

LOSING SIGHT OF OURSELVES: APPLYING DURKHEIM, GIDDENS,  
BAUDRILLARD AND VAKNIN TO REALITY TELEVISION

A Thesis

by

MEGAN ELIZABETH COLLINS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2010

Major Subject: Sociology

Losing Sight of Ourselves: Applying Durkheim, Giddens, Baudrillard and Vaknin to  
Reality Television

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## ABSTRACT

Losing Sight of Ourselves: Applying Durkheim, Giddens, Baudrillard and Vaknin to  
Reality Television. (December 2010)

Megan Elizabeth Collins, B.A., Southwestern University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Stjepan Meštrović

An application of theory to various reality television shows in order to discuss the emergence and encouragement of the false self in our society is the focus of this work. *Toddlers and Tiaras*, *Hoarders* and *Sister Wives* are the three television shows that will be analyzed by using content analysis in order to examine the effects of consumerism, narcissism and the emergence of the false self.

The limitless character of the economy 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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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION AND AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY .....	1
Methods .....	2
Theory .....	3
II PROJECTING FALSENESS: <i>TODDLERS AND TIARAS</i> .....	14
III CONSEQUENCE OF BELIEVING THE LIE: <i>HOARDERS</i> .....	30
IV THE EASE OF FALSENESS: <i>SISTER WIVES</i> .....	43
V ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FALSE SELF.....	56
VI CONCLUSION .....	64
REFERENCES.....	67
APPENDIX 1: <i>TODDLERS AND TIARAS</i> SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS....	69
APPENDIX 2: <i>HOARDERS</i> SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS.....	78
APPENDIX 3: <i>SISTER WIVES</i> SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS.....	88
VITA .....	101

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION AND  
AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY

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. Does what we choose to watch define who we are as individuals?

I originally hoped to examine reality TV shows and how they encourage narcissistic behavior. This issue shall still be discussed in this paper but as I began to examine the three episodes of reality television, for the purposes of this research, I began to understand that the encouragement of a false self was a very prevalent and recurring theme. What may be most haunting, of the discussion which is to follow, are that these reality television shows portray our society's ideology. Overall, this paper seeks to examine these issues of narcissism and shame as well as the interrelated aspects of trust, plurality of choices, anxiety, consumption and control.

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This thesis follows the style of *Media, Culture & Society*.

## Methods

I shall examine an episode of The Learning Channel's (TLC) reality television show *Toddlers and Tiaras*, an episode of *Sister Wives* and an episode of A&E's *Hoarders*. *Toddlers and Tiaras* follows the lives of infant/young girls and their families as they prepare and compete in beauty pageants across the country. *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 & Berg 2010). Finally, I shall examine TLC's *Sister Wives* which provides an in-depth look at the lives of a polygamous family.

When one mentions either of these television programs or the phenomenon the programs are portraying an immediate reaction may be one of repulsion and disgust at the individuals' behaviors and lifestyle choices. However, when one takes a closer look at these television programs they are portraying many important things about our own society and the individuals within it. Obviously, there are deep implications here not only about our society and its perceived ills but about the audience who take the place of voyeur when examining these phenomena as well as all reality television. What is appealing to audience members about these television 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? Watching the unusual and the strange? But what if these reality television shows are not portraying the unusual and the strange. What if they portray a



truth? A dissemination of these messages and what they mean for the individual within society and their construction of the self is the interest and focus of this paper.

I aim to discuss how the theories of Durkheim, Baudrillard, Giddens and Vaknin are all related to this idea of the false self and how our society encourages it through an in-depth analysis of these three reality television programs. I will also draw upon more recent literature that is addressing similar issues and ideas that relate to reality television and the construction of the self.

### **Theory**

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 helps 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 it’s body primarily in terms of its practical engagements with the object-world and with other people” (Giddens 56). The important relation of the body and self is key to 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.

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 or confronted by people s/he considers inferior to him or her and unworthy<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Vaknin (2001: 32)

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. 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.

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. (Suicide 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” (1950: 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 paper 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.<sup>2</sup>

Moral agency has been discussed by Lillie Chouliaraki in relation to the role that media plays in an individual’s life. Chouliaraki argues that we are conditioned by what

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<sup>2</sup> For more on narcissism see: Fine 1986, Grunberger 1971, Goldberg 1980, Muller 1987, Sennett 1970 and Twenge & Campbell 2009

we “consume” on television and what we watch informs us how to think and feel about the world. Chouliaraki attempts to understand whether or not there is moral agency associated with viewership since television distances the viewer from that which they are watching. Chouliaraki believes that the viewer can indeed be encouraged to act whenever they witness something morally disturbing on television and that the viewer will not simply fulfill the role of passive consumer/voyeur. What does this mean if they do consume the role of passive voyeur and consumer? I am not completely convinced by her argument that viewers can be persuaded to action if they are simply encouraged and provided an opportunity to act. 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 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. Programs like VH1's *Celebrity Rehab* and *Sober House* place individuals suffering from drug and alcohol addiction in a sober environment and proceed to display their progress and set backs as they work through traumas and issues that have led to their addiction. 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 deregulation, or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining" (Durkheim 1951:253). 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.

One final 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 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?

All four of these theorists, Baudrillard, Durkheim, Giddens and Vaknin discuss this similar 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. By examining the individuals within three 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.

## CHAPTER II

### PROJECTING FALSENESS: *TODDLERS AND TIARAS*

I would now like to discuss TLC's *Toddlers and Tiaras* and how it relates to this theoretical framework of identity, narcissism, consumerism and ultimately the emergence of a false self.

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 27<sup>th</sup>, 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 5<sup>th</sup> episode of the second season. I chose this episode because it falls directly in the middle of the total number of episodes aired thus far. There have been a total of 28 episodes in all three seasons and this particular episode is number fourteen. (See Appendix 1 for complete summary and quotations).

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). 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 interview: “I have twenty crowns and I love ‘em.” 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.’” 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 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. 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.” 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. Emily has dolls set up as her judges. 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... 15-20 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. 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!!”

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). It is very possible that these mothers are indeed narcissistic and possibly dreamed of being a beauty queen. 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” (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. 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 state “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. Elizabeth Bullen articulates that “screen texts are used to socialize the young into consumer society” (2009: 497). 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?

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. The dress-maker as she is measuring Rylan says “oh! Perfect girl. Keep that! Perfect shape.” 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” (65). Later, in the episode we will be exposed to the consequences of the teachings of narcissism for young Rylan Lee.

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. 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. 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 apart of a society obsessed with appearances. How we present our selves 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” (190). Some of the girls wear fake teeth referred to as “flippers.” In this particular episode none of the girls chose to wear them.

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 importance of competition and winning. 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 the 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 dependable 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).

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)? 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 188). Rylan apparently became involved in pageants when she saw them on television and said ‘Mom, I want to do that.’ What role must Mom now fulfill in order for Rylan to be successful in pageants, what lessons about how Rylan is to act in society to be successful will affect Rylan? Will individuals who watch reality television shows (like Rylan and her Mom) be encouraged to be competitive, individualistic, and even narcissistic or turned off by the behavior of the characters?

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 suppose 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, its very hard, so I think its 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 3<sup>rd</sup> runner up for her division. While on stage Rylan immediately looks down

at her trophy and touches the top of it with her finger. She then immediately looks to her left and right at the other trophies placed on stage for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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).

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? Even if one works hard and has all the attributes required to fulfill a role does not mean that that person is going to achieve the fulfillment of that role. Coming to terms with this knowledge for a small child is devastating but it is even devastating for adults, no? As the family packs up to go home Rylan's Mom discusses how Rylan won't be eligible for the High Point Supreme position (highest award at the pageant) 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 tells Rylan "I know you are having too much fun." Rylan says again with more force: "I don't wanna go!!" and Rylan's Mom states "I know you don't wanna go."

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. The pageant director exclaims, "lots of happy winners and some not so happy winners, but overall it's been a great day." 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. 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]." 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 suppose 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 breeds narcissism. 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 "One 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). 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 17<sup>th</sup>, 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 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 and features the stories of two hoarders: Jim and Deborah. (See Appendix 2 for complete summary and quotations).

I decided to examine this particular reality television program for the ills I believe it reflects about society, that of narcissism, consumerism and the emergence of the false self. Focus on material possessions as a source of prestige, power and notoriety is stressed in so many avenues of life as we 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 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 they want the world to know it.

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: 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. 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.

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. 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*." As stated early, Durkheim's concept of anomy 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 unable to face his behaviors and why they are on the extreme end of the spectrum.

"I'm tired of being ashamed. I'm tired of being a prisoner." Deborah confesses to the camera her feelings. Giddens discusses Lasch and Sennett and how narcissism is as much about self-hatred as self-admiration. "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) Shame and narcissism are closely related as shame can result when one's expectations about how they are suppose to behave or how things are suppose 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).

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.” Giddens describes how “surrounding areas of



knowledge become blurred for the individuals concerned, and the less likely they are to be able to foresee the consequences of their contributions beyond the particular sphere of their application” (1991: 31). 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. The old phrase “bump on a log” clearly comes to mind, and Deborah is that bump. 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). 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 narcissistic behaviors.

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.

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). Deborah has given significance to all the material possessions in her life, even to the point of viewing objects as representations of people. Is this really such a stretch considering our society’s patterns of consumption in relation to identity?

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). 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.

Deborah is outside the home smoking a cigarette and Ron is with her drinking a soda. Both are watching while the cleaning crew pile up furniture in the front yard. 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 one's to take charge not the children" (Sharenow & Berg 2010). Anthony Giddens explains this behavior: "people retreat to purely personal preoccupations: to psychic and bodily self-improvement" (1991: 171) 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.

Sam, the youngest child of Deborah appears to have been most affected by his 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 narcissistic behavior and the presentation and development of multiple selves. 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.” How clueless is Deborah to think that her kids have no idea what they’ve had to adapt to? 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?

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 the fault of our society and what I am trying to articulate about 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 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" (Giddens 175). 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 IV

THE EASE OF FALSENESS: *SISTER WIVES*

The Learning Channel (TLC) recently aired a new program, *Sister Wives*, on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 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 behaviour, 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 in today's world. 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 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. 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.

The family is shown at home with several of the family members gathered in the kitchen. 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. 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).

Here we see Meri lying to herself about her true feelings. 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. “Narcissists are pathological liars. This means that they are either unaware of their lies—or feel completely justified and at ease when lying to others” (Vaknin 2001: 37). 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. 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.

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. Sure, Janelle's comment was a joke, but in reality, Kody must have had to do some convincing on Meri's part in order to justify him bringing in another woman into their marriage. Throughout the episode the wives will attempt to justify their *lifestyle* that they are convinced is positive one.

The viewer is then exposed to Janelle, the second wife, who has six children with Kody. 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. One may begin to wonder if Janelle is somehow escaping from her family life. Yes, this is a stretch but if you pay attention to her dialogue it is almost 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 selfish. 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)?

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. However, if we recall, 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. Is it really that much of stretch to relate their perceived freedom to consumerism and how closely the two are connected and perhaps inseparable? 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.

By being a part of this polygamous family there is some level of encouragement to be narcissistic. Since Kody is the ultimate narcissist in this situation, the wives are allowed the “freedom” to pursue their own self-interest and may possibly even be encouraged to take it to the unhealthy level of narcissism resulting in the emergence of the false self.

The final wife, Christine, is then introduced to the viewer. 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 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)” There are many times when Christine is talking that she ends her comments with 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 the wives' true selves and reveal the falseness of many of their previous statements. 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." Of course Christine just likes 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. 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 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 grew up in 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 V

### ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FALSE SELF

This discussion of the false self will conclude by examining experiences one might have on a daily basis. If I am proud at how other people are looking at me when doing something false I will most likely continue to be false. If no one is looking at me being me, but people look at me when I am being false, then why not continue to be false? 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. 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.

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. But can you check yourself too much; can the false self take over?

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.

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.

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 more and more 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?

Another aspect of our society that encourages the false self is the ease of accessibility. Is it possible for you to sleep with more than one person? Why, yes, yes it is. So 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 passively go along with what others might want in order to be more liked or appreciated.

The faculties that are honed by constantly brushing against bruising reality—empathy, compassion, a realistic assessment of one's abilities and limitations, realistic expectations of oneself and of others, personal boundaries, team work, social skills, perseverance and goal-orientation, not to mention the ability to postpone gratification and to work hard to achieve it—are all deficient or missing altogether (Vaknin 2001: 198).

Producers in reality television programs 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.

the 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).

Have you ever been talking with a colleague or friend and suddenly they interrupt or abruptly leave to go pursue and speak with another person who appears. This person is “cooler” or more important or a boss, perhaps, and suddenly your friend is unaware of your presence. They no longer care what you have to say or what they were saying to you because they must now quickly leave and pursue a conversation with this more important individual. I am reminded of an example from high school. I had three best friends, and we always spent time together on the weekend. One particular weekend, my parents were out of town and I wanted to have a girl’s night with my three friends, no parents, doing fun things in the house all to ourselves. Around midnight, one of my friends, pulled her usual move, she received a phone call or text from someone mentioning a party. My friend left us to go to this party where more popular, cool people would be, and didn’t invite us to come with her, not that we wanted to go, because the rest of us were perfectly content with each other’s company and having a fun, unsupervised evening. This was not the first time my two friends and I had been ditched by this girl but it was painfully more obvious. Situations such as these characterize a person who has a very well developed false self. More so than most, and as discussed before there is a spectrum of falseness projected by all, but I think you will agree with me, that there are more and more interactions of this nature where we are left in the dust wondering why our conversation was not good enough while this other person’s presence was more valuable. I’m a Hyundai and a Ferrari just came along.

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). 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 become immune to these interactions and what’s happening around us and brush them off as 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 fakeness. Cheating is not only acceptable it is admired, especially when one does not get caught.

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? Does all of this really matter? 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.

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. Be true to yourself, do not look to others to define who you are as a person. You are a unique and extraordinary individual, so please, do not fake it.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Hoarding is viewed as a mental disorder. However, I strongly believe this disorder would not exist if our current society did not advocate narcissism with a focus on consumption. Anxiety as a result of having too many choices is a clear consequence of such societal characteristics. In all honesty, since we are discussing “reality” television, hoarding is a societal disorder not a mental one. It is a clear 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.

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 question still remains how audiences truly view such programs as *Hoarders*, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, and *Sister Wives*. 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. Anthony Giddens expresses that ritual and daily routine help to cope with this realization and it may attribute to why many Americans spend countless hours in front of the television,

separating themselves from this fatalistic society, or worse yet, immersing themselves in it.



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## APPENDIX 1

*TODDLERS AND TIARAS SUMMARY AND QUOTATIONS*

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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> 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: "Your 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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)

## VITA

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