole house, so, I'll be... I'll shower here and then I'll have to run upstairs twice to get clothes that I can't find here. Or if I am showering upstairs, I'm down here to dress because its, it's everywhere."

Christine: "It is true. He needs triplicates of every single thing."

(couch interview)

Kody: "I don't have my own space."

Christine: "It's true."

Janelle: "He has a closet."

Kody: "I have a closet, I have two closets."

Christine: "He doesn't have three closets."

Kody: "And I actually get to share their closets, so in closet space I almost have my own place."

(all the wives laugh)

(Christine in her kitchen)

Christine: "I usually serve Kody breakfast. I don't have a toaster because more people die from toasters than sharks every year so I uh, make toast in the oven. Ok, I'm gonna go get the girls. "

Christine's son: "Mom, you're toast is burning, again."

Christine: "What!?! Darn it, stupid. Darn it!! Gosh, Paedon why didn't you take it out?"

Paedon: "Because it was burnt."

(Christine takes burnt toast out of the oven)

(couch interview)

Kody (very engaged and leaning forward): "The toasters kill more than sharks do in a year." (Meri and Janelle are laughing)

Christine: "It's true."

Kody: "So she gets rid of the toaster."

Christine repositions herself in front of Kody: "Sharks killed three people one year.

Toasters, 357."

(Kody, Meri and Janelle all laugh)

(Christine back in Kitchen)

Christine: "I never wanted to just be married to a man, I always wanted sister-wives, uh, I just liked the idea of the companionship. I liked the idea of the freedom that it got me. There's too many things that I want to do and want to be, um, free for, and I just like the idea of having someone around. I just like the idea of sister-wives, a lot. Um, I, yeah, I honestly wanted sister-wives more than a husband, for a good time of my life. I wanted the whole family, I didn't just want Kody. I wanted everything. There's situations where a girl will come into a family and just want the guy and it rips the family apart and I

wasn't interested in that. I wanted the family, that's what I was interested in. I decided when I was about 19 that I wanted to enter a plural family, wanted to enter as the third wife. I guess after you get two wives, guys are like ahhhh!!! And then a third wife comes along and they actually say if you are having problems, in, like, when you are having two wives and having problems, marry a third, because it'll even it out. So I only ever wanted to be a third. I never wanted to be a first at all because I didn't want to be married to a guy by myself and then I didn't want to be a second, because I feel like they are the wedge in the relationship and I didn't want to be the wedge. I only ever wanted to be third, because it sounded the easiest. (Big smile)"

Kody voiceover to Christine interacting with the children: "Christine has a significant demanding schedule because she is actually mothering the 12 kids."

Christine interview: "So as far as my role in the family, it's just keeping the home running smoothly. I wanna make sure the kids are taken care of. Janelle works insane hours sometimes so I just wanna make sure that her kids are taken care of."

(Savanah, Janelle's daughter, writing her name in flour)

Christine in front of several children, including Savanah who is sitting next to her: "Savanah is technically Janelle's, but we've raised all the kids all together (shrugging her shoulders) and so if someone tries to tell me that Savanah's not my child, I adamantly disagree. (smiles)"

(couch interview)

Christine: "We always home-schooled our kids, until about 5 years ago. We put our kids all in this one school, that's a school for *our* people."

Kody: "The private school's a home-school coalition. It's a church school, a polygamous school. Everybody that goes to this school believes in plural marriage. They all have tons of moms, all of them!"

(Christine interacting with several of the children)

Meri: "They say you have to work on being nurturing. You, even if it hasn't come by naturally, you do a really good job at it." (shrugs shoulders)

Christine: "Thanks." (shrugs shoulders) *Interesting interaction, its as if they have never given or received compliments before and it is so strange to them that their body language clearly articulates the uncomfortable nature of the situation and possible falseness of the compliment.*

Christine at home with several children touching her pregnant belly.

Christine: "We're actually thinking about Truely Grace. Cute, huh? Yeah, I know! Truely Grace Brown. Cause otherwise she would be Truely Brown, and then she's just Truely Brown. So Truely Grace."

(More scenes from family doing yardwork)

Christine: “So, um, the kids don’t know anything about it, but of course we know that tonight he is making the big announcement. So we are all kind of excited about it, he’s kind of a little off a little bit. I dunno I’m hoping that the kids take it well and everything, we’ll just kinda have to see. We’re excited.”

Kody and Meri in their kitchen.

Meri: “He’s a little nervous.”

Kody: “I am.”

(Meri laughs)

Meri: “He’s making the big announcement tonight to the kids that he’s courting a woman (laughter from Meri) and he’s kinda nervous about how it’s all gonna turn out.”

Kody: “You know I haven’t been involved in a courtship for about 16 years. Christine was the last so…”

Meri: “And that was before any of the kids were born so…”

Kody: “And we’ve talked about it a little bit with the kids and (smiles at Meri) so know we are announcing it, and I’m nervous. Her name is Robin and she’s 30, she got three children. She grew up in the lifestyle and um, I’m kind of excited about it but I’m nervous about telling the kids. I don’t know how they are going to react necessarily, so, time to do it.”

Meri: “It’ll be fine.”

The whole family is gathered.

Kody: “Does everybody remember Robin?”

(several yes’s)

Kody: “Do you guys like Robin?”

(daughter sitting next to Kody smiles big and says ‘yeah’)

Kody: “Well, Robin likes us. I’m kinda nervous about this, so just, I’m gonna try and chill out. Alright listen, Robin has a family and what we want to do is I wanted to ask you guys what you thought about having our family grow by not just one, with the new baby (looks and points at Christine) but by four more than that, we’ll go from sixteen…”

Daughter sitting next to Kody: “Are you engaged to her?”

Kody laughs: “I’m not. To 21.”

Oldest boy: “Wow.”

(couch interview)

Janelle: “We were beginning to feel like there was someone else. I was beginning to feel like there was someone. Like I would comment to Christine, gosh we sure need another one, it’s getting kinda boring, you know?”

Christine: “Yeah, Meri made comments like that too and I’d be like, you guys are insane, it’s fine how it is, I don’t want to rock the boat…”

Janelle: “I sorta felt like there was somebody else coming. We sorta started to talk to the kids about another mother coming to the family, so I don’t think it was a foreign concept

to them. They have peers who, several of them, just had new moms come into the family.”

(back to family gathering)

Kody: “Did you guys like Robin?”

Several yeahs.

Kody: “Did you guys have fun?”

Several yeahs.

Kody: “Um, Robin has her choice, but I feel like we should invite her, Robin, to come into our family.”

Oldest boy enthusiastically: “Ok, yes!!”

(several other children begin shouting yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah!)

Kody: “Ok... Well, I’m just not ready to pop the question, you know? Besides she could still say no, you know, right?”

(briefly see a shot of Christine making eye contact with some of the older girls who aren’t saying anything, raising her eyebrows questioning, is this ok?)

A young boy says: “Go get ‘em, tiger!”

(laughter)

Kody: “Ok, so, she has not consented, and I have not asked.”

Younger girl: “I don’t know what Dad just asked.”

Kody: “We’re talking about Robin, do you remember her and her girls and son?”

(little girl says yeah)

Kody: “Did you play with her Lauren?”

(little girl says yeah)

Kody: “And did you play with Briana?”

(little girl says yeah)

Kody: “Ok, did you have fun?”

(little girl says yeah)

Kody: “Ok.”

Christine interrupts and asks if she can try to communicate to the girl what is going on: “Sweetheart, there might be a girl that’s going to be entering our family soon, so you’ll have another Mom and some other brothers and sisters, but right now, we’re going to keep it quiet. And when Robin comes are we gonna go, ‘Robin! You’re going to be our new Mommy!’”

Little boy says no.

Christine: “No, cause she’s not in the circle right now. So when she comes, we just go, ‘Hi, Robin, how are you?’ Ok? You guys are so smart, very good. Is that good (to Kody)?”

Kody: “Yeah, you made it so I understood it, (Christine laughs) cause until now I didn’t get what was going on. But is anybody concerned about this, or is this cool?”

Kody to daughter that was making eye contact with Christine earlier: “Aspen, how do you feel about this?”

Aspen: “I think it’s ok, I think it’s fine. I think it’ll be kinda weird at first but it’ll be like ok.”

(Commercial break)

(couch interview, 4 parents are in different attire)

Christine: "Here is this girl that is choosing to come into a family with 16 people, with three wives. She could have her pick, she could have her pick. And I know that she's a Mom, she's been married before, she has three kids, but she could still have her pick and she's really honestly choosing us, she wants to be part of the family."

Meri: "I'm not gonna lie. There are jealousy issues, you know? There are, those are there, those are natural, and you know, hopefully that's something that I can overcome."

Janelle: "When Kody first told me about her, I had had a spiritual witness, I don't know how to explain it other than that, that this person was special."

(Family all together, Logan (oldest boy) praying, all sitting up on their knees with arms crossed)

Kody voiceover: "So just before we go to bed, we usually try to gather everybody and have family prayer. And that only manages to happen about every third night. I usually have to organize this and bring it together."

(Kody kisses daughter on the head who is hugging him, asks for her to kiss him, she kisses him on the lips)

Kody voiceover: "I wanna always do a bed check. I wanna always peek in on all of them, I wanna see that they are all breathing,, that they are having a peaceful evening. I wanna say goodnight to everybody as well. My wives and I have been together for 16 years and all of the children have grown up in this environment, bringing somebody new into the family is a totally new thing, totally changing the dynamic and is a really big deal."

Christine voiceover: "I like three wives a lot and I'm kinda more hesitant adding another wife. I like it easy and so I kinda like just having three."

(Kody driving in his car)

Kody: "Robin and I have been courting for a couple of months, it's been challenging, cause she's about 4 hours away, the biggest challenge with the distance is that my wives don't actually like me being away."

Meri interview: "I like my time with Kody and having sister wives makes it so that I do have less time with Kody. Jealousy is something that I want to overcome."

(Kody arrives at a house)

Robin voiceover as you see her in the bathroom getting ready: "Kody is my soul mate. (laughs) I love him."

(Watch Kody and Robin embrace, Robin can't stop laughing and appears to be nervous,

viewer watches as they leave the house together)

Kody voiceover: "Because wives are comfortable with another wife in this lifestyle they are not comfortable with a girlfriend."

(Kody and Robin at dinner laughing, holding hands, hugging)

Christine interview: "I don't want to be a boat rocker, and I don't want my boat rocked. So no, I'm a little hesitant to accept another wife, but if it happens, she just has to be absolutely amazing. (brief big smile- fake) Otherwise it might be a little difficult. (raises one eyebrow)

(end of episode)

APPENDIX 4

CATFISH: THE TV SHOW SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS

Texas City, TX

(Nev and Max are doing push-ups on the floor of a hotel room)

Nev: Ok, are you ready? Pumped up?

Max: Let's look at some email.

Nev: Here's an email from Jennifer. 'Stuck in online friendship, Want More. Dear Nev and Max, My name is Jennifer and I am an 18 year old senior in high school. I live in a small town in southeast Iowa called Fort Madison. I met a guy named Skylar Hazen on an online site where you meet and chat with people all over the world. You can build your own room and invite friends to hang out with you and play games. Skylar stood out from everyone to me. He is 22 years old and lives in San Francisco, CA as a junior in college majoring in Computer Tech. His personality is what drew me in and we've been talking almost every day and he's always interested in how I am.

Screen shot Have I told you how sweet you are?

Only 10 times today.

I care about you so much.

Unfortunately we've never met because of the distance and money concerns. I've mentioned video chatting to him but he's always found an excuse for us not to.

Max: Hold up, he's in school for computer tech and he won't video chat with her?

Nev: I do have some concerns that he's hiding something from me even though I feel like I am completely open with him. I've been online since I was ten years old.

Max and Nev (in unison): Wow.

Nev: In middle school I was bullied and found that people online did not judge me.

Skylar is the one person that I would like to bring into my real world. I'm graduating high school and moving to college next fall and this is something that needs to happen now. -Jen.

Max: Alright I will point out: she's 18.

Nev: and he's 22.

Max: I mean that is a big deal. I mean who knows he could be older than 22.

(Nev starts video chat with Jen)

Nev: Oh my god it's Jen!

Jen: Hi!

Nev: You really know very little about this guy.

Max: What do you like about him?

Jen: I love his personality and I love how he talks to me. He'll call me 90% of the time.

He'll text me out of the blue. Normally I don't talk to people that I haven't video chatted

with but I talk to him because of how there's just something about him. Like I like him a lot.

Nev: Do you feel like you might love him?

Jen: I don't know. (giddy laughing)

Max: Are you officially dating?

Jen: No. I would love to be in a relationship with Skylar. I'm afraid of getting myself hurt. Because like I trust him as much as I can but then there's kind of a level where I just can't because I haven't seen him.

Max: Have you seen pictures of Skylar?

Jen: Umm, I've seen two.

Max: So did you like the pictures you saw of him?

Jen: Yeah. He's cute. A cute college guy. (hold up her phone with picture of "Skylar" to webcam). He's the one in the middle.

Max: But he didn't give you a facebook page or anything like that?

Jen: I asked him for facebook and he told me that he didn't have one.

Nev: Umm

Max: Interesting.

Nev: It's a little weird though as a guy in the tech field he hasn't been able to video chat with you.

Jen: I don't want to push him because I'm afraid of losing him and I'm afraid of scaring him off. And that's what's making it hard for me to go to another level. I could really use your help to help me meet this guy so... I want to meet Skylar. Then I know everything will be ok.

Nev: Your story is totally interesting and different. I would love to come out there and see if we can help figure this out.

Jen: That would be awesome.

Nev: I like her a lot.

Max: She's just coming out of her shell.

Nev: This guy seems to have really shown an interest in her.

Max: But she can't even imagine what she could be hiding.

Nev: She's ready for a serious relationship. This is like a big deal for her.

Max: Let's go to Iowa.

(shots of Max and Nev traveling)

(Max and Nev in rental car)

Max: She seems very mature in a lot of respects.

Nev: I don't wanna blame her for going online and finding a sort of more mature guy who has real conversations who just isn't trying to get to second base.

Max: Let's just hope he is who he says he is.

(pull up to Jen's house)

Jen: Hi! I'm Jennifer.

Max and Nev: Hi!

Jennifer: Do you want to come in?

Nev: Yeah.

Nev: The guy you're interested in meeting. His name is Skylar Hazen?

Jen: Yeah.

Nev: That guys name is Tyler Faison (points to camera guy).

laughter

Nev: How weird is that?

Jen: Kinda weird.

(Max, Jen and Nev are now sitting at the kitchen table)

Nev: So since middle school you've been actively socializing online?

Jen: Because people in real life don't like to talk to me. So I'm like I'm going to be who I am online. I'm not going to make a fake personality because I want people to like me for me.

Max: People don't like you in real life?

Jen: No. I was bullied in middle school that was kind of why I was online a lot. (pictures of a younger Jen start to fill the screen) I was heavier and I had acne and people just like didn't like me. And I was always like left alone so I just didn't put myself out there anymore and I just came home and got online.

Nev: So your online community of friends is where you get to be yourself and feel accepted.

Jen: Like with Skylar is the only time I can completely let myself go. I love his voice. I love talking to him so I like to just hear him talk. In past relationships I'm always the one trying to talk to other people they don't talk to me and the fact that he'll call me first makes a difference. I completely believe that he is who he is. But I don't want to get seriously emotionally invested if he's not who he says he is.

Nev: Have you told your parents that you have real feelings for Skylar?

Jen: I've mentioned it in the past. My mom understands relationships but she doesn't really understand it being online.

Nev: I mean I am really curious to like see this guy.

Jen: I can show you his Avatar now.

Nev: Ok cool.

Jen: There's this game where I've made most of my friends because we all like to play it together.

Max: You wear kind of a gold money chain around your neck. Gangster.

Jen (laughter)

Max: I didn't see that coming.

Nev: So let's check this guy out. Go to the picture... you showed us a picture over web chat but you couldn't really see him. (picture of man appears) So there's San Francisco. I've been there. Has he talked about these friends at all?

Jen: No. And then there's this one.

Nev: And that's the same guy? Its so hard to tell. Do you have text conversations?

Jen: Yeah.

(Jen shows her phone:

Good Morning ☺

Morning babe

What are your plans tonight, lovely?

Hey boo)

Nev: You guys are texting each other like you're dating.

Jen: Yeah I guess so.

Nev: So then why not video chat?

Jen: Umm I've asked him a couple of times but he's always been busy with school. I don't want to be annoying because that's how it was like in middle school and high school. Because I was trying to get friends, everyone called me annoying.

Max: Its hard to be direct when you're afraid of losing someone.

Nev: But obviously there is very little that you know about him and there's a chance, as there always is, that he could be lying.

Jen: Mhmm, yeah. I want to go on another level with him but I have to know. I have to have proof.

Nev: Truth on 3? One. Two. Three.

Jen, Max and Nev: Truth.

(Max and Nev in rental car)

Nev: I'm a little concerned because she's really into this guy.

Max: She's opened up a lot to him and he's really told her very little.

Nex: He's sort of just a huge mystery.

Max: It worries me.

(Commercial break)

(Max and Nev sitting at a table with their laptop)

Max: Let the games begin.

Nev: Ok so Jen met up with Skylar. He says he lives in California and he says he's the first person to ever really show her what a caring and passionate friend is. But. She knows basically nothing about him. And he could turn out to be someone who has been dishonest with her.

Max: We've got his phone number. We've got his name and we've got his school.

Nev: I think we need to start with this phone number. Here we go.

Max: What do we got? What do we got? Unknown name. Unknown gender. Unknown address. City and State: Martinez, California.

Nev: That is near the Bay Area.

Max: There's a chance.

Nev: Let's see who's in these pictures. (Nev drags the picture to a software program that searches the web for any matching photo) I'm dragging this first one over to see if anything comes up. Nothing.

Max: Alright, we're trying another image. Annnd... nothing.

Nev: Well the picture unfortunately did not hit. So we're no closer than we were. It doesn't obviously help us but at least those pictures aren't connected to some other guy. There could be a Skylar Hazen registered at San Francisco state.

Max: Maybe we can call the school and ask.

Nev: Yeah (phone ringing)

Suzanne: Hi this is Suzanne, the registrar at San Francisco State.

Nev: Hi Susan. I wanted to simply ask you if you have a student enrolled there and if I gave you his name could you confirm or deny that?

Suzanne: Yes.

Nev: Last name Hazen. H-A-Z-E-N.

Suzanne: Ok and first name?

Nev: Skylar. S-K-Y-L-A-R.

Suzanne: I don't have anybody under that name.

Nev: Ok well thank you so much.

Suzanne: Oh, you're welcome. Take care.

Nev: Ok bye-bye.

Max: Wow.

Nev: It certainly seems that the Skylar Jen is talking to is a liar.

Max: Right.

Nev: Let's think. Come on Max there's got to be something else.

Max: Go to the web search. Search for Skylar Hazen.

Nev: Looks like there is a Skylar Hazen in MyLife who was born in 94.

Max: So he's her age. She was born in 95.

Nev: There is a Skylar Hazen on Facebook. Lives in Nebraska.

Max: Look he's into gaming. So this could easily be him.

Nev: Yeah.

Max: We've found a kid names Skylar Hazen, a guy, who lives in Nebraska, which is only one state over.

Nev: Not to far away.

Max: He likes gaming. He's got a facebook account. He's listed on MyLife.

Nev: I mean its looking more and more like this could be our guy. But why would a kid pretending to be somebody, say his name is Skylar Hazen with a facebook page, but then not assume the girl he starts talking to for 8 months is gonna like find him. Hold on a second... (Nev reads something on the computer screen) I'm his girlfriend?

Max: Click on that.

Nev: Look Skylar and his girlfriend, holding hands.

Max: So if this guy turns out to be someone who has a girlfriend...

Nev: and just lying to her the whole time. I guess we could just reach out to anyone of these people and simply ask him if they've ever heard him talk to a girl named Jen.

Max: Let's reach out to KingSleepy. He seems to post a lot on the pictures.

KingSleepy's name is Austin.

Nev: (typing a message to Austin) Hey Austin, just wanted to ask you a couple of questions...

Max: There's only one Skylar Hazen on the entire Internet, across the entire world. He lives in Nebraska and he's got a girlfriend. This is the guy.

Nev: Alright, well, let's sleep on it and see what happens.

(The Next Morning)

Max: Did you hear anything?

Nev: One message from KingSleepy.

Max: KingSleepy might still be sleeping.

Nev: You're probably right about that. (phone ringing) Yeah hi, this is Nev. I'm looking for Austin.

Austin: Yes, this is Austin.

Nev: So you saw my message yesterday?

Austin: Yes.

Nev: So I was just curious if I could ask you a couple of questions about your friend, Skylar.

Austin: Ok.

Nev: Cool. So is he in a relationship now?

Austin: Yeah.

Nev: How did they meet?

Austin: They used to play this game together from what I heard. They just started talking.

Nev: And Skylar has a really good friend named Jen, right?

Austin: Who? Jen?

Nev: Yeah.

Austin: I don't know.

Nev: Alright, man. That was all very helpful. Have a good day.

Austin: You too.

Nev: Later.

Max: What are the chances that he's met another girl through a gaming site, through a game? He met her through a game!

Nev: Right. I just got a message from Skylar!

Max: Whoa!

Nev: "Hey Nev, I'm that guy you talked to KingSleepy about." Whoa.

Max: Give him your number. We're about to get on the phone with our only suspect right now!

Nev: This has never happened before.

Max: No.

Nev: That like the person we thought could be the catfish has reached out to me. (phone rings)

Max: It's him! Its him! Its him!

Nev: Hello.

Voice: Hi is this Nev?

Nev: Is this Skylar?

Skylar: Yes.

Nev: Cool. We came across a girl who has been talking to a guy named Skylar Hazen.

Skylar: Ok.

Nev: Now, you're the only Skylar Hazen we were able to find. I guess, I guess my question is do you have any friends from the gaming website named Jen?

Skylar: No. I don't know anybody named Jen.

Nev: Right. You have a girlfriend?

Skylar: Yeah.

Nev: We're just trying to make sure that you're not the guy that we're looking for. And I guess you could be potentially lying to me about all of this, but I don't get the impression that you are.

Skylar: I'm not.

Nev: Thank you for getting in touch and contacting me.

Max: Well the good news is its not Nebraska Skylar because Nebraska Skylar reached out to us. Its not the guy.

Nev: Alright well then we're back to where we feared we would be which is we literally have no idea who this guy is.

(Nev and Max driving in rental car with phone ringing)

Jen: Hello?

Nev: Yo, Jen! Listen we've got a lot to talk about, mostly questions.

Jen: Ok.

Nev: See you in a little bit!

Jen: See ya!

(Jen's house)

Jen: Hi!

Nev: Wow.

Jeff (Jen's Dad): Jeff.

Nev: Jeff? I'm Nev.

Jana(Jen's Mom): Hi, I'm Jana.

Nev: Hi, it's a pleasure.

Nev: So what do you know about Jen and her whole relationship with Skylar?

Jana: I don't know a whole lot about her relationship with Skylar. I know that they are friends.

Nev: Yeah.

Jana: I'm hoping that the outcome is good, obviously.

Jeff: She's been a wonderful kid as far as... she's never given me a reason not to trust her

Nev: We now want to talk to her to go over all the sort of research that we did into Skylar.

Jana: Ok.

Nev: Don't worry. I think she'll be fine.

Jana: Oh, I will hunt you like a dog, so....

Nev: Yikes.

Nev: Alright, let's sort of go over what we found. First, when we ran the phone number, usually we get a name or an address or something. All we got was somewhere near San Francisco.

Jen: Mhmm.

Nev: Then we just sort of Google-d Skylar Hazen. One of the first things that came up was the facebook page for this kid, Skylar Hazen. Here's the Skylar Hazen profile. As far as we could tell there are no other people with facebook profiles with the name Skylar Hazen. I spoke to him. I spoke to 19 year old Skylar Hazen from Nebraska. I felt good because at least we've confirmed that its not this guy.

Max: We don't think its this guy. It would seem highly unlikely.

Jen: I don't know what to think now. What else is there?

Max: We called San Francisco State and talked to the registrar and there is no record of a Skylar Hazen at San Francisco State. I'm really confused now. Like that's what he told me. Like what else. Like does he have a different name?

Max: Well you now know everything that we know.

Jen: Well I kind of want to know who I've been talking to.

Nev: Everything he's told you might be true. For whatever reason, he maybe just saw that kid's name and thought oh, cool. I'm gonna use that kid's name as my stage name.

Jen: I just don't understand why people lie I guess. I guess I don't know what to do and I'm frustrated that he did lie. I don't know what to do.

Max: We do know one thing about him, right?

Jen: His phone number?

Max: Right.

Jen: I have to have an answer.

Nev: I'm gonna call him. See you guys in a minute.

(Nev exits)

Jen: Can I have my dog?

(Nev is now outside)

Max: Are you angry at him?

Jen: This is the only time I've ever let myself open up to someone I haven't like video chatted with really. And it probably has back fired on me.

(phone ringing)

Voice: Hi, hello?

Nev: Is this Skylar?

Skylar: Yeah, who's this?

Nev: This is Nev Schulmann, from the MTV Show Catfish. I don't know. Are you familiar with the show?

Skylar: Yeah, I've seen the show. How do I really know this is Nev, from Catfish?

Nev: Yeah, I'm not sure I can prove that to you, however. I can tell you that I have recently met and become friends with a young lady named Jennifer. Who is a close friend of yours.

Skylar: Ok, yeah.

Nev: What I'm doing right now is basically trying to help you guys meet up

Skylar: Ummm. Well now is definitely not a good time. Like, I'm in the middle of finals right now.

Nev: Can you give me 5 more minutes?

Skylar: Ok, yeah.

Nev: She really cares about you. How do you feel about Jen?

Skylar: I mean, I think she knows how I feel about her.

Nev: We're a little concerned that maybe you're not being totally honest with her. And we obviously did a little research just to see if we could find anything out about you and the only thing we did find was uh, that there isn't currently anybody named Skylar Hazen registered at San Francisco State University.

Skylar: I mean, I do go to San Francisco State and everything. I just don't... if I want to meet her like I mean I feel like I could make it a point to meet her when I feel like. This is like the worst time ever for this to happen.

Nev: I mean look, sometimes, you don't get to choose exactly when and how things happen.

Skylar: It's just with things being so busy and hectic right now... I don't know... ummm. Sorry. I'm really busy. I'll think about it, but I've got to go, alright?

Nev: Ok, see ya.

(Nev comes back inside to Max and Jen)

Nev: Ok, I talked to Skylar. He said that...

Jen: Yeah.

Nev: He does go to San Francisco State. We left the conversation basically with him saying, I don't know that I can right now or that it would be the right time.

Jen: Yeah.

Nev: But there's nothing more that we can do right now, other than just sort of, cross our fingers.

(commercial break)

Nev: I have not heard back from Skylar, as of this morning.

Max: Does he not, care? Come on. He's got you waiting to come help him meet the girl that he supposedly likes.

Nev: More than just who is this guy. Is he who he says he is? What does he even want?

Max: I say we call him and see what his deal is.

(phone ringing)

Skylar: Hello?

Nev: Yeah, good morning. Skylar?

Skylar: Hi.

Nev: Hey, its Nev, again. How are you doing?

Skylar: Hey, I'm good.

Nev: Hey, we're running out of time over here so I just wanted to check in and see if you have made up your mind on whether or not you want to go through with meeting Jen this week?

Skylar: Yeah. I mean, if she really wants to come. I think it would be best for her to come here.

Nev: I need you to convince me a little bit more that like you are taking this as seriously as we are, and as seriously as she is.

Skylar: I mean, I really I really would like her to come here.

Max: Great.

Skylar: Yeah, I think it will be great.

Nev: Ok. Great. So we're going to start heading to San Francisco.

Skylar: Ok. Alright, bye.

Max: He just doesn't seem to be taking full ownership of meeting her. That's the only thing that worries me. Well, he said yes, we're past the point of no return. San Fran.

(Max and Nev packing up rental car)

Max: Alright, time to hit the road.

(Max and Nev are now at Jen's house)

Max: How are you feeling?

Jen: I'm alright.

Nev: We spoke to Skylar and long story short. The answer is yes, he does want to meet you

Jenn (smiling): Ok.

Max: So we're going to San Francisco.

Jen: Oh my. This is going to be weird.

Nev: The understatement of the year.

(laughter)

Jen: I'm excited now. Now, I'm all nervous. Now that it's actually happening.

Max: Well you better get packing because we've got a plane to catch.

(Max, Nev and Jen packing up the rental car)

Max: We've got to step on the gas. It's 3 now and we've got a plane to Chicago at around 8:30 so we literally have 5 hours to get to Chicago.

(Jen on the phone with her mom from the rental car)

Jen: So we are leaving for Chicago

Jana: Oh my gosh. I've been thinking about this all day. Now, I'm really worried.

Jen: Yeah, it'll be fine.

Max: Mom, do you have any words of wisdom?

Jana: Just be responsible.

Jen: I'm always responsible.

Jana: Ok, I love you.

Jen: Love you.

Jana: Bye.

Jen: Bye.

Max: 7:22

Nev: and we're still about 50 miles from Chicago.

Max: So we've got to burn rubber!

(Max, Nev and Jen running through the airport)

(Screen shot of text message from Jen: See you soon! Skylar: Can't wait babe!)

Jen: Next stop, San Francisco.

(Jen arrives in San Francisco. Screen shot of text message- Skylar: goodnight beauty!)

Jen: goodnight lovely)

(Next day: Jen is getting ready in a hotel bathroom)

Nev knocks on door.

Jen: Hi.

Max: Hello.

Nev: Hey... wow!

Jen: I'm extremely nervous just because of everything we've found out.

Nev: So much we don't know about him.

Jen: Yeah.

Nev: We don't really know his motives.

Jen: (shakes her head yes)

Nev: I just want to remind you, we're here to just, back you up.

Jen: (nods her head yes)

(Max, Nev and Jen are driving)

Nev: What do you think about what we're doing?

Jen: Just a mixture of nervous and excited.

Nev: I'm nervous to meet this guy.

(Screen shot of text messages- "have I told you how sweet you are?" "only ten times today")

Max: Alright this is his street.

Nev: Alright, so we're here. So we're here. What do you want to do?

Jen: Go.

Nev: You're good to go?

Jen: Yeah.

Nev: So let's text him and tell him we're down stairs.

(Shoot of phone sending a text message that "We are downstairs.")

Nev: Alright.

(Nev, Max and Jen all get out of the car and cross the street)

Nev: We'll just wait over here. So let's just stay here and let him come down. Don't worry, ok?

Max: I hear somebody coming.

(Man appears)

Man: Hi.

Nev: Hi. What's your name?

Man: umm, Bryan.

(Bryan to Jen): Hi.

Nev: This is Jen.

Jen: Hi.

Nev: and uh, we brought her from Iowa, just like we said we would. What comes as a bit of a shock for Jan and also us is that you're not the guy that we saw in the pictures and your name is also not Skylar.

Bryan: Yeah, I basically um, pretended to be Skylar. Because I never wanted it to reach that point where she would know who I am.

Max: So let me just get this straight. Do you have true feelings for Jennifer?

Bryan: I don't have any like emotional feelings towards her. I would never be able to have like a romantic relationship with her.

Max: Then why the f*ck are we here?

Bryan: Well, she's actually not the only girl I spoke to. And I felt like out of all the girls this is like the perfect time, the perfect girl to finally come clean to and end, like Skylar.

Nev: What are you ever hoping to gain from all these half true friendships that you have online? What's the point?

Bryan: I wanted to like brush up my game its just something I do.

Nev: You understand this all makes you look like a huge a**hole, right?

Bryan: Yeah, yeah.

Nev: Cause I don't give a f*ck that you wanted to come clean and set the story straight for all the other girls that you're being an a**hole to. Why did I bring this awesome, amazing girl from Iowa, so that you could clear your conscience?

Bryan: Because I feel like its good for her to finally know the truth and...

Max: You could have told her that on the phone though, right?

Bryan: Yeah, but in a way I wanted to end Skylar and I feel like by telling Jen who I am that ends Skylar.

Max: Right but that's... all about you. That's you taking care of your business and not really caring how its effecting someone else. Its kind of selfish.

Bryan: Yeah, a little bit.

Nev: I don't really care anymore. (walks Jen across)

Nev: First of all, I'm really impressed with... how you're handling all of this.

(Max and Bryan are still across the street)

Max: You are literally fishing and hooking girls and then just kind of tossing them back into the ocean, with... scars.

Bryan: I would just... yeah, I would just stop speaking to them.

Max: But are you sorry? Or do you feel like you didn't do anything wrong here?

Bryan: I don't know if I'm sorry, but, its... it is what it is. I was giving her a gift of... being in that... that relationship.

Max: You were giving her a gift?

Bryan: Yeah, I mean, she was happy. I knew I was leading her on but I knew it would never be permanent.

(commercial break)

Max: You told us on the phone that you had real feelings for her and wanted to see where this would go and you just kind of come out here and just straight up are like "I never had emotional feelings," that's what you said.

Bryan: Yeah.

Max: That is not what you told us on the phone.

Bryan: Yeah.

Max: I think you've got to take a hard look in the mirror and ask yourself what you're doing. It just seems really shallow that you would lead these girls on to brush up on your game.

Bryan: I guess it could seem that way, yeah.

Max: You are going to have a shallow, miserable existence and people are going to think you are a douche bag.

Jen: I guess I just don't understand like, what he was saying with how he was like trying to brush up on his game or whatever.

Nev: You've got an opportunity now on behalf of all the girls this guy has been playing with to tell him exactly how you feel about it. I encourage you to consider that.

Jen: (nods her head yes) Ok.

(Jen and Nev walk back across the street to Bryan and Max)

Jen: I thought you liked me and apparently these other girls thought that you liked them too. You didn't consider how I felt. You lied to them and you're wasting all of this time and you're wasting my time

(screen shot of text message: "you make my heart skip a beat")

Jen: Why did you even come down?

Bryan: I wanted to come clean to you face-to-face.

Jen: But did you want to come clean to me or did you just want to feel better about yourself?

Bryan: I wanted to come clean to you because I felt like... I felt like you were special. You have a cool personality. You're different than any of those other girls.

Nev: So you picked the coolest girl to reveal how much of an a**hole you were.

Bryan: It's more of a d*ck move to lie.

Jen: But are you even admitting the fact that you're a d*ck, or are you just saying it because all these people are looking at you?

Bryan: No, I feel like it's the best thing to come clean to you.

Jen: I don't even know if I believe that.

(screen shot of text message: "you mean the world to me")

Jen: Did you consider the fact that I did like you?

Bryan: No, I didn't. I wasn't as concerned about your feelings.

Nev: By successfully avoiding being yourself with the handful of girls you've talked to on the Internet, you've now revealed yourself to basically women around the world for being... you know, exactly who you are.

Max: It's not a good portrait.

Bryan: Once it would reach its peak I would be gone. I wouldn't drag it on. Two...

Jen: Exactly! Exactly! Where would I be? Where would I be?

Bryan: ... you have a sense of self-confidence, I knew that about her...

Jen: How did you know?

Bryan: I knew that she was stable.

Max: What you've done is cruel. Do you get that?

Bryan: (shakes head no) No.

(Jen walks across the street and gets in the car)

Max: You don't get it? It doesn't matter how much I stand here, you really don't get it!

(Nev and Jen in the car)

Nev: You've done an incredible job of being honest and holding true to who you are. He is... a mess. Its going to be frustrating you are going to feel anger, the resentment for him, but that's ok. All that matters is you did what was right and true for you. And the example you're going to set the people you're going to help through this makes it totally worth it.

(Max gets in car)

Max: Let's get the f*ck out of here.

(Screen shot of text message: "I care about you so much!" Response- "I'm blushing")

(commercial break)

Nev: I want this guy to learn and understand something from this so that we don't just leave and he'll then continue to go out in the world and mess with people.

(phone ringing)

Bryan: Hi, Nev.

Nev: How are you doing? We were curious if you'd be interested in sitting down with us for a minute and talking about what happened yesterday and sort of the whole situation.

Bryan: Yeah, I'd be cool with that, yeah.

(Max and Nev driving)

(Bryan's house)

Bryan: (opens the door) Hi.

Nev: Hey.

Bryan: Come on in.

Nev: Yesterday we were upset because primarily our concern was for Jen. You made a sort of conscious decision to engage with the people you've met online to work on your, sort of, female communication skills.

Bryan: But it wasn't like I sought out to go online, it happened online just naturally and I realized "ok, maybe this is something I can do without getting too close to the person" hoping that they wouldn't get too close to me without realizing like, the repercussions it would have to the other person. I mean I'm certainly not cold-hearted, but I was kind of hurt in the past by like a girl and I felt kind of uncomfortable trusting, building a trust.

Max: What happened in your past, previous relationship that scarred you so much from trusting?

Bryan: Just someone kind of leading me on, pretending to like me. Not only leading me on like physically but like she knew that I was invested emotionally, then I realized she was doing this to other guys too.

Max: Do you hear the similarities between what you're saying she did to you and what you...

Bryan: Yes.

Max: ...did to Jen?

Bryan: I mean I always separated from my regular life. I never really sat down and analyzed it until now. I never really faced it, until now.

Nev: Yeah, look, I mean we all have dark places and feelings and issues. We all have them. What separates the good from the bad in the world are the people who acknowledge them and work at changing them.

Bryan: (nods head yes) I agree, yeah. I think it's time to change.

Max: I hope you mean it. One last thing: do not contact Jennifer ever again.

Bryan: I don't intend to.

Max: She's done.

Bryan: Yes.

Nev: Good luck.

(Nev and Max driving)

Nev: I really hope this kid understands how serious this is. He'll have to just change if he ever thinks he's got a chance at any kind of meaningful relationship.

(phone ringing)

Jen: Hello?

Max: Jen!

Nev: Heeey!

Jen: Hi.

Nev: We're in the park where should we meet you?

(Max and Nev arrive at the park)

Jen: Hello.

Jen: I feel like I'm definitely going to be more careful. I don't want to stop talking to people, but I'm going to make sure that I know more about them before I even want to give them a chance to know me. I feel a lot more comfortable with myself just by doing this and it's helped me to like find myself in general and figure out what I need to look for in order to be around people. I think this week is the first time I've ever felt comfortable with myself.

(Nev taking pictures of Jen and Jen, Nev and Max enjoying time in San Francisco)

(Two months later- video chat with Bryan)

Nev: Hey! What's been going on since we saw you last?

Bryan: Just, uh, school and work.

Text appears: "Bryan says he's still active online but is now focusing on pursuing real-life relationships."

Nev: This whole experience of meeting Jen and us, do you feel like it changed anything for you?

Bryan: Oh yeah, I learned a lot! and I dropped the whole Skylar thing. I feel good about myself, everything is cool.

Nev: Well, good. I'm happy for you.

Bryan: Thanks.

Text appears: "Since filming ended, Bryan has kept his promise and not contacted Jen."

(Nev and Max video chat with Jen)

Nev and Max: Heeey!

Jen: Hi!

Nev: Jeeeenmnaaaeee!! You look great!

Jen: I'm just in a good mood.

Text appears: "Jen still goes online often, but says she's more cautious now about trusting the people she hasn't met in person."

Max: You still talk to all your friends around the world?

Jen: Oh yeah, I have friends everywhere. People were like telling me that they're really happy but that I went with something rather than... like hiding or like letting it... continuing on.

Text appears: "Jen recently graduated from high school and is looking forward to attending college in the fall."